

OLD TESTAMENT MEN

Spiritual Lessons From Godly Bible Men



Psalm 112 Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. ... Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

The Bible is more than a history book. It contains the stories of people who sought to follow God. There are many lessons we can learn from their lives. This book looks at the lives of Joshua, David, Moses, Ezra, Nehemiah and Caleb. Getting to know them as people like us, men with hopes and dreams, with fears and sins but always with a strong desire to live for God, can be very encouraging and motivating for us. There's a lot we can learn from these men of God. You can learn from them as well, for yourself or to preach and teach about them. Ask God to help you learn from their lives. I tried to write their stories, but remember that you are writing your own story every day of your life. Make sure it is encouraging and motivating to those who know you. They are reading your story every day. Make it a good one!

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For lessons on leadership from others like Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Nehemiah, Jesus, Peter, Paul, Timothy and various Bible women, see "Leadership Lessons from the Bible" by Jerry Schmoyer at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/>

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Spiritual Lessons from Godly Bible Men

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Old Testament Men

I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSHUA

By **Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer**

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Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

1. STANDING ON THE PROMISES – Joshua 1:1-9

BY JOSHUA

I once had a friend who thought it would be great to be a soldier, wear a uniform and march in parades. He joined the army to travel and have prestige, but before long he changed his mind. The training was hard and there was an enemy who was trying to kill him! Often God's people are just like that: they commit to follow God and live for Him, thinking of all the benefits this will have for them. Then they realize they are in a battle, and there is an enemy trying to destroy them. When you desert Satan's army and join God's army, you shouldn't be surprised that you are in the middle of a conflict. This is true of all God's people.

It was true of me, too. My name is Joshua. I was involved in much warfare in my time. All who desire to live for God are. In my day it was the Egyptians and the Canaanites we fought. In your day you are still battling God's enemies, but they are different. You battle Satan and his forces, the flesh (your sin nature, that natural tendency to be selfish, prideful and self-centered) and the world system with its ungodly system of priorities and values. The weapons that were used against us were swords, spears and arrows. Weapons used against you are greed, selfishness, fear, lust, anger and pride. What I went through physically is a picture of what you go through spiritually (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4).

This battle is really between God and Satan. It just spilled over to this planet and is carried out here on earth. It started in Eden when Satan started attacking God's people because He couldn't defeat God Himself. He started with Adam and Eve, then attacked Cain. He hit everyone until God wiped out all but Noah in the flood, then Satan went after the people after the flood. He got them to build Babel. God then chose one man to make into a special nation to reveal Himself to the world. That man, Abraham, then was bruised. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were all beaten by Satan. Eventually the new nation ended up captive in Egypt (a picture of the world) helpless slaves of Pharaoh (a picture of Satan). God intervened and delivered us by the innocent blood of the Passover Lamb (a picture of Jesus' work on the cross). He defeated our enemies at the Red Sea (a picture of His resurrection power). From then on we were in a battle. In Egypt we weren't in any battle, we were helpless victims with no power to fight back. Before salvation you aren't in the same kind of battles you are in afterwards. With salvation you get many new things, but one of them is a new enemy. We all get that.

I was born a slave in Egypt. I remember the Passover and deliverance through the Red Sea. I saw all the miracles of God's deliverance. My name means "Jehovah is salvation," the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word "Jesus." I was a soldier in Pharaoh's army. That's why Moses chose me to lead the Jews in our battle with Amalek (a picture of the flesh) soon after we crossed the Red Sea.

God's enemies are our enemies when we are on His side, and they can seem formidable! The giants in the land caused most of the other spies as well as the people to run in fear, so we had to wander in the desert for 40 years. Then, when the older generation had died, God chose me to lead the new generation into the land (Joshua 1:1). Following such a well-known, successful leader like Joshua was not easy. I myself couldn't do it. It was only God's power that enabled me to lead our people to victory. I had to totally rely on God's promises in order to have victory. God promised He would give us the land (1:2), but we had to move out in faith and fight the battles to take it. "I will give you every place where you set your foot" (1:3,4; Deuteronomy 11:24; Genesis

12:1-7). The land was ours – but we had to set our foot there. The Canaanites who were living there would do their best to prevent that!

Fortunately, God promised He would fight our battle through us. He guaranteed victory for us (1:5). God promises you that you will never be alone, either (Genesis 28:15; Romans 8:38-39; Ex 33:14). Because of this we didn't have to fear (1:6), and neither do you (Psalms 118:6; 23:4; Isa 41:10; Dt 31:6; Matthew 14:27). Of course, God expected us to obey Him in everything (1:7-8) for if we were in disobedience we would be cut off from His power and protection.

He told me "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (1:9). That was what I rested my hope on. God has promised you, too, that he will meet all your needs (Psalms 84:11; 23:1-3; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 13:5), that He will guide you (Psalms 48:14; 32:8; Proverbs 3:5-6) and that He will be your strength for whatever comes (Philippians 4:13; 11 Corinthians 12:9; Dt 33:25; Isa 40:29). He promises you victory in your battles, too (1 Corinthians 10:13). You need only to trust His word and lean on His strength.

So, when you have battles, and you will have them, learn from our battles. Ours were physical, yours are spiritual (Eph 6:12). Fight in God's strength, wear His armor (Eph 6:10-17)

and then, and only then, will you be able to have victory as we had victory. The book of Joshua is a book of warfare and victory, but it starts with God's promises. If we wouldn't have believed them and acted on them we would never have had victory. That is the start – believe what God says in His Word and trust Him, live in obedience to Him and face your enemies with the knowledge that He will give you victory. When fear or doubt, lust or greed, anger or selfishness, laziness or pride attack, quote God's promises of victory and move ahead in faith in His ability to overcome them. As the hymn says, make sure you are "Standing on the Promises."

Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

2. LIVING FOR JESUS – Joshua 1:10-18; 3:1-5:12

BY THE FIRST PRIEST TO STEP INTO THE JORDAN RIVER CARRYING THE ARK

“Swing low, sweet chariot, coming fo’ to carry me home. Swing low, sweet chariot, coming fo’ to carry me home I looked over Jordan and what did I see? Coming for to carry me home? A band of angels coming after me, coming for to carry me home. If you get there before I do, coming for to carry me home, tell all my friends I’m comin’ too, comin’ for to carry me home.”

“Crossing over the Jordan” - what does that phrase mean to you? Often you get your theology from songs, and often your songs speak of Canaan as heaven and the Jordan as entering heaven. I’ll tell you, though, to us who crossed the Jordan River it was an obstacle, and Canaan was a battleground, not heavenly rest. God had promised us the land, but we had to enter and fight. He would give us every place our foot stepped, but fierce warriors were prepared to keep us from stepping anywhere in that land. To us the Promised Land was where God wanted us to be. We were in His will there. It was His choice for us to grow, mature, serve Him and bear fruit. But that wouldn’t happen without heavy opposition. It was possession through conflict – that is the only way to have victory. We were to fight behind the “Captain of our Salvation,” Joshua (a picture of Jesus, whose name in Greek is the same as Joshua in Hebrew – both meaning “Jehovah is our Salvation”). We fought behind Joshua; you fight behind Jesus (Hebrews 2:10-11; Romans 8:37; 11 Corinthians 1:10; 2:14).

God is sovereign but He expects us to do our part in the fight. Everyone: Daniel, Jeremiah, Moses, Paul, even Jesus Himself, had their battles against God’s enemies. Our battles were physical. Yours are spiritual (Eph 6:10-12). From our Physical battles you can learn how to fight your spiritual battles. Listen to my story as I tell you what is necessary to enter into the place God has for you, the place where your battles for victory can be fought and won.



When Moses died Joshua took over. We were camped by the Jordan River, ready to enter the land to fight for our promised blessings. God said we should cross over and enter the land (Joshua 1:10-11) but the Jordan was in flood stage! As such it was impossible for us to cross. Still, we committed ourselves to obey Him (1:16). Joshua even started making plans for when we were on the other side by sending two men to spy our Jericho (Joshua 2).

We moved to the River’s edge (Joshua 3:1) and waited three days, wondering all the time how we could cross. The Jordan wasn’t a large river, except in flood stage. They if overflowed its banks and went far up the valley walls on either side of it.

When it was time to cross God said the priests carrying the Ark were to go first. This was where God’s presence was, between the angels on the ark. In effect God was going to go first and we would follow. That sounded right and acceptable. Everyone spent the evening getting ready by praying and removing any sin in their lives (3:5). In the morning we were all ready.

God told the priests to go first and all the rest would follow (3:6-7). Wouldn’t you know that the lot fell to me to have the privilege of carrying one of the poles which transported the ark! Normally that was a once-in-a-lifetime privilege which we all dreamed about. However, on this day it was a little different. What’s more, I was to go in the front! Why was this so bad, well, let me tell

you what it was like for us there. The banks down into the water were very steep and once one took a step down there was no turning back. It was slipping and sliding straight down to the bottom. That was VERY difficult carrying an ark under normal circumstances, but with the water raging far up the valley wall, there was no stopping until we hit the bottom of the valley and the river bed. But that would mean we would be under many feet of water which was rushing down with tremendous force and power. God hadn't said anything about stopping the water! I remembered how He opened the Red Sea BEFORE they stepped in 40 years ago, but now He was telling us to step into the water and trust Him! It would be like telling you to run full speed and jump off the side of the Grand Canyon, trusting God to put a bridge under your feet as soon as you started coming down! it was an act of faith!

You wouldn't believe what happened, though! My foot hit the water, and I know it went into the water, but it didn't get wet! The water parted and the land was dry (3:13). We were able to safely walk down the slope and into the middle of the water! Everyone crossed over on dry land (3:14-17). God had promised, and when we followed in obedience He delivered! As soon as the last one was across the waters rumbled back again. Now THAT was impressive!

God instructed us to leave a pile of stones on the shore as a memorial to remember this (Joshua 4:17). Instead of following up on this great psychological advantage and attacking Jericho, God had us camp. There was more preparation to do to be ready to battle. We needed to be 100% committed to God, so all the males were circumcised (5:1-9) and then we celebrated the Passover (5:10), something we hadn't done for almost 40 years. We were now in the land! The manna stopped (5:11-12).

God was teaching us something very important: the wet feet concept. You see, the water didn't part until after we made the first move and stepped in in faith. What step of faith must YOU take for the waters that separate you from being in God's perfect will to part? It is an attitude, a habitual sin, a relationship you put before God? Whatever it is, go ahead in faith, trusting God to remove it and open the way for you. He'll do it, but you must step out!

Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

3. AMAZING GRACE – Joshua 2:1-24

BY ONE OF THE SPIES INTO JERICHO, WHO LATER MARRIED RAHAB

It's interesting to ask people how they met their mate. Everyone has a different story. God brings people together in many different ways. Moses watered some camels and ended marrying the oldest daughter of the owner. Boaz paid off a distant relative's debt by buying their land and got Ruth with it. The Benjaminites grabbed women at a party and carried them off. Jacob worked seven years for Rachael and got her sister instead on his wedding night. Xerxes held a beauty contest and married the winner – Esther. Onana married his sister-in-law after his brother died. Hosea married whom God told him to and she later became a prostitute. I married a woman who was a prostitute when I met her.

My name is Salmon (Matthew 1:5). I was a descendant of Abraham, but my wife was not. She was a Gentile, outside God's promised provision. As a Canaanite she was under special condemnation (Deuteronomy 7:1-2). A Canaanite, a female Canaanite, a female prostitute Canaanite. Surely apart from God's grace there could be no hope of deliverance. Still, God's grace was very evident in her life as well as mine. But I'm getting ahead of my story here.

Moses led my parents out of Egypt. I was born while they were wandering because of their disobedience. Egypt, the Red Sea, Mt Sinai – all these were just stories to me. Now the crossing of the Jordan, that was a very real experience to me! When we arrived there Joshua sent me and a friend to spy out Jericho. What an event that was!

It was a privilege to be chosen. We were young, strong, intelligent, knew the culture and language of the people in Jericho, and we had no families. This was important because there was serious danger for us, the real possibility we wouldn't make it back. Joshua knew the importance of knowing your enemy ahead of time, so he sent us to gather information (Joshua 2:1). If we failed that would demoralize the whole nation and army. We would have failed if it hadn't been for God's grace.

He led us to the home of a prostitute, Rahab (2:1). Eight times she is mentioned in the Bible and six she is called a prostitute (Josh 2:1,3; 6:17,23,25; Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; Ja 2:25). Now those who ran what you would call an inn also were often prostitutes. An it would be where visitors went, where we would be less likely to draw attention, and where we could listen to the talk to gather information. Despite our precautions, however, word soon spread that we were at Rahab's home (Josh 2:2-3).

Everyone assumed she would turn us in, for we were their enemies. Instead, she hid us (2:4-11) because of her faith in our God. She had been searching, we knew she was different when we first met her. God always reaches out to every heart that seeks Him (Job, Melchizedek, Ruth, Ethiopian Eunuch, Luke, etc.). She asked question after question about Jehovah. We could watch her faith grow and grow as we talked to her. In her heart she became one of us, and therefore everyone else in Jericho became her enemy, too. Immediately she risked her own life, and her own family, to fight on the side of the God of Israel. No wonder she is used as an example of faith (James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31). In effect she joined our spy team. All she wanted was life for her and her family (Joshua 2:12-21), assuming they would be spared to be slaves for us instead of killed with everyone else.

How would all the soldiers know who to spare? She would hang a red cord in her window for us to see. Red. Like we marked our doors at Passover. Red stood for blood. Red meant

safety. We had no way of knowing then that one of our very descendants (Matthew 1:1-6) would fulfill that picture by paying for the sins of the whole world with His very own red blood! Now that's grace at its greatest!

A few days later, when we destroyed the city of Jericho, the red cord was there and Rahab and her family were spared (Joshua 6:22-23). Since I didn't have a family I became part of their family, helping them settle in with us. Before long we were married, and, well, the rest is history. Still, there is much to learn from this bit of history.

Not only do we learn that God protects and provides for His own out of grace, as He took care of us, but we also learn that God chooses and uses the most unlikely people (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)! Just as Jesus went out of His way to contact another immoral Gentile at Jacob's Well (John 4), so God went out of His way to reach and save Rahab. She had faith, and that faith was shown by her actions (as all faith must - James 2:17-25). Besides Sarah, she is the only woman in the famous faith chapter of Hebrews 11. James uses her to show that faith without works is dead. It wasn't her ability that was so great and impressed God, but her availability. God gave her a new life, as He gives all His people (Eph 2:1-10). Despite her sin, God's grace is greater than His wrath (Psalm 103).

God's grace means that our standing with Him does not depend on who we are and what we've done. It depends on who He is and what He's done. Salvation is by grace (Eph 2:4-9; Romans 3:23-24; Romans 11:6). All any of us ever have had or will have is by grace. Anything short of being in hell at this minute is grace. Grace – where would you be without it?

Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

4. VICTORY IN JESUS – Joshua 1:1-9

BY AN OFFICER IN THE JEWISH ARMY

Everyone knows that we men have an innate genetic ability that most women don't have. It enables us to find our way from one place to another without having to ask for help. Occasionally we may choose to take a scenic route or travel in circles. That is always done by choice. We know where we are, as proven by the fact that we eventually get where we're going. That isn't true only in your day, it was true 3,500 years ago when I lived, too.

Some have said we wandered in the desert for 40 years because the men wouldn't stop and ask for directions, but that's not true! We DID ask for directions. Joshua asked for directions to defeat Jericho. I know. I was there. I was a soldier in Joshua's army, an officer. I had some experience during the last years fighting invaders to protect my family, so Joshua made me an officer in our totally inexperienced army. I was experienced to warfare.

I guess you've realized that life in a series of one battles after another, haven't you? Serving God isn't not smooth and easy. It seems there is always some opposition. Oh, there may be lulls in the conflict, but then the fight starts back up again. If that's your experience, you're on the right track! If you never have struggles something is wrong! Paul himself experienced this same thing (2 Timothy 4:6-7).

In my day they were physical battles, but in yours they are spiritual battles (Eph 6:12). We fought with muscle and sword. Your battles rage in your heart and soul. Satan used the flesh and the world to defeat us. Still, God is the victor. We can have victory, too, if we follow Him and fight in His strength. That's what we did at Jericho.

Jericho was formidable, inaccessible. We had to defeat it to go ahead. The flooding Jordan was behind us and mountains were on each side of us. Jericho was a fortress for all living in the region. There was a double wall about 35' wide and 30' high with a dry moat outside. It looked impossible, especially to our army which had never fought a battle. We were totally untrained in warfare. Joshua did the right thing – he went to God for help.

I led a small group that went to protect him as he went nearer to Jericho, to think and plan. A siege would take many years. We had no equipment for a direct attack on such strong walls. What could we do? As we mulled over the options and eliminated each one, all of a sudden Someone appeared (Joshua 5:13). We didn't realize it right away, but we soon discovered it was God Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, before He came to earth to be known as Jesus. He said He wasn't on our side or on our enemies' side – just His own side (5:14). It was up to us to fight on God's side, not to try and get God to fight on our side.

As we watched from a distance Joshua fell down in humble reverence (5:14-15). Later Joshua told us what this meant to him. He knew he wasn't alone, and that's important for a man and a leader to know (Hebrews 13:5). He realized he was second in command, taking orders from Someone greater, and that is very comforting for a man and a leader. Especially reassuring was the assertion that the battle was already won. Realizing that we don't fight for victory, but that we fight from victory, is great encouragement (John 16:33). We knew every place where we set foot was ours, but setting foot in Jericho wouldn't be easy! It was the PROMISED land, and we had to believe God's promises that He would provide the way.

Provide He did – but what a crazy plan He came up with, nothing that any of us would ever advise Joshua to do. March around the city once a day for six days, then on the seventh go around seven times, blow the trumpets and shout, and when the walls fall in enter and kill everyone (Joshua 6:1-5). God's ways are certainly different than man's ways (Isa 55:8; Proverbs 14:12). They seem strange at the start – but they work!

What can I say but that we obeyed (6:6-14). It was hard for a soldier to endure the taunts of the people in Jericho and not make a sound, but this was God's way of showing that He was doing it all and it wasn't our strength or skill that brought victory (Ex 14:14; Psalms 46:10-11). We fought, but He brought the victory. God will do it all, but I must show up and do my part (Hebrews 11:30).

The seventh day was when we would either win all or lose all. It still seemed strange. By the time we walked around seven times it was late and we were tired, NOT the time for an attack! Sometimes obeying God seems hard and strange, contrary to common sense. But you never go wrong when you obey God, when you fight your battles His way (6:15-21). He tells us to forgive those who purposely hurt us and don't apologize. We are to love those who reject us. He says to turn to other cheek to those who use and take advantage of us. We are commanded to pray for those who plot us evil. In addition, we are to share with the needy and not worry about the future. Forgive, love, serve, pray, they sound like strange directions to follow, but they, too work! They can't be done in one's own strength, but in God's they bring victory over impossible odds.

When we obeyed God we ended up with one of the most famous military victories in history. The walls fell outward into the moat so we could easily enter. Only the section at Rahab's house stood and they were rescued (6:22-27). God kept His promises to us, as He keeps His promises to you. God is full of grace and mercy. Obey Him. Don't follow your own innate male (or female) sense of direction (Proverbs 14:12). His grace will sustain you.

Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

5. CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART – Joshua 7:1-8:29

BY THE FATHER OF ONE OF THE SOLDIERS KILLED AT AI

A little banyan seed said to a palm tree one day, "I am weary of being tossed about by the wind; let me lodge in your branches." "Remain as long as you like," was the reply. Soon the tree forgot all about its tiny guest, but the seed did not remain idle. Immediately it began to work its roots under the bark and into the heart of the trunk itself. Finally, the tree cried out, "What are you doing?" "I'm only the little seed you allowed to rest among your boughs," came the reply. "Get out!" exclaimed the palm. "You've become too large and strong!" "I cannot leave you now," said the banyan. "We have grown together, and I would kill you if I tore myself away." The tree tried desperately to shake itself loose, but to no avail. Eventually its graceful leaves turned brown, and its trunk wasted away; but the banyan continued to thrive until its host could no longer be found. Yes, a little seed can develop into a parasitic plant and do great damage. In like manner, a tiny sin that is not confessed and forsaken can grow into an overpowering habit that chokes a Christian's spiritual vitality and ruins his life.

Little sins can grow: anger, fear, lust, cruelty, cheating, violence, lying, stealing, pride, selfishness, laziness, greed, etc. When they grow they bring destruction and death, not only to the one sinning but to others around them.

My life was totally changed by someone else's sin. My son, my only son, was killed because of the sin of another. His death was unnecessary, but if my loss can prevent another's loss that may bring me some solace. Let me tell you about it.

I lived in the days of Joshua. I came out of Egypt through the Red Sea after being protected under the Passover blood. I was a teenager and remember it quite clearly. Forty years later I walked through the Jordan, finally entering God's Promised Land. That, and the victory over Jericho, showed us that God was well able to protect and provide what He promised. Then came Ai.

Ai was a small military outpost further up the valley from Jericho. It was nothing compared to Jericho, so Joshua just sent out a few thousand men to destroy it. But instead of coming back victorious, they came back in defeat. What's worse, 36 soldiers were killed (Joshua 7:2-5). One of them was my son, my only child. He was married and had a family of his own. He was our pride and joy. He was our only source of help and support in old age. Now his wife is a widow and his children are orphans. Thirty-five other families are also shocked and grieving. Why did it happen?

For one thing, Joshua moved ahead too fast. He didn't go to God and ask God's help. He was overconfident, assumed he was doing God's will and would be blessed. We can never assume God will be on our side, we must always make sure we are on God's side. Joshua underestimated the strength of the enemy and overestimated our own strength. That is pride, and it brings destruction. There is nothing that is too 'little' to ask for God's help. There is nothing so small that we can handle it on our own without God's help.

Still, I don't hold it against Joshua, or God. All of our lives are in His hands. My son could have died in the desert or at Jericho, or have never been born in the first place. It could have been someone else's son who died at Ai. I wouldn't wish that loss on anyone!

I took my grief to God. He understands. His Son was more of an innocent victim than mine was. I couldn't have saved my son, but He could have. He chose not to because His Son was

paying for the sins of me and my son. Because He sent His Son to die, I will be able to live eternally in heaven with my son. I can't complain about a God who does that!

If Joshua would have gone to God he would have been told what he later found out when he went to God after the loss (Joshua 7:1, 6-14). In a very dramatic way God pointed out that one family had sinned. It caused us all to search our hearts. It could have been any one of us. We all knew we were guilty of sin before God. It was only His grace that kept all of us from being destroyed.

The guilty ones that were destroyed were a man named Achan and his family (7:1, 16-25). We never knew just who brought the gold, silver and robe home from Jericho instead of destroying it, but everyone who knew and didn't do anything were killed along with Achan for God considered them as guilty as he was. That is very solemn and convicting!

Achan's sin was greed. Materialism ruled his heart. He was also impatient, for if he'd have waited a few days he could have had free plunder from Ai (8:1-2). He wasn't content (Philippians 4:11). Things became his idol. God clearly warns that sin brings death (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 5:12; 6:23). Sin starts small, but then it grows until it brings death and destruction. That is always its pattern. There are no exceptions. God hates sin and punishes it.

God still hates sin in your day just as much and it still brings destruction (Romans 6:16; 7:11; 1 Corinthians 15:56; James 1:15). What's worse is that sin is never private. It always affects those around us. Please make sure there is no unconfessed sin in your life (Psalm 139:23-24). Admit your sin to God and ask for His mercy and grace in covering it with the blood of Jesus.

Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

6. FAITH IS THE VICTORY – Joshua 9:1-10:29

BY A GREEK SCIENTIST COME TO INVESTIGATE THE DAY THE SUN DIDN'T SET

It was the strangest thing! You know how some days seem like they'll never end, they just go on and on and you figure it must be bedtime but it isn't? And then other days go so fast you can't believe they are over already? Time doesn't change, it's just our perception of time, of what is happening. Check a time-keeping instrument and you'll see that you were mistaken, that time always goes the same – or does it?

I always thought so until one day time did stand still! I am a Greek scientist (actually a Mycean, a predecessor to the Greeks) and I know it happened. I was there. Everyone who was alive at that time experienced it – the day the sun stopped and didn't go down. Those on the other side of the world experienced the opposite – the day the sun didn't rise! Stomachs got hungry, eyes became tired, animals went to sleep – but it was still midday! We kept watching our sundials and marking the shadows but for hours they never moved! It was a day like no other! Chickens got confused and didn't roost. Tides didn't move in or out. It was eerie, weird! Then all of a sudden things went back to normal again.

Most people shook it off and went about their business as usual. They weren't overly concerned now that everything was back to normal. It really shook me up, though. I was struck double strongly. As a scientist, I studied the sun, moon and stars. As a man I was seeking the power behind this universe. It's perfection and movement said it had to have a greater power behind it. Something was missing in my heart and somehow down inside I knew that that void would only be met when I met the God of the universe. When He exercised His power over His universe by suspending this one law for a while, it really got my interest!

We didn't know much about the universe in 1400 BC, but we did know some things. My people, the Myceans, are best known by the story of Helen of Troy and the Trojan wars, which happened about 100 years after I lived.

The place that was most advanced in its knowledge of the heavens and the earth was Egypt. I'd always wanted to go there, and this gave me the perfect chance. I wanted to study what that ancient writers had written about the universe. I also wanted to see what their current scholars had discovered about this time when the sun stopped moving.

After traveling there, I discovered I had come to the right place! They were struggling as a nation because of a slave people, the Hebrews, who had left causing lots of destruction. I heard about 10 plagues, ending with the death of the firstborn in every home that didn't have blood over the door. I was told about the opening of the Red Sea and the drowning of their army. Spies had brought back reports of something called manna, water coming from a rock, clothes that never wore out, and more recently of a river miraculously stopping flowing and a large city having its walls fall down from no seen force. Then I heard the story I was coming for. It told about a day when hail (which was most unusual) fell from heaven and only hit Canaanites who were fighting the Jews. Many were killed. It seems, as the story goes, their God stopped the sun from moving for that day so they could go kill all their enemies and not have any escape under cover of darkness.

I read about these events in the book of Jashar. My curiosity was so aroused, and my heart so drawn, that I had to travel there next. I knew they were killing everyone who wasn't one of them, but still I knew I would never be satisfied if I didn't fully pursue this new knowledge.

When I got there I found the people most open and receptive. They were very courteous, friendly and accommodating. They were honest, sincere people. That told me about that special day, and also about their God, Jehovah, the One who gave them the victory. As I listened my heart was warmed and my soul became excited for I knew inside that He was the One I had long been seeking! My head was filled with the answers about that long day and my heart was filled with peace and joy as I put my faith in this magnificent Jehovah Who was obviously the great Power behind the universe which I had been seeking!

I was told about how a powerful Canaanite coalition tricked them into making a treaty so they wouldn't be destroyed. Joshua himself, though, admitted it was his fault for not going to God for wisdom before acting. Then when these Gibeonites were attacked by neighbors for deserting their confederacy the Jews were obligated by their new treaty to protect them. Their God fought for them, using hail and then extended daylight to totally defeat their enemies. It turns out this wasn't the only time God changed the natural light and dark pattern on earth. He had made it dark in Egypt for 3 days before the Jews left – but it was still light in the area where the Jews lived (Exodus 10:21-23). There would in the future be a three-hour period of supernatural darkness over the whole earth when God Himself died on a cross (Mk 15:33) to pay for the sins of the world.

Oh, what answers I found in this great Jehovah God – answers to questions I didn't even know to ask! I stayed and watched them defeat enemy after enemy, always giving credit to their wonderful Jehovah. I never wanted to leave what I found, so I stayed with them the rest of my life. I continued to grow in knowledge as I read how He created the universe and kept it all going by His might. I also continued to grow in spirit as I discovered how He loves me and wants to help me find His best in my life. I made it a point to spend the rest of my life learning about Him and living for Him. What better use could I make of my life?

I invite you to check out this same God I found. Read about Him and wall the great things He can do in His book, the Bible. You, too, can read what Joshua wrote. He did so many great things, and He continues to do great things for His people even to today. Actually, His greatest miracles are still to come. Follow Him and you'll see them for yourself!

Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

7. ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS – Joshua 10:29-22:34

BY CALEB

I remember as a young boy watching an Egyptian stonecutter hammering away at a rock, over and over, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing. Then, all of a sudden, a blow would split it in two. I knew it wasn't that hit that did it, but the cumulative effect of all that had gone before it.

God taught me that lesson in my life, too. I had to learn to persevere, to not quit but to keep faithfully serving God no matter what happened. It's not an easy lesson to learn, for patience doesn't come natural to human beings. Is God trying to teach you patience and perseverance? How are you coming with your progress? Maybe my story will help you.

I grew up in Egypt. For the first forty years of my life, I was a slave patiently awaiting God's deliverance. Many grew bitter and doubted God would ever free us, but I kept faithfully believing and serving Him. Then when deliverance did come we ended up having to wait another 40 years to enter the land – more patience was required. Finally, five years after we crossed the Jordan River and began our conquest of the land, I got my chance to fight for my land. But I'm getting ahead of myself here. Let me go back and fill in some details.

It took us years to defeat the confederations of tribes in Canaan. God was teaching us patience and perseverance, the importance of sticking to something and how much more we appreciate that for which we have to work and wait. He was letting us have victory in one area, settle and hold it, and then move on to another area, just like He does in your lives today. To give it all to us as once would have been too hard for us. If all the Canaanites were destroyed before we could move in and replace them, wild animals would take over and make the places unsafe for us and our families (Exodus 23:20-30). Thus, God's way has always been little by little, claim and assimilate one area and then move on to the next area to be conquered.

Even so, despite the fact that the major Canaanite armies had all been defeated, there were still pockets of resistance and a few cities of giants left. It would take ongoing mop-up operations to remove them all, a lifelong task. Other new areas of defiance would raise up as well and have to be put down. Isn't that the way it is in your life, too? After salvation (Passover lamb and Red Sea deliverance) you must decide who you will live for: yourself or God. If you choose yourself you wander for years in aimlessness (as we wandered for 40 years in the desert). If you choose God and follow Him into the place of His perfect will for you, then you will find battles and opposition. The world, the flesh and the devil will fight you every step of the way to keep you from making that commitment to put Him before yourself. God will give you victory if you faithfully persevere and stay true to Him. The first major battles between the flesh and the spirit will have been won, but living in His will (in the land) will mean a lifetime of continual skirmishes, mop-up operations, taking new territory, and fighting giants that remain. Do you know what I mean?

The problem is that we didn't go ahead and keep battling. We got weary of it and decided that 90% victory was good enough when it isn't! the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh were willing to settle for land on the east of the Jordan. It was right next to God's perfect land (will) for us, but not in it. It was close enough to have some of the benefits, but stopped short of being where the battles and conflicts were. They were the first to get attacked and defeated, though, because they weren't in God's perfect place for them.

Other tribes complained that their portion wasn't large enough for them. That was because they didn't keep fighting and drive all the enemies out of their territory. Instead of battling ahead they left them there, then battled that their land was insufficient. How many of God's people stop short of the victory and blessing God has for them because they become weary of persevering and patiently moving ahead. Then they wonder why God's will for them seems so unfulfilling and lacking.

When most of the land was conquered and divided, I finally got my turn to choose my selection. Usually, land was given by lot to be fair to all, but because Joshua and I were the only 2 spies to trust God and encourage the nation to enter the land 45 years ago God had said we could have our choice of the land. For all these years I had believed His promise and was patiently awaiting the time when I could settle in the Hebron area. It was the richest part of the land, and therefore the strongest giants held it as their own. For me, though, it had special significance because that is where Abraham first settled. That land held the bones of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. That made it very special to me. You see, I was a Kenizzite by birth. My father, Jephunneh, had named me "Caleb," which means "dog" (more accurately a wild, wolf-like creature who was rejected and homeless). When I had nowhere else to go God's people took me in and nurtured me. I was so well accepted by them that the tribe of Judah made me their spokesman and leader. That's how I was one of the 12 spies.

When we had to wait 40 years to enter the land I was tempted to get bitter and hard, as so many others had. After all, it wasn't my fault we had to wander, but I had to suffer with the others for their sin. That made it harder for me to persevere. Still, I stayed faithful to the Lord. God passed over me and chose Joshua to be the next leader, so all my time could be invested in my family. My daughter married my nephew, Othniel, who was the next leader after Joshua (the first judge of Israel).

What a great God we serve! He had promised that every place we put our foot would be ours if we faithfully obeyed and followed Him (Joshua 1:3-5), and that is what happened (21:43-45). The same is true for you, too, if you follow your "Joshua" ("Jesus" in Greek is the same as "Joshua" in Hebrew). Are you following? Persevere, patiently obey Him. You won't regret it!

Old Testament Men – I. JOSHUA: The Battle Belongs to the Lord

8. WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE – Joshua 23:1-24:33

BY JOSHUA, JUST BEFORE HE DIED

Once there was this very wealthy young man. He lived in a great, elaborate house with dozens of rooms. One day he decided to invite the Lord to come and stay with him. When the Lord arrived, this young man offered him the very best room in the house. The room was upstairs and at the end of the hall. "This room is yours, Jesus! Stay as long as you like and you can do whatever you want to in this room, remember Jesus, it's all yours." "Thank you" the Lord replied, and with that the man shut the door and went about his daily business.

That evening after he had retired for the night there came a loud knocking at the front door. The young man pulled on his robe and made his way downstairs. When he opened the door he found that the devil had sent three of his demons to attack the man. He quickly tried to close the door but one of the demons kept sticking his foot in the door. Sometime later, after a great struggle, he managed to slam the door shut and returned to his room totally exhausted. Can you believe that! The man thought. Jesus is upstairs in my very best room sleeping while I am down here battling demons. Oh well, maybe he just didn't hear. He slept fitfully that night.

The next day things went along as normal and being tired as he was, the young man retired early that evening. Along about midnight, there came such a terrible ruckus at the front door that the young man was sure that whatever it was would tear the door down. He stumbled down the stairs once again and opened the door to find that there were dozens of demons now trying to get into his beautiful home. For more than three hours he fought and struggled against the demons from hell and finally overtook them enough to shut the door against their attack. All energy seemed to fail him. I really don't understand this at all. Why won't the Lord come to my rescue? Why does he allow me to fight all by myself? I feel so alone. Troubled he found his way to the sofa and fell into a restless sleep.

The next morning, he decided to inquire of the Lord about the happenings of the last two evenings. Quietly he made his way to the elegant bedroom where he had left Jesus. "Jesus," he called as he tapped at the door. "Lord,, I don't understand what is happening. For the last two nights I have had to fight the demons away from my door while you laid up here sleeping. Don't you care about me? Did I not give you the very best room in house? He could see the tears building in Jesus' eyes but continued on, "I just don't understand. I really thought that once I invited you in to live with me that you would take care of me and I gave you the best room in my house and everything. What more can I do?"

"My precious child," Jesus spoke so softly. "I do love and care for you. I protect all that you have released into my care. But when you invited me to come here and stay, you brought me to this lovely room and you shut the door to the rest of your house. I am Lord of this room but I am not Master of this house I have protected this room and no demon may enter here."

"Oh, Lord, please forgive me. Take all of my house - it is yours - I am so sorry that I never offered you all to begin with. I want you to have control of everything." With this he flung open the bedroom door and knelt at Jesus' feet. "Please forgive me Lord for being so selfish." Jesus smiled and told him that He had already forgiven him and that He would take care of things from now on. That night the young man prepared for bed he thought to himself, " I wonder if those demons will return. I am so tired of fighting them each and every night." But he knew that Jesus said that he would take care of things from now on.....

Along about midnight the banging on the door was frightening. The young man slipped out of his room in time to see Jesus going down the stairs. He watched in awe as Jesus swung open the door, no need to be afraid. Satan stood at the door this time demanding to be let in. Jesus took on his attacks in short order and sent him away.

There is a moral to this tale. Jesus wants all of you, not just a part. He will take all that you give Him but nothing more. How much of your heart have you given to the Lord? Are you keeping a portion of it away from Him? Perhaps the attacks are coming more and more each day. Why not let the Lord fight the battles for you. He is always victorious. I have found that God made man simple. All of man's complexities are of his own devising.

This is the message of my life. My name is Joshua. I talked to you when I was 25 years younger. God had promised us Palestine if we followed and obeyed Him. He made promises to us and kept every one of them. My last function on earth was to gather all the Jews together and tell them this. It's recorded in Joshua 23-24.

Everything that had happened in our conquering the land was God's doing, He got the credit and not us (Joshua 23:1-5). My generation had been afraid to totally trust Him and our fear of the giants kept us out. We wandered for 40 years in the desert. However, our children put their faith in God and He took care of them. It's like a young child coming to you for help, trusting you with his needs. Would you use that opportunity to do all you could to make his life miserable, or would you do your best to lovingly care for the child? Our heavenly Father is more loving and caring than we are.

I told the people that they had to stay faithful to God (v. 6-7) and keep trusting Him alone (v. 8-11) for it is often easier to trust during hard times than when everything is going all right. Now that there was relative peace I was concerned they'd stop depending on God moment by moment as they had in the past.

I reminded them, too, of what would happen if they turned from God (v. 12-16).

Just before I died I called all the people together to remind them again of these things (Joshua 24). I reviewed how God had taken care of us in the past (v. 1-13). It's important for you, too, to remember what God has done for you in the past. Paul, in Ephesians 2:1-10, reminds his readers of how they were lost in sin before God's grace rescued them. Remembering this keeps us trusting in Jesus and not our own strength.

Still, it's a free will choice each one must make on his own (v. 14-15). Each individual Jew had to decide, and men had to decide for their families. I told them my choice: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15). The people said they would follow God 100% (Joshua 24:16-28).

Those were my last public words. Soon after I died (Joshua 24:29-33). What a privilege it was to be used by God for His work during my time on earth. I had to give up everything to serve Him. He's looking for people in your time, too, to give up everything in His service. He will bless you beyond anything you could imagine, but you have to put Him first.

BIBLE VERSES ABOUT BATTLE BELONGING TO GOD

1 Samuel 17:47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Isa 54:17 no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.

Revelation 7:12 Saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

2 Chr 20:15-17 15 He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: `Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'"

Psalms 46:11 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Isa 9:7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Zech 4:6 So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: `Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.

Romans 8:31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

JOSHUA VERSES ABOUT BATTLE BELONGING TO GOD

Josh 1:5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Josh 1:8-9 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Josh 6:2 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

Josh 24:15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Old Testament Men

II. DAVID: The Man After God's Own Heart

SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF DAVID

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1. The Lord Looks at the Heart
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Old Testament Men – II. DAVID: The Man After God's Heart

1. THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART

The Bible never flatters its heroes. It tells us the truth about each one of them in order that against the background of human breakdown and failure we may magnify the grace of God. Sins are not glossed over, neither are they glorified. As we look at Bible characters, we find ourselves looking into a mirror. Great has been our failure, but greater still has been His faithfulness. Paul put it this way: "These things happened to them (Bible people) as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Corinthians. 10:11).

While there is much in the Bible in the way of theology, principles and teachings, it is seeing these truths acted out in the lives of Bible characters that helps us really understand them. No one's life is more helpful and instructional than David. He mirrors all of us.

DAVID'S name appears 1034 times in the Bible. Almost half of the books mention him. You must read all or part of 66 chapters to get an overall picture of his life. Creation has 2 chapters, Abraham 14 chapters. David is best known as "a man after God's own heart" (I Samuel 13:14). His actions weren't always as God would have them be, but his heart was truly for God his whole life. David's life is like a compass needle that wiggles but keeps coming back to north.

SAUL was the first king of Israel. God didn't want them to have a king -- He was their king. They insisted, and He warned them it would bring disaster (I Samuel 8:5, 18-22). Sometimes God lets man learn things the hard way and this was one of those times. Saul was chosen by the people because he was tall and handsome. They didn't care about character, just appearance. God is more interested in character. Character is what you are when no one is watching. Outer appearances can be deceiving, it's what's inside that really counts!

Saul failed because he used people. When his own son Jonathan led the Jews to victory against the Philistines, Saul in jealousy made a crazy law that anyone that ate or drank before the end of the battle would be put to death. Jonathan had no knowledge of this law, and when he broke it his father would have killed him if the soldiers wouldn't have intervened. Saul just used people for himself, then dropped them -- even family. Then Saul was guilty of presumption. He offered sacrifices which only a priest could do. In his pride he put himself above the law of the land, seeing himself as an exception to the law's others had to obey. Finally, he disobeyed God by not destroying all the enemy and livestock. Then, to make it worse, he lied and tried to cover up his sin. He blamed others (I Samuel 15:22-23). As a result of these sins God took the kingdom from him and gave it to another (I Samuel 15:28).

DAVID IS CHOSEN by God, whereas Saul was chosen by the people (I Samuel 16:1). Samuel thought it was one of David's older brothers, for they were tall and good looking (I Samuel 16:2-6). God made His priorities clear, though, when Samuel wanted to anoint David's oldest brother. "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (I Samuel 16:7). David is then anointed king, but it'll be awhile before he sits on the throne.

When we look at David we see just why God chose him, what inner traits God valued in David and still values in us today. This is what it means to be 'after God's own heart.'

DAVID IS CONTENT to stay and take care of sheep. He isn't jealous or impatient. He is willing to wait for God's timing. This is one of the inner traits God so greatly values in His servants.

DAVID IS HUMBLE after he is anointed. This special privilege doesn't go to his head nor make him proud. He hasn't tried to elevate himself or impress others, and that is one of the reasons God chose him. Even today God looks for inner godly character traits for His servants (I Timothy 3:1-11). We must cultivate these same inner qualities in ourselves instead of working on outer appearances and external ways of impressing people.

DAVID IS FAITHFUL in little things before God gives him larger ways of service. He was faithful as a shepherd. He wasn't sitting around waiting for God to give him some nice, juicy job. He faithfully worked behind the scenes, doing whatever God wanted him to do. Jesus said "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall become your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44).

DAVID IS WILLING to do whatever God would have him do. He was willing to leave his sheep, his home and his family when God called. He was available to be used by God in any way God wanted to use him. That's what God wants of us today, too. He doesn't care about our ability (outside), just our availability (inside).

DAVID IS PATIENT in awaiting God's timing in being king, too. He had years with the sheep, playing his harp for king Saul, and many years running and hiding from Saul. It can be hard to wait, to be patient for God's timing. Moses didn't wait but moved in his time and ended up with 40 years wasted in the desert. David knew he couldn't make himself king, and that if God wanted it to happen He would have to bring it about. He was willing to wait for God's timing.

Contentment, humility, faithfulness, willingness and patience -- these are what God looks for. God looks inner traits, not outer. That's why He chose David instead of Saul. That's what He wants from us today, too. He doesn't look for sinless perfection, for David was as sinful as Saul. He looks at our heart (I Kings 14:7-8). What does He see when He looks into yours?

Remember, appearances are deceiving. Don't focus on them in judging others or evaluating yourself. Don't try to impress others by your outer appearance. Inner means more. A young officer who was blinded during the war met and later married one of the nurses who took care of him in an army hospital. One day he overheard someone speaking about himself and his wife: "It was lucky for her that he was blind since he never would have married such a homely woman if he had sight!" He rose to his feet and walked toward the voices, saying, "I overheard what you said, and I thank God from the depths of my heart for blindness of eyes that might have kept me from seeing the marvelous worth of the soul of this woman who is my wife. She is the most noble character I have ever known; if the shape of her features is such that it might have masked her inward beauty to my soul, than I am the greater gainer by having lost my sight." Make sure you, too, focus on inner beauty and not outer beauty (Proverbs 31:30).

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2. FIGHTING GIANTS GOD'S WAY

Everybody likes to cheer for the underdog. We pull for the tortoise to beat the hare. We thrill over the Alamo. We cheer for the underdog in sports. Why? It's so easy to identify with the underdog. We all feel that way from time to time in life. That's why we pull for the underdog. The Bible is full of underdog stories: Daniel and the lions, his friends and the fiery furnace, Moses at the Red Sea, Joshua and Jericho, Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Mordichi and Naaman. Perhaps the best known and loved is the story of David and Goliath. David's victory over the giant gives hope for all us little guys as we face giants in our lives.

THE CRISIS It was larger than life. For generations the Jews were oppressed by the Philistines. The Jews were no match for them because the Philistines had iron and giants. Only with God's help would they ever win. During the time of Saul things got particularly bad. It seems each arm was drawn up on opposite sides of a canyon that was as much as 20' deep (I Samuel 17:1). Each army taunted the other to attack, for whoever attacked would be at a very severe disadvantage. To break the stalemate without endangering their whole army, the Philistines, who were the aggressors, decided to send their best fighter to take on Israel's best fighter. This was common practice among the city-states of Greece, where the Philistines originally came from. It kept whole armies from being wiped out. In battle even the victor's army was weakened and prey to other armies.

The champion the Philistines sent us was a giant named Goliath (I Samuel 17:4), a descendant of the giants that were in the land when Joshua conquered it (Josh 11:22) and one of the reasons the Jews were afraid to enter under Moses 40 years earlier. He was over 9 feet tall and wore armor that was almost 200 pounds ((Samuel 17:4-7). Humanly speaking there was no way any of the Jews could face him. We, too, face giants that are way too strong for us: cancer, bankruptcy, divorce, addiction, rejection, fear, loneliness, sin patterns, etc.

It defies our power. Not only are these giants present in our lives, but they seem to taunt and challenge us, mocking us for inability to remove them. This is what Goliath did to the Jews (v. 8-11). They felt helpless and powerless. Indeed, in themselves they were! Without God sending a deliverer they would never prevail (v. 12-15).

It will not go away. Since they were unable to defeat Goliath in their own strength the Jews just hoped he would go away, but he didn't (v. 16). You can't ignore a giant that is challenging you. They don't go away. Marriage problems don't just disappear. Rebellious teens don't just outgrow it. A friend making destructive choices isn't going to just wake up. That sin which keeps defeating you isn't going to just go away on its own. Giants need to be attacked and destroyed in God's strength (I Samuel 17:17-27).

David immediately seized up the situation as the powers of darkness challenging God and His people (v. 26). He didn't look at his own resources and compare them to the giant, He looked at God's resources compared to the giant. The giant was big, but God is much bigger (I Jn 4:4). But before he can remove the giant he has to deal with opposition from his brothers.

THE CRITICS They are obsessed with the trivial. David's brothers mocked and criticized him for what he was about to do (v. 28). They should have supported him, but they were either jealous, guilty or just bitter inside. They were more concerned about the sheep than David!

They believe the worse about people. Even worse, they unfairly and inaccurately attributed self-centered motives to David (v. 28). Don't you hate it when people accuse you of wrong motives? Aren't you glad God knows the truth?

David handled it the only way those things can be handled -- he ignored the talk and went ahead with what needed doing (v. 29-30). Even Saul criticized him (v. 33). He didn't fight them, nor did he let them distract him from the job he knew God needed him to do (Proverbs 17:14).

THE CONTEST David used God's weapons. David remembered God's past deliverances against a bear and a lion (v. 34-37) so he knew God could do this, too. It's important to remember what God has done for us and others in the past and not just think of the present or future. The greatest work of God for us was on the cross. If He could have victory there He can and will have it now!

David refused to fight the giant the world's way -- with Saul's armor (v. 37-39). We can't fight the giants we face in the world's way, either. Things like bitterness, pride, anger, forcing our way, sneaky things, etc., won't work. God's weapons are spiritual, for it is really a spiritual battle we face (Eph 6:10-18). It isn't the cancer or bankruptcy as much as it is Satan behind it using it to defeat and discourage us. That's the real battle. That's why we, too, need God's power to fight. The fruit of the flesh is fear, worry, anger, etc. But the fruit of His Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). That's what He expects us to have to fight back with against discouragement and fear. These seem laughable to the world. But then so did a sling shot and a stone.

A sling was a string with a leather pouch in the middle. Both ends of the string were held while the pouch was swung in a circle, gaining momentum. Then one string was released and the other held, allowing the stone to fly free. Actually, David had five stones. Why? There were four other giant relatives of Goliaths (2 Samuel 21:15-21). David had to be ready for them all. God had him fight them one by one at future times, though. He couldn't worry about future giants at the moment, but had to be prepared for them nonetheless. One at a time, though.

David refused to be intimidated. David's giant tried to intimidate him (v. 41-44), to fill him with fear. Fear is one of Satan's biggest tools to defeat us. Even a small problem can become a giant when viewed with fear. Don't let your giants intimidate you. Face them in Jesus' name and strength (v. 45) not your own. Have faith in God's power as being greater than whatever you face (v. 46-47). Make sure God gets the credit (v. 46-47).

Don't run from your giant. There comes a time to boldly attack in God's strength and He will give the victory! That's what happened with David. He used what little battle skill he had -- slinging stones. One could be quite accurate with a stone (Judges 20:16) but there was no guarantee the stone would hit its mark. It was David's job to do his best, to face the giant and give it his best shot. From when the stone left the sling, though, God took over and made sure it hit its mark. We aren't to hide at home, simply praying, when it's time to face our giants. We do our best, trusting that God will take it and use it for His glory and our victory. That's what happened with David (v. 49-54). If there is a giant in your life, face it in God's strength (Luke 9:1).

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3. GET READY, GET SET ...

Most of the things we learn in life we learn the hard way -- through experience. The Bible is full of teaching and others can add personal experience, but it seems most wisdom is gained through daily life experiences. God trains and prepares His servants for service by sending them to the school of hard knocks. It seems some things can only really be learned by practical life experiences. Life experiences show us our own limits and our need of God. Even Jesus had to learn by experience: "He learned obedience from what He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). The same was true of David.

God had called and anointed David to be king. However, it is a big jump from the sheep pen to the throne room! Even though David was sincere and very committed in his faith, he still needed training to be the king of Israel and to rule them as a man after God's own heart. David had some hard lessons to learn in the school of life experiences.

1. PEOPLE WILL DISAPPOINT Immediately after David killed Goliath Saul started wondering who he was and trying to find out information about him (I Samuel 17:55-58). What made that so bad was that David had been in Saul's court as an armor-bearer and to play his harp to soothe Saul (I Samuel 16:14-22). How do you feel when you go out of your way to help someone and they forget you, don't even remember you? David had to learn that what he did was to be done unto the Lord because God wanted him to do it and it was the right thing to do. As a leader David couldn't count on people's appreciation and thanks. He could not afford to get in the pattern of doing things to impress people. No leader can really lead that way. The same is true of us. To serve God we must learn to not depend on people's approval and to not do things to impress or please people.

2. A LOYAL FRIEND IS VERY VALUABLE Evidently Jonathan had been listening to his father's questions. He remembered David and reached out in friendship, giving David clothing and armor he would need in the court. This friend made David's transition to court life much easier (I Samuel 18:1-5). Sometimes we think God might not be listening to us or helping us, but if He has provided a god, loyal friend He has provided a wonderful blessing. We only learn how important a good friend is by life experiences -- that's when we need a friend.

3. WORLDLY SUCCESS IS FLEETING David's time in the court didn't last long, though. Saul got very jealous of David's popularity (I Samuel 18:10-12). God was teaching David that he couldn't depend on security in job or position. That's an important life lesson, and the sooner learned the better. No matter how great a job is, it's not our security. Only God is.

4. PUT GOD BEFORE LOVED ONES One of the rewards for killing Goliath was Saul's oldest daughter, but he gave him his other daughter, Michal, instead. First he said David would have to kill 100 Philistines as a dowry, hoping David himself would be killed. Instead, he killed 200. Saul tried to capture David in his home with Michal but he was able to escape. Michal wouldn't come with him, though, and married another man who seemed to have better prospects at the moment. David is showing David that He must be first, even before family and loved ones. Sometimes taking a stand for him alienates one from their loved ones.

Because he had to flee for his life he also lost his best friend, Jonathan, for they couldn't be together any more (I Samuel 19:1, 41-42). He had to stay away from his mentor, Samuel, too, or Samuel's life would be in danger. David lost his job & position, his wife, his mentor and his best friend. All he had left was God. God wanted these experiences to teach David to trust Him more. Unfortunately, David didn't do so well. He lost his relationship with God, too.

5. SINFUL FEAR DEFEATS AND DESTROYS Fear is one of Satan's best tools, and it worked to perfection on David. He decided to take matters into his own hands to meet his needs, and then when that backfired tried to cover up his sin, making it worse. This began a sin pattern in David that he would repeat over and over, culminating with his sin with Bathsheba.

He ran in fear to take refuge with God's enemies, the Philistines (I Samuel 1:10-15). When they discovered him there he came up with a plan to cover himself and avoid the consequence of his sin. He pretended he was insane, acting crazy and letting his saliva run down his beard. Ancient people believed those who were insane were 'touched by the gods' and wouldn't harm them. What a humiliating position for David to be in! He fled to a cave and hid (I Samuel 22:1).

6. BE CONTENT NO MATTER WHAT How appropriate that David was trapped in a dark, damp, lonely cave. Isn't that where we put ourselves, too, when we take matters into our own hands and then try to cover up our sins when things don't work out like we want? Self-pity, depression, discouragement -- what awful, lonely, dark caves they are!

God used that cave to bring David to repentance (Romans 8:28). David soon saw his self-centeredness and independence. He confessed them and returned to God. Read Psalm 142, for David wrote it about what he learned in that cave. He learned to trust God and be content, even if it means losing job, mate, mentor and friend. Losing them is no reason to lose God, too. It took some hard life experiences to teach this lesson to David.

7. FORGIVE THOSE WHO HURT YOU Word of David spread throughout Israel and before long many who were discontented with Saul or threatened by him also fled to hide with David (I Samuel 22:1-2). Saul had really hurt lots of people, including David. To be a good king David had to learn to forgive and not use his power to get revenge. He learned this the hard way, too, for when Saul was within his reach David did something to hurt Saul (I Samuel 24:1-7) and soon regretted it. He repented of it and promised to never do it again. Revenge is never as sweet as it seems it will be. The sooner we learn to forgive instead of being bitter, the better we will be (Romans 12:17-21). This, too, is one of those lessons we must learn from experience.

8. LEARN FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES Thus God is using these life experiences to teach David to trust Him and put Him before anyone and everything else in life. There were necessary lessons to learn to be a king after God's own heart, and God put David through a long training period to learn those things. God does the same to us today. Learn from them.

9. PASS YOUR LESSONS ON TO OTHERS David passed his knowledge on to us, too, to help us as we go through life experiences today. That's why he wrote it down for future generations. Pass on what you have learned to your children and others around you. That won't replace learning by life experiences, but it will make the lessons easier and quicker.

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4. MRS. INSIDE OR MRS. OUTSIDE

Have you ever done anything foolish? Everyone does. Sometimes disaster results, other times just humorous consequences. Instead of a hit or miss approach, God offers wisdom to help His children make the right decisions. David, the man after God's own heart, trusted God when faced by a bear, lion and giant. He patiently awaited God's timing to become king. However, he also did some unwise things. Marrying his first wife was one of those things. It was foolish, not wise, and sad consequences followed it.

MRS. OUTSIDE: The Queen whose love turned to scorn. Our story starts with David visiting his brothers and taking up the challenge to fight Goliath. Saul promised to give his oldest daughter to the one who killed Goliath, but failed to do so for he became jealous of David's popularity. Still, he was pressured to keep his word so he gave David his youngest daughter, Michal, who was infatuated with David as the latest national hero. Michal was a spoiled, self-centered princess who got everything she wanted. Saul tried to use her to get rid of David, saying he'd have to have proof of killing 100 Philistines as his dowry for a princess. David came back with proof of 200 dead Philistines!

When Saul sent soldiers to murder David in his home, Michal helped him escape but then lied to her father to cover up her role (1 Samuel 19:11-17). She was a good, convincing liar, playing both sides against the middle to protect herself. She could have gone with David but didn't want to leave the king's court, so she married another man 'on the way up' since there didn't seem to be much of a future for David (1 Samuel 25:44).

During the next 14 years David, unfortunately, married several other women, including Abigail. When Saul died and the people wanted David for king, he demanded having Michal back for a wife as his condition for taking the crown (2 Samuel 3:14). She readily agreed, for David was now much more prestigious than her current husband. It broke his heart to see her go, and he followed her down the street crying (2 Samuel 3:15-16). Wanting her and taking her was not a wise move on David's part.

More time passed, and eventually David realized he had been foolish. Michal laughed and mocked him for his care-free worship and praise when he brought the ark back to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:12-23). She had no spiritual perception, no concern for David's joy. She only had pride in her own position. She rejected God and He rejected her, as did David (2 Samuel 6:23). She lived only for herself, and for her pleasure in the present. That is foolishness. It's like the man who tore down his barns to build more but died that night. Jesus called him a 'fool.' A fool puts today's pleasure over future good.

Wisdom is doing what is best in the long run, even if it isn't the easiest at the moment. We don't naturally have wisdom, but God gives it (James 1:5-8) through His Word (2 Timothy 3:15). A deep commitment to God and His values is necessary to have God's wisdom (Psalms 111:10). Man's wisdom apart from God is ultimate disaster (1 Corinthians 3:18; 2:6-16)

Fools. Some people do foolish things because they are naive, ignorant, don't know better (Hebrew 'pethi,' Proverbs 8:5; 14:15; 22:3; 27:12). Others are foolish because they don't do what they can to gain wisdom (Hebrew 'Kesil,' Proverbs 8:5; 10:1, 23; 13:20; 14:7; 17:10, 12). Worse are those who have knowledge and awareness of God's principles but reject them (Hebrew 'ewil,' Proverbs 1:7; 10:14; 12:16; 15:5; 17:28; 20:3). When this continues a person becomes proud, haughty and unteachable (Hebrew 'lits,' Proverbs 9:8, 13:1; 22:10). The final result is the one who

even goes so far as to deny their being a God (Hebrew 'nabal,' Proverbs 17:21; Psalm 14:1). It's interesting that David's second wife, who was a very wise woman, was married to a man with the Hebrew name 'Nabal,' or 'fool' (who goes so far as to reject God).

MRS. INSIDE: The Queen who was both winsome and wise. During David's 14 years in hiding his men helped Nabal, who was expected by rules of society to reward him (much as we are expected to leave a tip for a waitress today) (I Samuel 25:1-44). David was foolish and let his flesh rule. He took his men to kill Nabal and his household for the insult. However, Nabal's wife, Abigail, a woman of both intelligence and beauty (verse 3), acted quickly and intervened. She sought to make the wrong right. She confronted 400 angry men bent on murder with words of peace and wisdom. She humbled herself and spoke respectfully to David. She talked to David as if he already knew and agreed with what she was saying, taking a positive approach instead of a negative, condemning approach. She was persistent and kept talking so David couldn't respond quickly in anger. God used her to protect innocent lives and to keep David from sin. David was wise enough to take her advice (Proverbs 4:1; 8:10, 33; 24:32; 25:12).

Later, when she told Nabal, he suffered a stroke and soon died. David had his revenge, but God got it instead. David then wisely married her. He had no other wife at the time. She should have been his one and only wife. All of his heartache, family problems and kingdom turmoil would have been avoided had he been wise enough to have her for his only wife. Just as David was a man after God's own heart, so she was a woman after God's own heart. They were both godly and wise, a fine pair indeed. They balanced each other nicely, David being more the extrovert and Abigail the introvert. They had a son together named Kileab which means 'God is my judge.' Obviously that was Abigail's tribute to God for taking care of her in her awful, abusive situation with Nabal.

Wisdom or foolishness, the choice is still ours. Doing what is short-sighted and self-centered brings negative consequences in the long run. Doing what is best for the future, based on the principles and values shown forth in God's Word, that is wisdom. Proverbs has much to say about wisdom. "Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice" (13:10). "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (13:20). "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (14:12). "A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise" (15:12). "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord" (21:30).

Are you open to and seeking for God's wisdom? Or do you just want to do what is easiest this moment? Remember Michal and Abigail. Michal had everything but lost it because of her self-centered foolishness. Abigail had nothing but because she did what was right in God's sight ended up with everything. You can't have both, it's either what the world offers or what God offers. The choice is yours. Make a wise one.

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5. MERCY ME!

Everyone sins. If anyone says they don't they are lying (I John 1:8, 10). God's provision is the blood of Jesus, which is applied to our sin when we admit it and recognize that it is sin (I John 1:9). If we don't confess sin, then we slip into a state called 'backsliding' (a 'slide' because it is so easy to do and 'back' because it is going back to sin instead of ahead with God). God still mercifully awaits our return, like the father of the prodigal son. There are many examples in the Bible of those who have backslidden from God: Solomon, Jonah, Abraham, David -- yes, that's right, David. The man after God's own heart backslid. There is a 16-month period in his life when he actually abandoned God and lived with the enemy.

1. DAVID WAS DISCOURAGED AND LOST FAITH IN GOD. After killing Goliath David became so popular that Saul was jealous and tried to kill him. Even though God took care of him every day (I Samuel 23:14), David got weary of the oppression and decided to give up (I Samuel 27:1). We all have times we are weary of persevering and slip a bit in our commitment and zeal (Gal 6:9). David knew God's promises about being the king, etc., but instead believing them he became discouraged and went to live with the Philistines, the very ones he had been fighting for years. It was an act of leaving God (I Samuel 26:19).

2. DAVID ABANDONED GOD & HIS PEOPLE. David moved to Gath; the very place Goliath was from! (I Samuel 27:2-4). For the next 16 months (I Samuel 27 - 30) there is no mention of David going to God for help. No psalms were written during this time. He did experience relief from the oppression of Saul, but Satan's payment for this was far greater than any 'benefits' David received. We know, too, that if we let up in our devotion to the Lord that life seems to be a bit easier for a while. Satan and the flesh rise up against us when we oppose them, but when we give in they are pacified and life seems easier (for a while). Worse yet for David, he brought all his followers with him. When we drift from God we influence others. When we backslide, we often take our family and friends with us! David forsook God, but God didn't abandon him (Matthew 12:20). Still, "those who forsake the Lord shall come to an end" (Isa 1:28).

3. DAVID ADAPTED TO LIFE WITHOUT THE LORD. To live safely with the enemy, one must become like the enemy. This is perhaps the lowest time in David's whole life. The sin with Bathsheba just fell into his lap and David went with it. This time of sin was planned, plotted and done with his entire free will. He lied to Achish, his benefactor and provider in Philistia (I Samuel 27:6-8). David supported his followers by attacking people friendly to the Philistines, taking all their possessions, and killing every man, woman and child so the Philistines wouldn't find out. Then he'd say he had been raiding Jews (I Samuel 27:9-12). It was because of this bloodshed that David was later forbidden to build God's temple.

David seems to be 'successful' in his backsliding, but the trap is about to shut. He fits in so well with the Philistines that he is invited to help them attack the Jews and King Saul (I Samuel 28:1-2). David seems very glad to do so, and disappointed when God, in His mercy, bails him out and keeps him from having to fight his fellow Jews (I Samuel 29:1-11). Even though David still hasn't repented, God still is merciful in His dealings with David.

Mercy is God's goodness manifested to those in misery or distress. God is rich in mercy (Eph 2:4; James 5:11). It is often translated as 'love' or 'compassion' (I Chronicle 16:34; Psalms 57:10; Psalms 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:4, 29). Mercy is not getting what we deserve.

4. DAVID REAPED THE RESULTS OF LIFE WITHOUT GOD.

When David and his men returned after not having to fight the Jews, they found their town destroyed and their families and possessions carried off (I Samuel 30:1-4). Life without God is NOT better! David is rejected by the Philistine lords, he loses his family and possessions, and his friends all turn against him and talk of killing him (I Samuel 30:6). This is what Satan had in mind when he first lured David away from God. Satan promises the best but delivers the worst! He is a liar and deceiver, and any who trust him end up regretting it! It is God who comes to David's rescue (Psalm 103:8-18) -- the very One he deserted to make life 'easier.'

GRACE	MERCY
Getting what we don't deserve	Not getting what we do deserve
To sinful man as guilty	To sinful man as miserable
Unmerited, undeserved favor	Compassion, pity, lovingkindness
Goodness to the ill-deserving (in sin or guilt)	Goodness to those in need (misery or distress)
Focuses on man as guilty	Focuses on man as miserable
God's attitude toward the law-breaker and rebel	God's attitude toward those in distress
Grace comes first I Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2 Ti 1:4 2 Jn 3	Mercy follows grace, only the forgiven can be blessed

5. DAVID CAME TO HIS SENSES AND RETURNED TO GOD.

"But David found strength in the Lord his God" (I Samuel 30:6). Repentance is the only solution to backsliding. Turning to God is what he should have done before going to the Philistines. The whole last 16 months would have been different, and he'd still have his family and possessions! David asked God for wisdom and help (I Samuel 30:7-8). God showed him mercy and forgave him (Psalm 90:14). The same thing happened when he sinned with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:13) and when he disobeyed and took a census (2 Samuel 24:14).

God's mercy continued to be shown to David - He made it possible for David and his men to rescue their families and reclaim their possessions. David was so appreciative of God's mercy shown to him that he showed mercy to others -- something he didn't do during his 16 months away from God. While retrieving his family he came across an abandoned slave that belonged to his enemies. He could have killed him but he took care of him. Some of his men couldn't help in the battle with those who took their families, but David made sure they got their fair share of the possessions anyway. He gave away much of the bounty to poor Jews. A good test to see if you are aware of God's mercy is to see how merciful you feel toward others. If you don't have mercy to others, you may not be in fellowship with God as you should be. When David was right with God he had mercy on others, when he wasn't right with God he didn't have mercy for others. The two are closely related. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Are you discouraged, thinking of quitting (or maybe you have already started in little ways)? Don't believe Satan's lie that life is better outside the Lord's camp! If you are backslidden you need to repent and confess your sin, calling on God for mercy. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

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6. OF LIFE AND OF DEATH

Last words can be quite revealing. James Rodgers, when asked if he had a last request before facing a firing squad, said: "Why, yes, a bulletproof vest." Douglas Fairbanks' last words were "I never felt better." William Palmer who was hanged, said, when told to step on the scaffold's trap door, "Is it safe?" P. T. Barnum's last words were, "How were the receipts today?" You would think that being so close to death's door would sober a person into considering the prospect of facing his Maker, but that doesn't always seem to be the case. It wasn't the case with Saul, king of Israel, either. His last words reflected his life: prideful and self-centered. The setting was the battle between the Jews and Philistines, the one that God in his mercy prevented David from participating in.

THE BATTLE RAGES The Philistines won a massive victory in that battle (I Samuel 31:1), due largely to their use of iron (which the Jews didn't have). Forty years earlier God said this would happen if they insisted on having a king -- and God was right! Saul had just gone to a spirit medium for advice -- what a way to go face the Lord! Actually, Saul and his 3 sons were killed in the retreat (I Samuel 31:2-3). Saul was only wounded, then killed himself because he was afraid of what the Philistines would do to him if they captured him alive (I Samuel 31:4-6). His last words were to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me" (v. 4).

THE KING DIES When the day started Saul had no idea he would die that day. God doesn't tell us ahead of time when it will be our last day. We don't know when we will die, just that it will happen. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment." Death is an important part of life. If it weren't for death, people would live very differently! Preparation for death is an important part of preparation for life. Only those who are prepared to die are really prepared to live. We never know when it will be God's time for us to die, so need to always be ready. When one accepts Jesus as Savior one of the benefits is eternal life. Jesus took the sting of death (1 Corinthians 15:55), so death is just a shadow (Psalm 23). Death brings a life far greater than this life to those who are God's people (Philippians 1:21). Saul, unfortunately, had none of this hope in his life. He ended up a suicide (I Samuel 31:4-10). Ironically his body was hung on the wall of the same city where he had been anointed king! His life came full circle, ending up where he started - - nothing was gained during those 40 years. It was a waste for him and for the nation. A life lived away from God always ends up empty.

DAVID RESPONDS TO NEWS OF SAUL'S DEATH When David and his men returned from rescuing their families and getting back their possessions, they found out about Saul's death (2 Samuel 1:1-10). Even though it meant they could return to Israel in safety, and David would be made king, still they mourned and wept. Saul's life had been wasted, David's good friend Jonathan was dead, the Jews were defeated and scattered, and God's reputation was shattered. That mattered more to David than his own gain of the throne. He wasn't self-centered, but truly a man after God's own heart (Proverbs 24:17; Matthew 5:44-45).

Later that day David dealt with the messenger who came, claiming to have killed Saul and looking for a reward from David. For his deception and greed, he was killed (2 Samuel 1:11-16). His greed led to death. David then wrote a psalm of remembrance for Jonathan and Saul (2 Samuel 1:17-27). Saul's was seen as a wasted life, Jonathan as a good friend who will be missed. How will people feel when YOU die? What will they say? Will they miss you for the godly influence you had, or feel sorry for a life wasted on selfish living? NOW is the time to decide.

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7. JESUS IS LORD

C. S. Lewis once wrote: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." His point is well taken. Anyone who claims to be God, Creator of the universe and One who can forgive sin is either a LIAR for making such false claims, a LUNATIC for actually believing them or the LORD of the Universe. If He indeed is Lord, as the Bible claims Him to be, then it is up to us to make Him king of our lives now and forever.

DAVID WAS ALSO A KING, God's choice for the people, and an example of King Jesus, Who will one day sit on David's throne. Just as the people prospered when they willingly made David their king, so we prosper when we make Jesus king of our hearts. There are some very insightful lessons about making Jesus our king from the Jews making David theirs.

Saul and his sons have been killed by the Philistines, most of Israel is occupied by the Philistines who are oppressing the Jews. When David hears of this he doesn't rush off doing his own will, he asks God if he should return and offer himself as king 2 Samuel 2:1; Psalm 127:1). God tells David to return to Hebron, so David obeys. All the years of trials and persecution, of suffering and affliction have deepened David and made him godlier. Those 14 years were God's preparation to make him a godly king. He will be better, too, because he knows what the people he rules go through. Jesus, our king, knows what we go through for He went through it Himself (Hebrews 4:15-16).

When David returned, **SOME WERE QUICK TO MAKE HIM KING** (2 Samuel 2:4), just as some today are quick to make Jesus king of their lives. David didn't force himself, he offered himself as available and let it up to God. Jesus, too, doesn't force Himself on anyone. If Jesus will rule and reign in one's heart is a voluntary, free will choice of that person.

Not everyone, however, made him king. Abner, the commander of Saul's army, supported Ish-Bosheth (a weak son of Saul who was still alive) and put him on Saul's throne. All the tribes but Judah followed Abner. Jesus, too, has **COMPETITION FOR THE THRONE** in our lives. Satan offers other, more popular alternatives: money, things, power, popularity, prestige, family, relationships, lusts, fear, pride, sin, etc.

Unfortunately, the result of having two kings was civil war -- fighting within the nation. That happens inside us when Jesus is not king over 100% of everything. For 7 1/2 years there was **INNER CONFLICT** in Israel (2 Samuel 2:12-32). Then Abner deserted Ish-Boseth due to a fight over a concubine. He went to David and said he'd give him the throne of the northern tribes. Instead of trusting God's timing, David agreed on the condition he'd get Michal back as his wife. Abner was only thinking of himself and his power, but soon was killed and ended up with nothing. That is what happens when we try to run our own lives!

We often say that Jesus is first in our lives, but it is more of a figure-head position than really controlling every area of life. A man once stood up in an assembly of Christians in England and told of the great blessings that he had received at a certain conference he had attended the week

before. when asked to speak more specifically about what he had experienced, he said, "Well, I can say this: I was a Christian before I went. Christ was my king, but I am afraid He was a constitutional sovereign and I was a Prime Minister. In this country the queen gets the praise, but the Prime Minister runs the country. As a result of the conference, He now runs the country." Honestly ask yourself, who runs your country?

Ish-Bosheth was soon killed and the kingdom naturally passed to King David (2 Samuel 5:1-5). Finally, when David was the one and only king, was there **PEACE**. So, too, peace only rules in our hearts when Jesus is king over everything.

David's first act as king was the same as Jesus' when we make Him 100% king. Enemies are attacked and driven out (2 Samuel 5:6-7). Enemies in their midst for hundreds of years, which they couldn't dislodge in their own strength, are one by one defeated. If Jesus is the Lord of your life you should be seeing a **STEADY PROGRESSION OF VICTORIES** over the world, the flesh and Satan.

New ground was gained, the borders expanded, and the nation grew. That is what happens when we follow Jesus, too. However, it wasn't without opposition. When Jesus is on the throne, **THE ENEMY ATTACKS** to dislodge Him. The Philistines sent wave after wave of soldiers against David but God prevailed and there was victory over them (2 Samuel 5:18-25).

What lessons can we learn from when David was made King over Israel? First of all, like David, Jesus won't force Himself on you. It is your choice to allow Him to rule and reign in your heart. There will be other things trying to have first place, but until he is your 100% king there will be no peace. You will have inner toil and conflict. When He had total rule of your life then He will start to defeat your enemies. There will be opposition, but He will bring progressive and lasting victory in your life. However, it all starts with making Him King of your life. Remember, He died to be your Savior but He lives to be your Lord. As the earth revolves around the sun, so should our lives also revolve around the Son.

When Queen Victoria had just ascended her throne she went, as is the custom of Royalty, to hear The Messiah rendered. She had been instructed as to her conduct by those who knew, and was told that she must not rise when the others stood at the singing of the Hallelujah Chorus. When that magnificent chorus was being sung and the singers were shouting "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," she sat with great difficulty. It seemed as if she would rise in spite of the custom of kings and queens, but finally when they came to that part of the chorus where with a shout they proclaim Him King of kings suddenly the young queen rose and stood with bowed head, as if she would take her own crown from off her head and cast it at His feet. Indeed, Jesus is Lord!

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8. PRECEPT AND PRINCIPLE

"... the church is full of people who emphasize either precept to the exclusion of principle or principle to the exclusion of precept. It makes the church a battleground..." A **precept** is a law. For instance, a sign posted on a certain stretch of highway that says 35 mph warns us of a precept or law that limits the speed on that stretch of highway. The precept is valid whether the road is wet or dry, deserted or crowded. A **principle** has to do with the good-sense reason behind the precept or law. Apparently there was some reason why that piece of road was posted with a 35-mph sign. The principle is the reason behind the sign. In this case the principle might be drive carefully for the safety of all those who drive or walk this stretch of highway.

Often it doesn't take a lot of thought to honor a precept or law. In this case, just put the needle of your speedometer on 35-mph and cruise on through. You need not be concerned with the reason. That is the responsibility of the one who posted the sign. To honor a principle, on the other hand, takes some careful thought and consideration. In the case of the road, we are using as an illustration, issues like rain, snow, dry pavement, condition of traffic, presence of pedestrians and other such things all are matters of concern.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just post the 35-mph sign and forget about thinking about the principle of careful driving and that would guarantee 100% safety on that road? Of course, you and I know that accidents happen in 35-mph zones as a result of careless driving, even when people obey the precept and don't exceed the posted speed. There might even be some situations that would make the road unsafe at 35 mph (such as a troop of Girl Scouts walking along the edge of the road). Wouldn't it be nice if we could just forget posting speed limit signs altogether and trust that everyone would make it their business to honor the principle of driving carefully, always knowing just the right speed to go under the present circumstances.

The truth is, we need both the sign and an understanding of the good sense behind the sign (the precept and the principle) to insure maximum safety on the highway. The sign (precept) helps in those times when good sense is absent for whatever reason. Understanding the principle, that is, the need to drive carefully helps in those times when driving the speed posted on the sign would be unsafe.

Now, "what does that have to do with a sermon about the life of David?" I am trying to illustrate the fact that we need both precepts and principles to insure maximum safety on the highway. And really, what I want you to realize is that we need both precepts and principles in the spiritual highway of life in order to be right with God.

As David successfully defeated Israel's enemies and expanded her borders, prosperity and blessing flowed over the land. He wanted to show God his gratefulness by bringing the Ark of the Covenant, where God's Presence resided, to Jerusalem. He wanted God to be at the center of the nation so all could worship and follow Him. That was a great, godly desire. He gathered 30,000 top men of Israel, who dropped what they were doing to join this praise processing (2 Samuel 6:1-5), but something totally unexpected and very shocking happened on the way. One of the oxen pulling the cart with the Ark stumbled and the cart shook, so Uzzah, a leading man with the privilege of walking alongside the ark, reached out to steady it (v. 6). Immediately he fell down dead (v. 7). All the singing and rejoicing immediately stop. Everyone was stunned. David got a bit angry at

God for rejecting what he was trying to do (v. 8). He was too afraid of God to move the Ark any further so they left it in a nearby home (v. 9-10). David went home confused and uncertain.

After 3 months, though, reports of God's blessing upon the home where the Ark is kept filter back to Jerusalem (v. 11), so David feels it is safe to bring the Ark the rest of the way to Jerusalem and the trip was successful (v. 12-15). The reason things went well this time and not the first is seen in verse 3 ("new cart") and v. 13 ("carrying the ark"). You see, God had told them to carry the ark by hand (Exodus 25:12-15; Num. 4:5-6, 15). During the 3 months David had learned of his error, and blamed the Levites for not having alerted him the first trip (I Chronicle 15:11-15). There are some real lessons for us in this.

God cares about both the principles and precepts of His Word. The right principle in David's heard didn't mean he could ignore the clear precepts of God's Word. When we focus on precepts we become legalistic and lack love and grace. We become like the religious rulers and use guilt and fear as motives. We stick to the speed limit no matter how unsafe the conditions might be. But when we focus just on principle everything becomes relative, subjective and with no absolutes. God is love so anything is OK if your heart is sincere. Forget holiness, forget the speed sign, just go by what 'feels' right. Freedom does not mean the absence of constraints or moral absolutes.

Consider, for example, the precept "do not neglect the assembling of yourselves together." Gathering with other Christians is a MUST. But it doesn't mention Sunday at 11 AM, does it? Worshipping God on the golf course breaks this precept, but saying there is never a legitimate reason to miss a Sunday morning service breaks the principle. We need both.

Good intentions are not sufficient to justify disregard for the areas where God has clearly spoken. We can't disobey God even for a 'good' reason, no matter our sincere intent. Where God has spoken we MUST obey. Granted, there are some openings to interpretation of what He has said, but all the more reason to make sure we really understand exactly what He means. Where He hasn't directly spoken we have guidelines to help us know His will: how will this affect our testimony to Christians or unbelievers? What is my motive? What would Jesus do? The fruit of the Spirit grows only in the garden of obedience. Obey God's precepts. Also obey God's principles (be a servant of all, do what you do motivated by love, etc.). Precepts and principles should never conflict!

One day a three-year-old was playing with her toys. Her mother, who was folding laundry across the room, noticed Beverly's shirt was dirty and needed to be changed," After calling two times with no response her mother gave her the full three-name call: "Beverly Elizabeth Provost, did you hear me?" Beverly-answered, "Yes, Mama. My ears did, but my legs didn't." Make sure you hear what God has to say, both His principles and His precepts. Make sure your legs hear as well as your ears!

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9. WHEN GOD SAYS "NO"

I really envy Moses, Elijah, Paul, and Jesus. They were people who relied on prayer as though it made a difference--as though it really was conversation with God. Exodus 33:11 says that "the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Elijah's prayers affected the weather, Paul never stopped praying, and Jesus would sometimes pray all night (James 5:17; Colossians 1:9; Luke 6:12). Wow!

Undeniably, these prayer-filled lives encourage us to take all of our desires and distresses, praise and pleas, troubles and triumphs to God. They reinforce the expectation that God hears and answers our prayers, just as Jesus promised (John 14:13-14, etc.). Isn't it exciting when God says "Yes" to our requests? I can't think of anything that affirms God's presence in my life more than receiving something for which I've prayed. But, not every sincerely offered prayer is answered in the affirmative. Sometimes God responds to our requests with a resounding "NO!" That often throws me into a tail spin! That's when I question God, I question myself, and I question the validity of prayer!

But you remember that Moses, Elijah, Paul, and Jesus all heard God say "No." When Moses wanted to go into the promised land, God said "NO!" When Elijah asked God to end his life, God said "NO!" When Paul asked to be rid of his "thorn," God said "NO!" When Jesus asked if there were any way around the Cross, God said "NO!"

There are lessons to learn from these "no" answers, though. "No" to Moses underscored the importance of God's holiness (Deuteronomy 32:51). "No" to Elijah meant God had more work for him to do. "No" to Paul served to protect him from destructive pride. "No" to Jesus meant that some suffering is unavoidable if sin is to be overcome. I guess the questions I need to ask when God says "No" are not whether there is a God, or if He cares, or even if I am truly His child. The questions I need to ask are, What does this 'No' teach me about myself and God's will for my life? Maybe hearing "No!" affirms God's presence in my life as much as hearing "Yes."

DAVID, TOO, HEARD GOD'S FIRM "NO" in answer to his requests. Sometimes it was because of his failure to obey God's Word (as with the ox cart death -- 2 Samuel 6). Other times it was because God had something else in mind for David. When David wanted to build God a fine home in Jerusalem, God said "no!" David didn't think it was right for him to have a fine palace and God dwell in an old tent (the tabernacle), so he asked God if he could build Him a fine home, but God rejected David's offer (2 Samuel 7:1-7; 1 Chronicles 17:3-4). Why?

Think of a single woman in her middle to late 30's has long wanted to be married and have a family, but has not found a Christian husband. She has poured her heart out to God for years asking Him to help her, but she has remained single. Now it is beginning to look like she will never find the husband she desires. Her dreams seem broken. Or picture the only child of a couple in their late 30's has leukemia. The doctors have given him less than 6 months to live. His parents and the members of the whole church have prayed without ceasing for the boy. Day by day, however, he has gotten worse. Finally, he dies. Their dreams of a family die with him.

What about a young man desires to be a missionary on a foreign field. He is sure it is the Lord's will. He sacrifices to get his training but when it is nearly complete, he falls ill. Both of his kidneys fail. His years of dreams for the mission field die as he is told that he will never be able to live in an area away from the medical attention he needs. Then there is the successful Christian businessman has long desired to build and support a Christian "halfway house" for recovering drug

addicts. It is the passion of his life. His plans have been made. Finally, construction starts on the new facility. His dream is about to be realized. Then, suddenly, his business takes a plummet. In a matter of several months, he is financially wiped out. Not only does he lose his business, but his plans of service to the Lord are lost as well.

Each desired to do something for God, but God said 'no.' Each is disappointed in their broken dreams. Perhaps you can add examples from your life or from the lives of friends. Just remember that **sometimes God says no** to things that are good and right from our perspective.

The worst part is that **God doesn't always explain why** He says no. Later he told David that it was because of the blood he had shed, but at first there was no explanation. Just because He doesn't give us a good reason, though, doesn't mean He doesn't have one! You see, **God has His own plans**. And He doesn't have the same plans for everyone.

What is encouraging, though, is that God honored David's intentions, even if David couldn't carry them out (2 Chronicles 6:7-8). When God says no to something, **it doesn't mean He doesn't appreciate your honorable intentions**, and He will reward you for your desires anyway. It's also important to remember that "no" doesn't mean God will quit using you in other ways. He **still used** David to bring Israel to its pinnacle as a nation, to write many Psalms, and to be an ancestor of the Messiah. Knowing all this, though, doesn't mean it will be easy to hear no.

David gives us a good example of how to **HANDLE DISAPPOINTMENT** when God says no. First of all, **go to God with it** (2 Samuel 7:18). Don't run from Him. Job lost everything, yet went to God for help. Jesus didn't answer the prayer of Mary and Martha to keep their brother Lazarus alive, still they went to Him for solace when he died. They had learned to **trust God as sovereign** (v. 18b). **God is wiser** than we are and has reasons we don't know about (v. 19-21). Often He has greater, more far-reaching plans than we do. David wanted to build God a home, but God wanted to build David a house for all eternity. The home David planned, which Solomon built, only lasted a few years, but the house God built David will last for all eternity. Perhaps some of David's reasons for wanting a house for God in Jerusalem was to have the security of having Him there. Many of the plans we make are for our own security, and by saying "no" God is telling us to place our security only in Him.

David knew to **praise, don't pout** when God told him no (v. 22-24). Paul and Silas did the same thing when God didn't answer their pray for release from prison. Also, David knew to accept God's will, not fight it (v. 25). Jesus tells us to pray "YOUR kingdom come; YOUR will be done." It's God's kingdom, not our kingdom, that we should be concerned about.

How well we are doing with God's "no" is shown by if we are or are not **willing to do what God allows** (1 Chronicles 22:1-5). David didn't complain, but asked God what else he could do. "If I can't get married, I'll help others who are." "If I can't have children, I'll help others with theirs." "If I can't go on the mission field, I'll pray for those who do go." "If my business fails, I'll help others make theirs a mistake." What is your response?

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10. WHEN GRACE COMES KNOCKING

A man died and went to heaven where he met Peter at the Pearly Gates. Before he could enter Peter gave him a few questions to answer, telling him that he had to accumulate 1,000,000 points before he can go in. "So, how often did you go to church?" Peter asked. "I went every Sunday and Wednesday," replied the man. "That's one point," answered Peter. "One point? Wow! I figured it would be worth more than that." "And did you give any offerings?" asked Peter. "Yes, I gave 20% of all my income every week," answered the man. "Well, let's see," answered Peter, "that's worth 1 point. Did you do anything else?" "Well, right off hand, I can't think of a whole lot. I did mostly what I thought I was supposed to do." "Well, we'll give you 1 point for good behavior, but can't you come up with something else?" By this time, the man was completely flustered. He finally cried, "Well, I can't come up with anything else. It seems no one can enter heaven except by the Grace of God!" "1,000,000 points! Come on in!"

GRACE is one of the most beautiful words in the Bible. It's used over 200 times. The first is "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8) and the last "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (Revelation 22:21). Grace is unmerited, undeserved favor.

DAVID IS A GOOD EXAMPLE of God's grace in that God took a poor, young shepherd and made him the greatest man of his time and the greatest king Israel ever had. David is also an example of someone who shows grace to another as well. That's what we want to look at.

David was secure, successful and victorious in all he did. Life was easy. During a time of reminiscence, he thought of his good friend Jonathan who died with Saul fighting the Philistines. He **REMEMBERS A PROMISE** he had made to not kill any of Jonathan's descendants (1 Samuel 20:14-17). Such a promise may seem strange to us, but Jonathan knew that, although he was the next in line for the throne, David was God's chosen king. He knew that meant he'd die. He also knew the custom was to kill all rival claimants to the throne in order for the next king to secure the throne for himself. David wondered if he had kept that promise completely. He wanted to do more than keep descendants of Jonathan's alive, he wanted to share his own prosperity and blessing with them.

Upon inquiring, he discovered that a son of Jonathan's named Mephibosheth was still alive so he called him to the palace (2 Samuel 9:1-6). Now Mephibosheth had both feet crushed when he was 5 and his nurse dropped him fleeing the palace after Saul and Jonathan died (2 Samuel 4:4). He was living in fear of being found and killed (v. 7a). He had no peace. He could well have been bitter because David was ruling and living where his father should have ruled and where he should have lived. Besides, David was living with the Philistines when they attacked and killed his father. Also, he was living in "Lo-Debar" which means "place of desolation, barrenness." Life for him was empty.

Mephibosheth is a perfect picture of **MAN WITH OUT GOD**: living in fear of discovery and then under judgment, lacking peace, having a life that is empty and barren. God, like David, wants to reach out and change all that (John 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:9) by showing His grace. The first thing we see about grace is that it is **freely given** (v. 7). David was looking for someone to show grace to. He sought out Mephibosheth, not the other way around. That's the way it is for us, too, for God seeks us out, we don't seek Him, we run from Him!

God's grace is freely given **to the undeserving**. Mephibosheth had no value or worth to David. Being crippled he couldn't do anything to earn grace or pay David back (2 Samuel 9:8-13).

Still, David lavished blessings on him. Salvation is a gift (Eph 2:8-10) and as such it can only be received. It is based on the work of another. We can only accept it. It is **on the merits of another**. David paid for the gifts, and gave them because of his love for Jonathan (2 Samuel 9:1). God blesses us because of His love for Jesus, who paid for all our blessings on the cross. **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**, that's grace. So, grace is freely given to the undeserving on the merits of another **for the helpless**. Mephibosheth could not help himself, just as we in sin cannot (Romans 6:23; 5:6-8).

Notice, though, that even though David showed grace to Mephibosheth, sin was still present. He never forgot where he came from because his feet were still crippled. Still, he was accepted as an equal son in the family. Although sin was present, it was **covered** by grace. The garments David provided, the table and food that was over it -- these covered the crippling effects of sin. Our sin, too, is covered by Jesus' blood (1 John 1:7; Eph 2:13; Hebrews 9:14). What a blessing that is for us!

As you can imagine, that filled Mephibosheth with **gratitude** to David. Even when Zeba lied and convinced David that Mephibosheth was a traitor and trying to take the throne, he still was faithful in his love to David (2 Samuel 16:1-4). His love and faithfulness wasn't conditional on what David did for him. Eventually the wrong was righted (2 Samuel 19:24-30) and everything was returned to Mephibosheth, but all he cared about was that David was all right. David's seeking out and showing grace to Mephibosheth is a beautiful example of how He seeks us out to show us His grace, too.

Once upon a time a young woman found herself living with a stepmother and step sisters, all who hated her and used her. They convinced her she was worthless and not good enough to be loved. But when the prince held a ball hope sprung up in her heart and, by a miracle, she was able to meet the prince. He fell deeply in love with her, but she feared he'd reject her as unworthy so she fled his presence. She even hid from him, believing her past too bad for him to love her. Finally, he finds her and she accepts his love and lives happily ever after. While that sounds like the story of Cinderella, it is actually the story of all God's people. Convinced by Satan and his forces that we are unworthy, we by some miracle still end up meeting the King's Son who we find loves us. Such love seems too good to be true, though, so we flee, believing Satan's lies that we aren't good enough. We hide until he seeks us out to reaffirm His unconditional love for us. When we respond to that grace we truly live happily ever after with Him.

Where are you in that story? Have you ever met the Prince and experienced His love? Are you running from Him, convinced that you are worthless and beyond help? Either way, He invites you to come to Him. More than that, He is seeking after you, if only you'll accept His love and stop running from Him. That's the only way you'll be 'happy ever after.'

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11. A FALL FROM A ROOFTOP

How are people to respond when their national leader who claims to follow God, gets involved in sexual sin, then abuses his power by trying to cover up that sin with lies? How does that affect a nation? It is devastating: for the person, his family and his nation. That's what happened to David, the man after God's own heart.

COVER-UPS The story starts with a pattern of covering up sin. At age 17 when he panicked and fled from Saul, David had his friend Jonathan lie to cover up for his being missing. Then he lied to Abimelech, the priest, so he would help David. For doing so, Saul killed Abimelech and 85 other priests. He fled to the enemy Philistines, and pretended he was insane so they would let him live there and not kill him. Finally, after much time in a cave, David confessed his sin (1 John 1:9), repented and was restored. Psalm 34 may be about this.

A few years later, still while hiding from Saul, David's fear again gets the best of him and he again flees to Philistia to hide. Through trickery, deceit and half-truths he got his own city, Ziklag. To feed the thousands who are joining him David takes his men raiding to steal food and possessions. Then to make sure the Philistines don't find out he is taking from their allies he has every man, woman and child killed. Again, his deceit and cover-up of sin results in innocent deaths. David wanted to join the Philistine army when they fought the Jews, but some of their generals didn't trust him so he went back to Ziklag. When he got there he found someone had raided Ziklag and taken all the women, children and possessions captive. What goes around comes around. When out of God's will awful things happen. We reap what we sow. We end up being treated as we have treated others. David recognized his sin, confessed it, and God forgave and restored him. God had mercy and helped them get their families back.

Because Saul and his sons were killed in the battle between the Philistines and Jews, David was made king. Eventually he brought peace to the land as well as prosperity. He was popular and loved by all. He set up the Ark in Jerusalem, wrote Psalms and led the nation in praise and worship to God. He and his nation were rich and successful. Success can be very dangerous, and for David it was deadly. The sin that resulted is the second most well-known in history, right after that of Adam and Eve in Eden.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF SUSCEPTIBILITY. Instead of going to war with his army as he should have, David stayed home to enjoy his success (2 Samuel 11:1). Satan always seemed to get David after a time of success. After killing Goliath and becoming immensely popular he ran in fear of Saul and his cover-up ended in the deaths of innocent priests. After resisting the temptation to kill Saul twice he again ran in fear and covered up by killing innocent people he robbed. . Now after his greatest success, bringing Israel to its greatest pinnacle ever, he will sin and, in fear try to cover it up, leading to the death of one of his most faithful supporters. It's important to know how Satan sets traps for you. Watch those patterns so you can avoid them.

Having innocently stumbled upon a very beautiful naked women bathing in her courtyard (v. 2), instead of immediately fleeing the temptation (as Joseph did) he looked and lusted. Jesus says that is sin the same as committing the act (Matthew 5:28). Temptation isn't sin, but when thoughts are allowed to remain and become fantasies, that is sin. For women this applies more to fantasies of romance and love (soap operas, gossip, romance novels, etc.). Both sexual and romantic fantasies show dissatisfaction with life and an escape to unreality. It's an illegitimate way of meeting legitimate needs, needs that only God and mate can meet.

This, too, was the culmination of a life-long pattern of sin in David's life, one that started 30 years ago when he was 20. David always was a lusty, sensual person. Despite God's command, he was not satisfied with one wife but took one after another, they numerous other wives and concubines when he became king. He had developed a pattern of feeding his sexual desires instead of controlling them. Satan had been working 30 years to set this trap of sexual sin and then cover-up, and it worked!

Satan knows we won't go out and commit an awful sin, but may more easily commit an act of 'little' sin. Each step the sin slowly grows. If you put a live frog in boiling water it will immediately jump out. But if you put it in cold water and hear it at a rate of .0036 of a degree per second the frog won't notice but will be dead after 2 1/2 hours. Sin starts small and slow in us, but gradually grows. Satan is patient. He plans far ahead. He is very successful. As good as Satan is, though, there is no excuse to sin. God doesn't allow us to be tempted beyond what we can resist and always gives us a way to escape the sin (1 Corinthians 10:13).

COMPLICATIONS OF SECRECY When it became evident that Bathsheba was pregnant (v. 4-5), David went into his cover-up mode instead of admitting and confessing the sin. First he brought Uriah back from the war and tried to have him sleep with his wife (6-8) but he was too loyal to God and his fellow soldiers to do such a thing. Even when David got him drunk he refused (9-13) to sleep with his wife, thus not providing the explanation for Bathsheba's pregnancy that David wanted. To make sure his sin wasn't found out, David had Uriah put in the front lines of the next attack and had to other soldiers withdraw so he would be killed (v 14-27). It was nothing but murder. Again, David's sin and attempted cover-up ended in innocent death. What a sad ending for a noble man like Uriah.

CONSEQUENCES OF SIN While it might have seemed to David that he had 'gotten away' with his sin, that wasn't so. Bathsheba and David's friends knew, and their respect was gone. His sons ended up doing similar things themselves. Enemies mocked David and God (12:14). Mainly, though, God was displeased (11:27b; Num. 32:23). Inside David was miserable (Psalm 32:3-4), and for about a year he was away from God. Then God sent Nathan the prophet, a man David highly trusted and respected. When confronted with his sin, David confessed and repented (2 Samuel 12). His repentance is expressed in Psalm 51 and 32. While consequences of his sin still remained, he was forgiven and restored.

An old clock that stands in a corner once had a beautiful chime; now it has a harsh metallic sound. A bit of broken spring fell against the chime while it was being repaired, and this little piece of metal is causing all the discord. As soon as this bit is removed, the hour will strike again in a rich, full tone. Is there discord in your life? It takes but a bit of anything to deaden the note of joy. Whatever it is, great or small, it may be removed by yieldedness to our Lord Jesus Christ. David knew where to go when he cried, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation..." (Psalms 51:12).

Old Testament Men – II. DAVID: The Man After God's Heart

12. DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

David is one of the best known and most loved people in the Bible. He was a man after God's own heart. He had victories over a lion, a bear and a giant. Unfortunately, he also had some major defeats. His most well-known sin was his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband. That was a result of a long-time pattern of sexual lust as well as a pattern of covering up his sins. . It's one thing to quickly get into sin, it's another to neglect a very important role and responsibility year after year. I think there was a worse sin in his life, a lifelong neglect of his duties and father and husband

DAVID'S FAMILY BACKGROUND Ruth and Boaz, David's great grandparents, had a good love and commitment for each other. Obed was their son, and his son, Jesse, was David's father. Jesse neglected David, even forgetting to have him come to see Saul when he came to anoint the next king. His brothers cruelly mocked him. He must have felt rejected from father and older brothers alike – a hard thing for any male to work through. While he was able to have great intimacy with God, David didn't seem to achieve that with his family. He had multiple wives, making it impossible for him to truly relate to any one of them. Then he seemed to be distant from his children, too. Perhaps David, like many today, was running from inner pain.

All children need unconditional love and acceptance from their parents. If they don't have it they will feel it is their fault, they aren't worth it. To cover this pain, they will turn to various substitutes. Substance abuse such as alcohol, drugs, smoking, overeating, sweets, etc., is one escape. Others turn to adrenaline addictions: workaholicism, danger, gambling, crime, sex, etc. In all these cases interpersonal relationships are affected. Natural, healthy relationships are replaced with dysfunctional relationships – relationships which don't function as they should.

DAVID'S FAMILY PROBLEMS A prime example of this in the life of David and his family occurs in 2 Samuel 13, to story of Amnon raping his half-sister Tamar. Then her full brother, Absalom, told her to not make a big deal of it, because what would others think of the family if they found out. He evidently learned that approach from his father, who was very upset about it but didn't discipline Amnon nor comfort Tamar. He did nothing. As a result, the pain went underground, but didn't go away. Two years later Absalom also crossed legitimate boundaries by taking matters into his own hands and killing Amnon. He took over his father's responsibility because David did nothing. For 3 years he was in hiding, and it took intervention to get David to even allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem,. Even then David ignored him for 2 years until forced to face him, but it was a superficial and forced meeting with nothing brought into the open or resolved. Absalom's pain exploded into anger and he rebelled against his father, almost taking the kingdom from him. It wasn't until Absalom was killed that David's love for him came out (2 Samuel 18:33; 19:4). "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!" Where was this love when Absalom needed it? Why was Absalom never made aware of it?

CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSFUNCTION Several characteristics of dysfunctional families are evident here. Instead of facing problems, they cover problems up and assume things will change in time. Anything painful is avoided, thus emotions are stuffed, feelings hidden or denied, and certain subjects are taboo. Anger is felt, often expressed, but never in a healthy, maturing way. Roles are changed or blended, children taking over adult roles and adults sometimes acting very childish. Communication is poor, sometimes nonexistent (Absalom didn't talk to Amnon for years).

Actually, the one in David's family to not go with this pattern was Absalom. He broke it and became the family rebel, the scapegoat who could be blamed for all the family's problems. He looks like the 'enemy' because he doesn't go by the family rules. However, the family rebel is usually the most emotionally 'healthy' one in the group and certainly the one with the best chance of breaking out of this cycle of dysfunction. By not going along and rejecting it, he is taking the first step out.

SOLOMON - CHILDREN FROM DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES Most children in dysfunctional families are more like Solomon, however, and not Absalom. Solomon was remarkably wise, wealthy, powerful and gifted. He tried power, sex (700 wives and 300 concubines), workaholicism (poured himself into the nation) and alcohol (Eccl 2:3; Proverbs 23:29-35) to escape his pain, but it didn't work. He tasted all the pleasure the world offered (Ecclesiastes 2:1-6) but found it totally empty ((Eccl 1:2). Typically, those from dysfunctional families go to one extreme or another: overachiever or underachiever. Solomon wrote 3 books in the Bible, wrote 1005 psalms and 3,000 parables, and did tremendous work in bringing Israel to its pinnacle as a nation. But he had a hard time with intimacy, like his father. A thousand women is certainly a symptom of not being able to really relate on a personal level to any one woman. Another result of growing up in a dysfunctional family is having a pattern of getting into one destructive relationship after another, as David did with his pagan wives. He, too, passed the family dysfunction on to his son, Rehoboam, who split the nation in two. This family dysfunction broke the nation as well as the family, and it was never reunited until 1947. How long-term devastating this is can be seen in our nation today as generation after generation gets further and further from the family unit as God designed it.

ABIGAIL & CODEPENDENCY When a family dysfunctions roles are mixed. The man doesn't fulfill his God-given role so others pick up the pieces. Abigail and Nabal were rich, attractive and intelligent people. But he was an alcoholic whose pain had turned to bitterness and selfishness. She was used to and good at covering up for him, and the servants knew the game. They came to her for cover-up instructions. Nabal was propped up as a figure-head, but she obviously kept the house together. When he died she immediately went into a marriage with David, who married another woman at the same time. Didn't she feel she deserved a full-time, loyal, committed husband all her own? Why did she put herself back into a serving role right away?

A codependent is one who is dependent on another to have their emotional needs met. By covering up and propping up, Abigail found her role and worth in life, perhaps following a pattern she learned from her mother or practiced herself as a child. Making up for his lack was her life.

BREAKING CODEPENDENCY & DYSFUNCTION The way out is the way in. Jesus said the truth shall set you free, and admitting the truth about these problems in your family and own life is the first step to freedom. If one doesn't recognize and admit to this in life there is no hope of being free from it. It takes a great amount of emotional energy to deny and stuff down the pain inside. This prevents love, intimacy and maturity. Everything is directed to handling the pain. Substitutes and addictions are necessary to make up for what is missing. First, feel the pain. Then, ask God to remove it and heal it (Jer 17:14). Learn God's way to function as an adult. Make sure you don't pass these things down to your children. With God's help one can

Old Testament Men – II. DAVID: The Man After God's Heart

13. REBOUNDED FROM SIN

If David could write one more Psalm, right now, in heaven, imagine how glorious it would be? With all his ups and downs behind him, and Jesus in front of him, I'm sure he would go on and on praising God for His greatness and majesty, His patience and mercy, His love and power. Throughout his whole life on earth, God was with David and David was with God. "A man after God's own heart," he had great times of victory and terrible times of sin and failure. The one that had the most impact was his sin with Bathsheba.

From then on his life, his family, and his kingdom started going downhill. The baby died. Rebellion became part of his family. Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar and, when David didn't do anything about it, Absalom took matters into his own hands and killed Amnon. Eventually Absalom ended up starting a civil war and driving his father from the throne and from Jerusalem. It made David miserable (Psalm 55:4-8). Still, he submitted to God's will with a good attitude.

"If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, He will bring me back and let me see it (Jerusalem) and His dwelling place again. But if He says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let Him do to me whatever seems good to Him." (2 Samuel 15:25-26). This was the attitude that characterized the rest of David's life on earth. It was this attitude that gave David peace through his final years, and even when he died. He knew God was sovereign and it was He, not Absalom, that was in charge. If God wanted David restored it would happen, if not it wouldn't. No army can overcome God's will. He trusted God's wisdom and committed his fate to God, no matter what God had for him. He could do this because he trusted God's love and knew God did what was right and best for Himself and for David (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Still, he persevered doing what he felt God would have him do (Gal 6:7-9). Absalom's revolt was put down and Absalom killed. A Jew named Sheba later revolted and was defeated. David had victories over the Philistines and continued working on plans for the temple. He wrote Psalms and led the nation in praise and worship to God. He even went out of his way to undo the wrongs which Saul had done to the Gibeonites.

But no one lives forever on this earth. There comes a time for each one to die. Life is temporary. It is short. Soon it's David's turn to die. He died as he lived -- trusting in God and trying to be faithful to Him.

When he knew he was dying he called the top men in Israel together to have a final talk with them (I Chronicles 28:1). What a time this must have been! Many of these men were old, too. Some had been with David for 40 years, since his days at Ziklag. When David addressed them the first thing he talked about was the one thing in life he wanted to do more than anything else -- build the temple for God (I Chronicles 28:2-3). Still, God said "No" to that and David accepted. There was no bitterness in him. Oh, that we would come to the end of our days and look back at our lives, having been content with what God chose for us instead of being disappointed and bitter at what He didn't do. An attitude of contentment is very important to have (Philippians 4:11; I Timothy 6:6). He was content because his whole outlook was ahead, looking to heaven. He wasn't trying to do his 'thing' on this earth, he just wanted to do whatever God wanted him to do, knowing this life is very short.

David then went on to encourage his listeners to follow God in all they did (v. 8-9). He encouraged them to support Solomon in building the temple for God (10-11, 20) for this was still utmost in his heart. Later he had a private time alone with Solomon, encouraging him, too, to live

for God alone (1 Kings 2:1-4). I'm sure those words had a strong impact on his listeners. The dying words of a person are always listened to, for they aren't wasted on trivial matters. Paul's closing words were similar (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

David's final years were spent in peace. His final days were in peace. He died in peace. I like the way God puts it what He says that David "rested" with his fathers (1 Kings 2:10-12). Death is the ultimate rest for God's children, for those who have accepted His free gift of salvation in Jesus. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15). "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13). For God's children death has no fear, for we know God will be with us when the time comes. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)

While the experience of death may be physically painful, God promises that emotionally and spiritually His peace will be with us and we have nothing to fear. Until we come to grips with death we won't be able to truly live. A person isn't ready to live until they are ready to die. Death is nothing to fear because it isn't the end. It's really just the start. The best is yet to come! "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (1 Corinthians. 5:8). When we die our work is finished, but our life is just beginning! David's death ended his work but not his life. He is more alive now than when he walked on this earth! Something when we die we go from the land of the living to the land of the dying. The opposite is true. THIS is the land of the dying, next comes the land of the living! David is more alive than when he walked on this earth. He continues to live, praising and worshipping the God he loved and served.

Someone noted that our view of death is like a group of mourning caterpillars carrying a cocoon like a corpse. Above there is a beautiful butterfly inside the cocoon staring down in unbelief. When a person goes on an airplane we watch until the plane is out of sight, then we say, "Well, they're gone now." They may be gone from our presence, but they still continue to live. They are gone from us, but they aren't 'gone.' David is gone from this earth but he isn't 'gone.' He lives and he always will!

That is the assurance God provides for all His children as well. We may die, the real 'us' is never dead. We, too, will live forever because Jesus conquered sin on the cross.

Old Testament Men

III. EZRA, ZECHARIAH, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Esther

By **Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer**

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1. NEW GUIDANCE (God's Will, Ezra 1:1 - 2:67)
How can I know what God wants me to do with my life?
2. NEW PEACE (Fear, Ezra 2:68 - 3:13)
How can I handle my fear and uncertainty about following God's leading in my life?
3. NEW VICTORIES (Obstacles, Ezra 4:1 - 6:14)
What about obstacles I encounter when doing God's will in our lives?
4. NEW PRIORITIES (Priorities, Goals, Haggai 1:1 - 2:23)
How can I do everything God wants: home, career, marriage, etc.?
5. NEW TRUST (Sovereignty of God, Zechariah 1:1 - 6:8)
How can I know how things will turn out?
6. NEW ASSURANCE (Promises, Zech 6:9 - 8:23)
What does God expect of me? What does God promise me?
7. NEW RESPONSES (Criticism, Ezra 6:15-22; 4:6-23)
How should I respond to unfair criticism?
8. NEW FUNCTION (Shepherd, Zechariah 9:1 - 14:21)
How can I be a shepherd like Jesus to those under my care?
9. NEW ASSISTANCE (God Uses Women, book of Esther)
How can God use my wife?
10. NEW POWER (God's Hand, Ezra 7:1 - 8:36; Nehemiah 8:1-9, 18; 9:1-4)
How can I know when God's hand is on my life?
11. NEW MARRIAGE (Marriage, Ezra 9:1 - 10:44)
How can I make my marriage more like what it should be?
12. NEW LEADERSHIP (Leadership, Nehemiah 1:1-11)
What does God look for in a man He can use to lead others?
13. NEW OPPOSITION (Impatience, Fear, Nehemiah 2:1-10)
What tools will Satan use against me when I try to lead for God?

14. NEW WORK LOAD (Overwork, Nehemiah 2:11 - 3:32)
What can I do when I'm stressed from an impossible work load?
15. NEW ENCOURAGEMENT (Discouragement, Nehemiah 4:1-23)
How can I overcome discouragement?
16. NEW PROBLEMS (Problems, Nehemiah 5)
How should I respond when attacked from within?
17. NEW ENEMIES (Nehemiah 6-7)
How should I respond when personally attacked?
18. NEW REVIVAL (Sin, Revival, Nehemiah 8 - 12)
What should I do when there is sin in my life?
19. NEW CHALLENGES (Malachi, Nehemiah 13)
How can I stay faithful when life keeps throwing challenges at me?

CHRONOLOGY OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH & MALACHI

Ezra 1:1 – 2:67 Preparation to return to Judea, March 24, 538 BC

Ezra 2:68-70 Arrival in Judea (4 months later)

Ezra 3:1-7 Altar rebuilt, 537 BC

Ezra 3:8-13 Work on the temple foundation begun 536 BC

Ezra 4:1-5 Opposition during Cyrus' reign and after, 536-522 BC

Ezra 4:24 Opposition during reign of Darius I, 522-520

Haggai 1:1-11 Haggai's First message, Aug 29, 520 BC

Ezra 5:1-2 Work on temple renewed, Sept 21, 520 BC

Haggai 1:12-15 Resume building temple, Sept 21, 520

Haggai 2:1-9 Haggai's second message, Oct 17, 520 BC

Zech 1:1-6 Zechariah starts preaching, Oct-Nov 520 BC

Haggai 2:10-19 Haggai's third message, Dec 18, 520 BC

Haggai 2:20-23 Haggai's fourth message, Dec 18, 520 BC

Ezra 5:3 – 6:14 Tattenai's letter to Darius opposing temple rebuilding 519-518 BC

Zech 1:7 – 6:8 Eight night vision s by Zechariah, Feb 15, 519 BC

Zech 6:9-15 Jeshua crowned, Feb 16, 519 BC

Zech 7:1 – 8:23 Repentance urged, blessings promised, Dec 7, 518 BC

Ezra 6:15-18 Dedication of the rebuilt temple, Mar 12, 516 BC

Ezra 6:19-22 Passover, April 21, 516

Ezra 4:6 Opposition during reign of Xerxes, 486-465

Ezra 4:7-23 Opposition during reign of Artaxerxes I, 465-242 BC

Zech 9:1 – 14:21 Zech's final prophecy, after 480 BC

Esther lives and serves

Ezra 7:1-7 Ezra leaves Babylon, April 8:458

Ezra 7:8-9 Ezra arrives in Jerusalem, Aug 4, 458 BC

Ezra 7:10 - 10:8 Ezra brings reform to Jerusalem, Aug-Dec 458 BC

Ezra 10:9-15 People assemble, Dec 19, 458 BC

Ezra 10:16 Committee investigates mixed marriage, Dec 29, 458 BC

Ezra 10:17-44 Committee report on mixed marriages, Mar 27, 457 BC

Nehemiah 1:1-11 Nehemiah's prayer about Jerusalem, Nov-Dec 446 BC

Nehemiah 2:1-10 Nehemiah goes to the king, Mar 445 BC

Nehemiah 2:11 Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, Aug 445 BC

Nehemiah 2:12 – 6:14 Wall rebuilt and opposition to it, Aug-Sept 445 BC

Nehemiah 6:15 Walls completed Oct 2, 445 BC

Nehemiah 6:16 – 7:73 Those who returned listed, jobs given, Oct 445

Nehemiah 8:1-13 Public assembly, Oct 445 BC

Nehemiah 8:14-18 Feast of Tabernacles Oct 22-28, 445 BC

Nehemiah 9:1 – 10:39 Fast and repentance, Oct 30, 445 BC

Nehemiah 11:1 – 12:26 People settle in Israel, 444 BC

Nehemiah 12:27-47 Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, 444 BC

Nehemiah 13:6 Nehemiah recalled, April 1, 433 BC

Mal 1:1 – 4:6 Malachi's warnings, 433 BC

Nehemiah 13:7a Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, April 19, 432

Nehemiah 13:1-5, 7b-30 Final ministry of Nehemiah, failure of the people, 432ff BC

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

1. NEW GUIDANCE

How can I know what God wants me to do with my life?
EZRA 1:1 - 2:67; 538 BC; PERSIA & JERUSALEM

“Do you think God is calling me to be a pastor?” “I really love him, but do you think we should get married?” “Does God want me to quit this job?” “Should we buy this house?” “What should I do about _____?” These and other questions come up all the time. How are we to get the answers? As men we are responsible to lead and guide our family God’s way. But how are we to know just what God wants us to do? It can get quite confusing sometimes.

CLOSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT The place to turn for answers is the Bible. This article is the first in a series about Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Esther. These people lived from 538 to 432 BC. They close out the Old Testament. After 400 silent years John and Jesus come on the scene. This events of this time set up the conditions surrounding the birth of Jesus. Very few of us know much about these people and these times, yet they are very similar times to today. They are about a minority of believers living in an anti-God, post-Christian and very materialistic world. As we see how they lived before the first coming of Jesus, we can learn how to better live for Jesus in these pre-second coming days.

BACKGROUND FOR EZRA The Jews were taken captive by Babylon in 605 BC (Dan 1:1). In 586 Jerusalem was destroyed. God said they would be in captivity for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10). In 538 Cyrus let some of the Jews return (Ezra 1:1), roughly 70 years after they were first taken captive. Or the 70 years could be from 586 BC (when Solomon’s temple was destroyed) to 516 BC (when Zerubbabel’s temple was completed). Either way, it shows that God remembers and keeps His promises, even when we don’t remember them.

BEING ALLOWED TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM On March 24, 538 BC, King Cyrus of Persia issued a proclamation that the Jews could return to Judea (Ezra 1:2-4). He wanted to establish a strong buffer state around his empire and he also wanted to please the local gods so they’d pray to his gods, Bel and Nebo for him (so it says on the Cyrus Cylinder, written by him in 538 BC). A total of about 50,000 Jews responded to the call to return (Ezra 2:1-67), a very small percentage of the total number of Jews in Babylon. Why didn’t more return? Were they too immersed in the materialism of Persia and didn’t want to leave the good life there? Had they forgotten God? Or didn’t God want them to return? How were the godly men who did want to know God’s will able to discern if God wanted them to move hundreds of miles away to a raw, barren land to make a new start or to stay with family and friends and live in comfort and ease? How were they to know God’s will?

“GOD MOVED THEIR HEARTS” There is a phrase that is used that explains why those who returned did so. “God moved their hearts” (Ezra 1:5) as he had “moved the heart of Cyrus” to allow them to return (Ezra 1:1; 2 Chronicles 36:22). God is in the business of moving hearts. Then it is up to men to obey Him. The same phrase is used of the Jews who gave toward the construction of the Tabernacle: “Everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments.” (Exodus 35:21) Notice the two elements that come into play here: God’s sovereign call (“moved their hearts”) and man’s free will (“everyone who was willing”). That’s the basis of how God speaks to us today.

“Moved their hearts” literally, in the Hebrew, means “stirred up the spirit.” The word, *uwr* (oor); means to open the eyes, to awake (literally or figuratively). “So, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty” (Hag 1:14; see also I Chronicle 5:26).

God does the stirring, the awakening. He does it by His Spirit. What He does is touch the spirit of man. The Hebrew word used is *ruwach* (roo'-akh); from wind or breath. It is the word commonly used for man's spirit as well as God's Spirit. Thus what happens is that God's Spirit stirs up, moves, man's spirit and then man is responsible to be sensitive to this and obey it. So how are we to know God's will – listen for His Spirit to stir/move our spirit. That's what He did to draw Jews back to Jerusalem in Ezra's day, too.

While that answers one important question, it brings up other unanswerable questions. On what basis did God choose whose heart to move to return (arbitrary choice, those most committed, those who needed to be weaned from materialistic Persia, etc.)? Why didn't He move in everyone's hearts? Shouldn't they all have returned? What about someone like Esther? Were there any who wanted to return but didn't have their hearts stirred? Did any go whose heart wasn't stirred? Did any not go whose heart God moved – either for a good reason (to serve God) or self-centered (escape debt., etc.)? Why did so very few spiritual leaders (priests) return – only 74 (Ezra 2:40)?

Then, too, are the questions about how God did this. Did He just move the hearts of the heads of the clans (the ones named in Ezra 2) or did He move the hearts of each one in the family?

THE TRIP BACK While we will never have the answers to those questions, do know about those who went back. Neighbors gave them money and materials to take back. We can assume God moved the neighbor's hearts so they gave generously (Ezra 1:6), as when they gave to the Tabernacle (Exodus 35:21). In fact, there are so many parallels between this return under Zerubbabel and the exodus from Egypt that could be called “Exodus # 2”. Here even King Cyrus was moved to contribute (Ezra 1:7-8).

Everything we give and do is important to God, and we see that in the record of what was taken back in Ezra 1:9-11. Each person is important to God, too. Imagine how encouraging it was to Ezra's readers to see their names or those of their friends, listed in Ezra 2. That they made a difference was very motivational. Isn't it great that God has all of OUR names listed in His books in heaven and knows us by name, too (Psalms 69:28; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15; 21:27).

Another interesting note in this list is that those who returned to Bethlehem are listed – ancestors of Joseph, Mary and Jesus. They didn't know their crucial part, they just faithfully returned as moved by God. It may well be that God is using your faithfulness now to set things up for your grandchildren or great children. Time will show it.

Anyway, the 900-mile trip back took four months, but no details are given.

KNOWING GOD'S WILL TODAY So what do we learn from this? Listen to the “still, small voice” of God (I Kings 19:12) when He speaks to your spirit. Learn to identify His voice. Be sensitive. Use your free will to obey. God speaks to you just as He did to His people then. Just listen, then obey.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

2. NEW PEACE

How can I handle my fear and uncertainty about following God's leading in my life?

EZRA 2:68 - 3:13; 537-536 BC; JUDEA, JERUSALEM, TEMPLE

BACKGROUND God has moved in the hearts of some of the Jews to return to Jerusalem from captivity in Persia. Only about 50,000 responded, a very small percentage of the Jews who stayed in Persia. Nothing is recorded about the 900 mile, four-month return trip. Their sacrifice and obedience isn't the focal point. God is. They were glad to be allowed to return. We can focus on our cost, our sacrifice, too much, instead of on God and the privilege of doing His will.

ARRIVAL IN JUDEA (Ezra 2:68-70) When they arrived in Jerusalem a free will offering was taken to finance the rebuilding of the temple. The beautiful temple David had designed and Solomon built was totally destroyed. The people contributed over ½ ton of gold and 3 tons of silver. They were fully committed to serving God and had given up everything to follow Him to Palestine. That didn't mean it would be easy. Knowing God's will and doing God's will are two different things. Now that they were in Palestine, it was up to the men to actually carry out God's will. They must have naturally been a bit fearful and uncertain.

ALTAR REBUILT (Ezra 3:1-7) Three months after they arrived in Judea (Ezra 3:1) they gathered back in Jerusalem "as one man." This wasn't possible in Persian, but here among just those who are also committed, it is possible. God had two men who led. Jeshua was the priest, the spiritual leader. Zerubbabel, who led the people back, was the civil leader. God always has a division of responsibility, a plurality of leaders. That way they can support and encourage each other. They can work in their areas of strength and complement each other.

Their first priority was to rebuild the altar. This was where blood sacrifices were made, a picture of their sins being covered. This hadn't been a priority before, and they went into captivity. Now they know that worshipping God because innocent blood covered their sin is a top priority. This was why they came back. This was God's will for them. Life was hard there, especially compared to back in Persia. But they came in obedience. They got settled and gathered together to start the important work which they came to do. Still, it wasn't easy!

"Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices" (Ezra 3:3). They knew the Gentiles living around them would not like to see Jerusalem prosper again, and were likely to do what they could to keep the Jews spread out and ineffective. They didn't let their fear keep them from obeying God's will, though.

When we hear God's Spirit stirring our spirit and we obey, we will face opposition as well. The world, the flesh and the devil all will do what they can to keep us from carrying out God's will. They want us to be ineffective, too. Do not assume everything will be smooth sailing when you commit to follow God. Don't wait until the fear is taken care of. Obey despite the fear. Go by your mind, which knows God is in charge. Don't go by your emotions, which feeds fear. Fear is one of Satan's prime weapons in distracting us from doing God's revealed will in our lives. "What if" plagues our mind. The Jews came together for strength and encouragement, to follow God despite their fears. They needed each other. Christian fellowship is necessary for us to keep from being sidelined by fear, too. Sharing our fears, helping each other in areas of threat or danger, just working together is a great help and encouragement. The Jews worked together, completely rebuilt

the altar, and offered sacrifices to God. They knew the only way to approach God was “through the blood.”

TEMPLE FOUNDATIONS REBUILT (Ezra 3:8-11) Seven months later, in the spring of 536 BC (exactly 70 years after the first Jews were taken into captivity, as God promised through Jeremiah [25:11-13; 29:10]) they started rebuilding the temple itself. They had to start with the foundation. They placed 3 Levites in charge of the work (Ezra 3:9) and other Levites helped.

Now normally a Levite couldn't start ministering until 30 years of age, so they could settle into life and marriage as well as gain some maturity and experience (Num. 4:3). Today we are more concerned with youth, but God valued maturity and experience over youth. Thirty years was the age at which Jesus Himself started His ministry. If there was a real shortage they could drop that to 25 years of age (Num 8:24). Here the Levites were 20 years of age (Ezra 3: 8). This showed what a great shortage of priests there were (1 Chronicle 23:24-27; 2 Chronicle 31:17). It seems unlikely God wouldn't move enough hearts – it must be that many stayed in prosperous Persia instead of following God to rural and backward Palestine. Perhaps they let their fear, as well as materialism, keep them from following God. How sad. What has happened to their descendants? Instead of being part of God's work in Palestine, with descendants who saw and heard Jesus, they became absorbed into the fabric of pagan Persia.

Still, those were making following and serving God did a good job. They laid the foundations and dedicated them to God with praise and thanksgiving. They didn't take credit for it themselves but gave credit to God (Ezra 3:10). This may be one reason that God doesn't remove the source of their fear – it causes them to lean on Him and give Him the credit for what is done. Is God allowing opposition and oppression to put fear into your path? He wants you to let Him work through you and then have you give Him the credit for it all.

IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR PERSPECTIVE (Ezra 3:12-13) What a noise must have been lifted: musical instruments like cymbals (Ezra 3:10), thousands of people loudly singing and praising God (v. 11a), shouts of joy (v. 11b, 12b) and weeping and crying (12a). Weeping and crying? Why would some be weeping and crying? They were older people who remembered the temple before it had been destroyed in 586 BC, 50 years earlier. Evidently this new one was no comparison! It was like a grand cathedral being replaced by a concrete block garage. And all they had so far was the foundation! The young people were comparing the current temple foundation to what was there when they arrived: rubble and burnt wood. They were joyful. The older people were comparing it with what was there when they left many years ago: one of the wonders of the ancient world. They cried. The different reactions were based on their perspective. Everything is relative. It's what you compare it to. Many times, we are not appreciative of what God has done in our lives for we compare ourselves to someone or something else and so don't appreciate what we do have. The same thing will happen at the final dedication of the temple building (Haggai 2:1-9).

But God wasn't comparing buildings in the way they were. If His presence was there it had everything. If His presence wasn't there it had nothing. It was as simple as that. The same is true for us and what we do today. Follow His will. Obey Him. Don't look at outer circumstances or fear will discourage you. Don't compare with others or your disappointment will discourage you. Keep your eyes on Jesus, not your fears, not the past, not others, just Him!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

3. NEW VICTORIES

What about obstacles I encounter when doing God's will in our lives?

EZRA 4:1 - 6:14; 536-518 BC; PERSIA, JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND God has moved in the hearts of some of His people to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The ones who return rebuild the altar and lay a foundation for a new temple. They are in God's perfect will and, despite fear of opposition, obey His will. Still opposition comes.

OPPOSITION FORMS (Ezra 4:1-5) When you do God's will you WILL have opposition (Philippians 1:29). We operate in (and against) Satan's world system. He attacks God's Kingdom by attacking us. When we line up on God's side, we are declaring war against Satan and his forces. He fights back!

The Jews found this out when they were doing God's will. Enemies materialized. Details aren't given about the opposition, for that isn't the main focus in the Bible, although it often is in our lives. It is mentioned to show it will happen, but God gets the credit and glory for all that happens. Humanly speaking it was impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Plan 1: Infiltrate and sidetrack At first these enemies pretended to be friends (Ezra 4:1-2). Deceit is one of Satan's first-line weapons. They told half-truths as if they were all truth. "Yes, we sacrifice to your Jehovah, so let us come help you!" Their motives were wrong. They wanted to infiltrate and sidetrack the work – exactly what Satan has done in many families and churches today.

While what they said was true, it wasn't the whole truth. They did sacrifice to Jehovah, but also to every pagan god they knew of. They wanted to compromise Jehovah (2 Kings 17:29-41). Often our most dangerous enemies are those within the church or group, the "weeds among the wheat."

Zerubbabel (the civil leader) and Jeshua (the spiritual leader) took a clear stand, even though it seemed to be very unpopular (Ezra 4:3). Would the others understand why all this free help was being turned down? Being a leader isn't easy.

Plan 2: direct opposition When their first plan didn't work, the enemies used a more direct plan. They undermined the true leaders by rumors and gossip (v. 4a). They used fear tactics to discourage the people in their work (v. 4b). Satan still tries to discourage those who are following God's will for their lives. They even hired men whose sole purpose in life it was to "work against" and "frustrate" the work of God's people (v. 5). What was worse, they did it from 536 through 520 BC! For seventeen years the opposition persevered! Imagine that! And God allowed it. He wanted to use it to make the people stronger as they came closer to Him. Never think that following God is the easy way to go. It's the right way, but not the easy way!

OPPOSITION CONTINUES (Ezra 4:24) Even after Cyrus died in 522 BC, the harassment continued. The enemies then turned their attack against the next king, Darius, during his reign. Thus, for these 17 years there was no work on the temple – their smear and fear campaign worked! Why would God allow that? The people had their own free will choice to make: keep their eyes on God and persevere or put their eyes on their fears and quit. They chose the latter. They had such high, lofty goals when they arrived 18 ½ years earlier. Even God-inspired goals fail when our focus shifts. Starting off sacrificing all to do God's work doesn't guarantee we will continue to do so the rest of our lives. Major obstacles can be faced, but often the slow, wearing grind of day-by-day struggles discourage us and we, too, quit.

Note, too, that the outside opposition brought the Jews closer to each other and to God. It brought out the best in them and made them stand up. However, this fear and smear campaign within with highly successful. It wore the people down and separated them. Watch out in your family and church. Those 'inside jobs' by Satan are much more deadly than a full frontal attack. How is he working in your family? What about in your church?

THE WORK RESUMES (Ezra 5:1-2) Finally God intervened. In 520 BC He sent in reinforcements. Since the smear campaign against Zerubbabel and Jeshua had rendered them ineffective (4:5), God sent in the backups, Haggai and Zechariah. God sent them to help the leaders, to take the brunt off of them. When the people would no longer listen to their high priest and governor, God sent prophets to preach to them. The best known, whose message God has preserved in His Word, are Haggai and Zechariah. Their messages will be analyzed in upcoming articles. The result of their preaching was that the people turned back to God and resumed the rebuilding work. They wasted 17 years, but at least they were again active.

OPPOSITION INCREASES (Ezra 5:3-5) One would think that these enemies would not quit since their inner fear and smear campaign is no longer successful. Satan doesn't work that way, though. The enemies of God's people went back to their other strategy – attacking from without. Starting in early 519 BC the enemies challenged their right to rebuild the temple. They tried to put fear in the people by threatening to go to the local governor as well as national king - Darius (5:3-5). God worked in the heart of the Persian governor so he would give the Jews the benefit of the doubt until the charges made against the Jews could be thoroughly investigated. The governor had to be very careful to check out every charge for there was much political unrest seething in many locations. His very life was at stake.

LETTER TO DARIUS (Ezra 5:6-17) A copy of the report from the governor, which he sent to King Darius, is in the Bible. He reported that the Jews were, in fact, working hard on rebuilding their temple. He said that when he asked the Jews what right they had to rebuild the temple they told him that King Cyrus had authorized it in the first year of his reign, and even contributed much money toward it. He asked Darius to check the archives to see if there was any record of such a decree. Would Darius find the document?

LETTER FROM DARIUS (Ezra 6:1-14) The following year a letter came back from Darius. The news was good. The declaration was found. Darius decreed that the work could continue and that no one was to oppose or hinder it in any way. Now the Jews could continue with the support and protection of the local governor. Opposition without as well as within had ended – at least for a time. Opposition had turned to assistance. Perhaps that's one reason God allowed it. All things do work together for the good of those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28).

What about the opposition you are facing in carrying out God's will in your life today? Is it from without or within? Is there a smear or fear campaign going in your life? In your family? In your church? Persevere through it!!! Trust God and follow His leadership. Stick to what you know to be His will, no matter what. Don't be surprised by obstacles – climb over them!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

4. NEW PRIORITIES

How can I do everything God wants: home, career, marriage, etc.?

HAGGAI 1:1 - 2:23; AUGUST 29 - DECEMBER 18, 520 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND As the Jews who returned to Jerusalem started rebuilding the temple, they faced opposition from without (which they resisted) and within (which they gave in to). Their enemies started a fear and smear campaign, and they became discouraged and quit building. For 17 years they were out of God's will. Their trust in Jeshua and Zerubbabel was undermined. Then God sent reinforcements: Haggai and Zechariah came and preached God's message. The people responded, repented, and resumed rebuilding the temple. Haggai preached 4 messages between August 29 and December 18 of 520 BC. They are recorded in the book in the Bible that carries his name.

HAGGAI THE MAN His name means "festival," so we assume he was born during one of the major Jewish feasts. He saw Solomon's temple destroyed (2:3) so he is now in his 70's. He is a man of great faith. He delivered four messages in four months, two on the same day. His book is the 2nd shortest in the Old Testament, next to Obadiah. He says God's word came THROUGH him TO the people. He saw himself as just a spokesman, a channel. That's all we know about him. But that's enough, for the focus is on the message, not the messenger.

LORD ALMIGHTY 'Jehovah Sabaoth' is the name God uses for Himself as He reveals Himself to the people who have returned from captivity. Literally meaning "LORD of Hosts," this title is used by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi 90 times. Haggai's short message uses it 14 times. Why does He choose this title at this time in history? Literally 'Hosts' refers to a large group organized for war. What a comforting thought this must have been for the people. There they were, surrounded and oppressed, defeated and discouraged, and God shows up with millions of angels ready to do battle for them. No forces can stand against God and His angels! Victory is sure. This title alone preaches the message.

Remember this name. Use it when you are discouraged and feel overwhelmed. God is still 'LORD Almighty' today!

MESSAGE 1: THE CHALLENGE TO RESUME REBUILDING (Haggai 1:1-11) It was August 29, 520 BC, the time of the new moon, when people often went to God for guidance (2 Kings 4:22-23; Isa 1:14). Haggai stands up and challenges them. He points out that, though they have worked hard in their fields, the harder they work the less they have. God has kept their crops from prospering. Why? Because their priorities are all wrong, that's why. They live in fancy, modern homes but neglect God's house. Their comfort comes before serving God. They are building their kingdom and neglecting God's Kingdom. Oh, they make excuses about why they can't get back to rebuilding God's house: "It's just too dangerous at the moment, it's not God's timing to do it. When God wants us to rebuild it we will, but that's not what he wants now." However, it's always time to obey God! They knew and followed God's will 19 years ago when the headed His Spirit stirring in their hearts and sacrificially gave up everything to come to Palestine. Now they are so busy building their own homes they don't have time for God's home. "How can we do it all?" they ask. "There just isn't enough time in a day to get everything done! We'd rebuild the temple if we just had the time!"

It was a vicious cycle for them. The harder they worked the less they had. God made sure their labor wasn't prosperous for their priorities were wrong!

Some might wonder why God was so hard on these Jews in Jerusalem while He let those in Persia prosper. At least these left Persia to follow God back to Jerusalem! But these in Jerusalem had made a deeper commitment and God is holding them to it. They were more aware and accountable of what God wanted. That certainly applies to us today, too.

RESPONSE: REBUILDING RESUMES (Haggai 1:12-15) The response to this message was great! Everyone obeyed God's message. They repented, turned from their self-centeredness and started following God. Their fear of people turned to 'fear' of God (v. 12). It seems they repented of their attitude to Joshua and Zerubbabel, too, for they started following them again. On September 21, 520 BC they restarted the work on the temple.

What did they do between August 29, when Haggai preached, and September 21, when the work restarted? Probably used the time to get organized, gather materials, maybe even harvest their figs and pomegranates. God understood and allowed them this time.

MESSAGE 2: GOD'S PROMISE TO THE PEOPLE (Haggai 2:1-9) However by one month later, October 17, progress on the rebuilding of the temple had slowed appreciably. There was 60 years' worth of rubble to clean up, there were several festivals in the last month: Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles.

"Be strong" God tells them three times, "and work." So much work, not enough time, and a building much less impressive than the one it was replacing caused the people to become discouraged. God tells them to not compare, but just do their best in faithfulness to Him. His Spirit being inside was what counted, not the size of the building. The same is true of us. It's not our humble situation that counts, but how God uses it. We must look at God, not ourselves.

ZECHARIAH STARTS PREACHING (Zech 1:1-6) It was about that same time, October to November of 520 BC, that the prophet Zechariah also was used by God to preach to the people. While the people mean their recommitment 2 months before, they didn't carry it out. God warned them to repent and turn back to Him. They were disobeying (v. 4), delaying (v. 5) and doubting (v. 6). Zechariah, too, calls them to complete recommitment, shown by actions.

MESSAGE 3: THE PEOPLE ARE DEFILED (Haggai 2:10-19) Haggai then delivered his final two messages (at least of those which are recorded) on December 18, 520 BC. Just because they were in the Holy Land didn't mean they were holy! You can't get holiness that way. In fact, they were defiled because of sin. Haggai encourages them to get and stay clean. Because of their positive response to this message God promises to bless their crops and labor. If they are faithful to Him He will be faithful to them!

MESSAGE 4: ULTIMATE VICTORY WILL EVENTUALLY COME (Haggai 2:20-23) Later that same day Haggai foretold the coming Day of the Lord, when God will set up His throne on the earth. Then all enemies will be removed and God's people will live in peace and glory. God is reassuring them that He is sovereign and in control of the world and time: past, present and future. He will win. Therefore, His people should trust Him, serve Him, and put Him first. He is to be our first priority, for we are His first priority!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

5. NEW TRUST

How can I know how things will turn out?

ZECHARIAH 1:1 - 6:8; FEBRUARY 15, 519 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND The Jews that returned to Jerusalem from Persia started well, then stopped working on the temple for 17 years because of the threats of enemies. Under Haggai's preaching they recommitted themselves to the work, but it was hard going. God sent Zechariah to encourage them to continue. He did this by a series of visions showing them His sovereignty.

ZECHARIAH THE MAN 'Zechariah' was a very common name in the Old Testament. At least 30 separate men are mentioned with this name. It has a form of God's name at the start and means literally "Jehovah remembers" but came to mean "Jehovah is renowned." This Zechariah was eleventh of the twelve minor prophets. He was of priestly descent, a son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo (Zech 1:1 Zech 1:7), the chief of one of the priestly families that returned from exile along with Zerubbabel (Nehemiah 12:4). Zechariah began his prophetic labors in the eighth month of the second year of Darius, 520 B.C. In the fourth year of Darius a deputation of Jews came to the Temple to inquire whether the day on which Jerusalem and the Temple were reduced to ashes by the Chaldeans was still to be kept as a day of mourning and fasting. Zechariah replied that, in the sight of Jehovah, obedience is better than fasting. Two other oracles delivered by Zechariah are recorded in his book of prophecies (Zech 9-11 and 12-14). Zerubbabel was presumably a young man when he began to preach. Tradition, on the contrary, declares that he was well advanced in years. He apparently survived Haggai, his contemporary (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He was a poet as well as a prophet. Nothing is known of his end. The Targum says he died a martyr.

THE VISIONS All 8 visions were the same night, February 15, 519 BC (Zech 1:7). "Vision" is some derivative of Heb. haza, to "perceive"; Grk. harao; or of ra'a, to "see"; optomai). They were supernatural presentations of certain scenery or circumstances to the mind of a person while awake (Num 12:6-8). Visions are experiences similar to dreams through which supernatural insight or awareness is given by revelation. But the difference between a dream and a vision is that dreams occur only during sleep, while visions can happen while a person is awake (Dan 10:7). In the Bible, people who had visions were filled with a special consciousness of God. The most noteworthy examples in the Old Testament of recipients of visions are Ezekiel and Daniel. The purpose of visions was to give guidance and direction to God's servants and to foretell the future. Daniel's vision, for example, told of the coming of the Messiah (Dan 8:1,17).

VISION 1: HORSEMAN AMONG TREES (Zech 1:8-17) In this first vision Zechariah sees God send angels patrolling throughout the earth. They report back to God the Son ("angel of the LORD") that the world is at peace and rest under Persia's rule (v. 11). Still, Jerusalem is trodden down by Gentiles, oppressed and afflicted by her enemies (v. 12). It's not that God has brought judgment on Jerusalem; all He has done is withhold His mercy (v. 12). God doesn't need to send judgment or punishment on anyone. All He does is stop showing mercy and the inevitable result is judgment. We are much more dependent on God's mercy than we could ever imagine! God had allowed the Gentile nations to oppress Israel so they would turn back to God. They have gone too far, though, and God will now judge them for their sin (v. 15). He will again show mercy to Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt (v. 16). Peace, comfort and prosperity will again reign over His people (v. 17).

God is sending this message to His people through Zechariah to encourage them to persevere in their work. They will prevail because God will prevail. God is in sovereign charge of everything, so there is no reason to fear, doubt or quit. As they do God's will, they will be opposed, but ultimate victory is theirs because God is sovereign over all!

VISION 2: 4 HORNS & 4 CRAFTSMAN (Zech 1:18-21) God assures them that He is in control of all Gentile powers, even those which have oppressed the Jews. He will overcome them.

VISION 3: MAN WITH MEASURING LINE (Zech 2:1-13) Zechariah sees someone, perhaps God the Son, measuring Jerusalem as someone would do who owned it and was planning restorative repairs to it. He tells the Jews to flee Persia and Babylon and return to Jerusalem for safety, where He will protect them. Then He jumps ahead to when He will return and set up His kingdom on earth. Wait patiently and persevere in faith is the message from God.

VISION 4: CLEAN GARMENTS FOR THE HIGH PRIEST (Zech 3:1-10) Next Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest at that time standing before God with Satan accusing him. His filthy garments show His guilt and sin, as well as that of all the Jews. God the Son intervenes, defending His people, saying they are "a burning stick snatched from the fire" (3:1). God the Son affirms that He has provided clean garments and removed their sin (3:4). Again, the vision then moves to a future time when God the Son will set up His throne on earth and rule and reign from it. Then peace and security will last forever.

VISION 5: GOLD LAMPSTAND AND 2 OLIVE TREES (Zech 4:1-14) In a pictorial way God shows His light and glory will one day fill the whole earth. "Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit," says the Lord Almighty. God sees all and knows all and He is sovereign over all that Jerusalem is facing.

VISION 6: FLYING SCROLL (Zech. 5:1-4) A vision of a very large, open scroll flying through the air reminds them that God knows their sins and they must deal with them. He is sovereign to judge (withhold mercy) as well as bless.

VISION 7: WOMAN IN A BASKET (Zech. 5:5-11) The whole wicked world system, which finds its fullness in Babylon, is under God's control and will one day be judged. Have no part with it!

VISION 8: 4 CHARIOTS (Zech. 6:1-8) Similar to Vision 1, God again reaffirms His sovereign control over the world and nations. He will bring victory in His time.

All this is to reassure the Jews laboring in discouragement that they should persevere in faith, for God would bring victory in His time. That should be our encouragement today, too. As we seek to follow God's will for our lives, we must remember that God is in total control of everything. We can't look at circumstances or current obstacles, but only to the future when our sovereign God will rule and reign over all His (and our) enemies. Remember that!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

6. NEW ASSURANCE

What does God expect of me? What does God promise me?

ZECHARIAH 6:9 - 8:23; FEB. 16, 519 BC & DEC. 7, 518 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Zechariah's 8 night visions (1:7 - 6:8) were sent by God to encourage the people and remind them that He was in charge of everything. Even though they were having opposition and difficulties in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, He would ultimately give them success. One day he would rule and reign on earth, in Jerusalem and in the temple. God follows that up (Feb 16, 519 BC) with a prophecy about the Messiah who will rule on the throne in Jerusalem (6:9-15) and a bit later (Dec. 7, 518 BC) four messages from Zechariah explaining what God expected of them and what He would do to help them (7:1 - 8:23).

JOSHUA CROWNED (Zechariah 6:9-15; February 16, 519 BC) After his night visions, God told Zechariah to do something strange. He was to take gold and silver that was brought back to Jerusalem from Babylon, make a crown, and put it on Joshua the high priest at that time. What is so strange about this is that only someone from the tribe of Judah can be king, while priests must come from the tribe of Levi (family of Aaron). How could Joshua be both?

The mystery is compounded when God calls Him the "Branch," a title the Jews believed belonged to the Messiah (v. 12). This One would build the temple and rule from it. This is obviously far beyond what Joshua the priest could do. He was only a picture of the One who was to come. The crown wouldn't stay on him but would be kept in the temple awaiting the Branch who would fulfill this prophecy (14).

This was further encouragement to the Jews that their work was not in vain but would ultimately succeed. Final and total success would come when the Messiah, God Himself, took over the temple rebuilding and filled it with His presence and glory.

God again continues to encourage His people to persevere through present difficulties by keeping their eyes on the future. That's why God has given us so much information in the Bible about His return for us and our future with Him in heaven and then ruling on earth. In fact, that's how Jesus comforted and encouraged His disciples the night before He was crucified (John 14). Perhaps if we studied and remembered the great future God has for us, and how He will ultimately defeat all His enemies on this earth we can better persevere through our difficult and dangerous times on earth.

MESSAGE 1: REBUKE FOR WRONG FASTING (Zechariah 7:1-7; Dec. 7, 518 BC) The occasion of this message was when Jews living outside Jerusalem sent messengers to ask the officials if they still had to keep on observing the various fasts that were part of Jewish traditions (v. 3). Clearly implied is that they were tired of it and wanted to be able to stop. It was just something where they were going through the outer motions without real meaning. God's message to them through Zechariah dealt with this, their poor attitude toward fasting. They were just going through the motions. It had become an external act devoid of real meaning. They weren't doing it for God, it was just habit.

We, today, must make sure we don't just go through the motions of what God would have us do: devotions, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, church and Bible study attendance, giving our money, singing, etc. It's easy for that to happen, but it is wrong and dangerous!

MESSAGE 2: WHY THE JEWS WENT INTO CAPTIVITY (Zech 7:8-14; Dec 7, 7, 518 BC) In fact, it was this same attitude toward God and spiritual things that caused God to have the previous generation go into captivity in the first place. God says He is more concerned with the inner motive than the outer action. Actually, both must line up. Service to God and others is a must, but our motive must be love and compassion, not just going through the motions.

Unfortunately, the Jews never learned this lesson. Jesus Himself continually reprimanded the religious rulers about this. The situation continues today. We, too, can be guilty of being more concerned about our outer actions than our inner attitudes. Watch out!

MESSAGE 3: MILLENNIAL CONDITIONS (Zech 8:1-17; Dec 7, 518 BC) Having clearly communicated what He expects of His followers, God now reminds them of what He will do to help them. He never gives us commands without also promising what we need to meet those requirements. God reminds them that serving Him with the right motive is the way to go. He will prosper them for it. This will all result in a future day when Jerusalem is restored and all is peace and security. Jerusalem will be the center of the world and people from everywhere will come to worship God there. God promises He will be faithful and right to His people (v. 8).

MESSAGE 4: MILLENNIAL CONDITIONS (Zech 8:18-23; Dec 7, 518 BC) Getting back to the issue of fasting, God tells them that their fasts will turn into feasts when the Messiah comes to sit on His throne in Jerusalem. Gentiles will no longer oppose Jerusalem; they will come from everywhere to worship there. The Jews will be witnesses by word and example to God's love and grace (v. 23). Their godliness will attract others to God, as should be true of us today.

WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS A study of this passage shows that God expects His people to diligently obey Him, but with pure motives. He demands true justice to all and mercy and compassion shown to all and especially to the needy. He tells them to not plot evil. He encourages them to be honest, true and peaceful. In effect, He is repeating what He told them in the beginning, to love Him and others. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)* When Jesus quoted this He added that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the same as God told the Jews in Zechariah's day. If we are to be like Jesus we are to do the same thing ourselves.

WHAT GOD PROMISES US Whenever God expects something from us, He promises to enable us to do it. He promised the Jews He would bless them, always be with them, be faithful and righteous to them, provide their needs, and use them to bless others. He promises He will return and set everything right, establishing His kingdom in Jerusalem forever. In other words, He promises to love them and show it. This is just what He expects us to do. He loves us so we can love Him back. His promises are what we have to go on now, just like the Jews back then did, too. He promises us His Spirit to fill us and produce the fruit of love in us (Gal. 5:22).

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

7. NEW RESPONSES

How should I respond to unfair criticism?

EZRA 6:15-22; 4:6-23; MARCH 12, 516 BC - 465 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Finally, 70 years after it had been destroyed, the temple was rebuilt and dedicated (March 12, 516 BC). It had taken 21 years for the Jews who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem to complete the work. There were many distractions and much opposition along the way. Eventually the work was completed and, among great worship and many sacrifices, everyone celebrated (Ezra 6:15-17). Then they reinstated the Passover which commemorates the first deliverance from captivity and move into the land 900 years ago (Ezra 9:19-22). This, too, had been neglected for the last 70 years. The Jews were truly at a high point – close to God and faithful to Him. It had been many years since the nation had been this close to God, many years indeed. But what happens when we get right with God and live for Him? That's right, opposition begins. That's what happened to the Jews, too. Opposition came in the form of criticism from their enemies among the nations surrounding them.

CARRYING THE DONKEY A father and son once took a donkey to the market. The father sat on the donkey and the boy walked. Onlookers said, "What a terrible thing, a big strong man sitting on the donkey's back and the poor boy has to walk." So, the father got off and the boy got on the donkey. People then said, "How terrible, this strong man walking and the little boy sitting." So, they both got on the donkey's back, but then others remarked: "How terrible, two people sitting on one donkey." So, they both got off the donkey. Then people said, "This is crazy! The donkey has nothing on his back and two people are walking." When they arrived at the market, they were both carrying the donkey! If we always allow ourselves to be influenced by what others think and say, we may find ourselves "carrying the donkey" more often than we like. Trying to please everyone just doesn't work. How, then, should we respond to criticism? If trying to please everyone doesn't work, should we just always ignore all of it? What about the hurt and pain it causes? Let's look to God's Word to see how to respond.

THE CRITICS All the criticism seems to have come from two men, Rehum and Shimshai (Ezra 4:8-9). It's now 485 BC, about 30 years since the temple was dedicated and the Passover reinstated. They have been doing all they could to oppose the Jews throughout this time, but when a new ruler took over in Persia they found a more receptive ear.

They implied there were many others who shared their sentiments (Ezra 4:9-10) but in effect it was just the two of them (v. 23). One of the first giveaways of ungodly criticism is when someone says "everyone," "they," "lots of others," etc. They hide behind numbers, making it out to be that they are just the spokesmen for a large group who agree. They imply that they are in the minority. Instead of saying "I have a concern," they let on that many have expressed the same feelings and concerns they have. In fact, they often come across as if they are doing you a favor by being the ones to pass these opinions on to you.

THE CRITICISM What these two men did was write a letter to king Xerxes (called Ahasuerus in Esther) in Persia, who ruled the whole area at that time (Ezra 4:6-16). They started by calling themselves 'servants' (v. 11) and saying that they were only concerned for the king's welfare (v. 14). This is another sign of ungodly critics – they pretend their motives and loyalties are 100% pure and true. They only want what is best for the king, they claim. In reality these men were jealous of the prosperity the Jews were finding in their new walk with God. They wanted to be the strongest,

most prosperous people in the area but the Jews were surpassing them. They couldn't do anything themselves, but if they could get the king to stop the Jews ...

The plan was to slant what was happening in a way that would cause Artaxerxes (also called Xerxes) to see the Jew's prosperity as a threat to him. Thus, they told the king that the Jews were rebuilding Jerusalem so they could fortify and rebel against Persia. Then the king would no longer have their tax money (Ezra 4:13, 16). Note that money, to them, is the bottom line of everything. This shows their real motives. They say, though, that the Jews are the ones with greedy motives. They say their motives are to keep back the king's due and not pay their taxes. This is another sign that criticism is ungodly: they criticize the motives of others. We've all had that happen from time to time, and it's awful. The more you try to do to spread the truth, the worse things seem to get. Today, as then, the critics go behind the back of the person they are criticizing and talk to others. These men never asked the Jews their reasoning or sought to really know them. They go behind a person's back and gossip to others. It's deadly!

As proof and support, they turned to the past reputation Jerusalem had for independence and control, as in the time of David and Solomon. They asked the king to check and see if Jerusalem wasn't a city that liked to rule itself instead of being ruled by others (v. 15). Taking something from the past, even something good, and giving it a 'spin' to make it seem like something wrong, is a very successful tactic of ungodly critics.

Still, God is in sovereign charge, isn't He? Would He let such an unfair and untrue thing succeed against His people? Previous kings had given permission to rebuilt Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). They were in obedience to Persia and God, surely God would protect them! Right?

THE CONCLUSION The king checked into the records and found Jerusalem to be an independent city, the capital of the Jews. Without checking he believed the accusations of Rehum and Shimshai that the Jews' motives were greed and rebellion. He ordered them to stop all building in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:17-23). Why would God allow ungodly criticism to succeed and stop His work? I don't know, God never says why. He didn't tell the Jews then, and He doesn't tell us today.

One thing we do know, though, is that the Jews resisted. They didn't just rollover and quit. They had to be "compelled by force" (v. 23) to stop. It's so easy to get worn out by ungodly criticism and just quit. If not, there's the temptation to fight it which means we get down on their level and end up losing anyway. The other mistake is to try to appease the critics and win them to our side by following their advice. This will never work, either.

We don't even know who the leaders were in Jerusalem at this time. Zerubbabel had passed from the scene and Ezra hadn't arrived yet. Whoever it was, though, they persisted. They didn't quit easily. They had enough maturity to know that all godly leaders will be persecuted. If you carry the ball, you are going to get tackled -- sometimes for a loss.

They must have known these men who were doing this. When we consider the source we can better know how to respond. They kept their focus on God and saw Him in control of all. If He allowed this opposition to stop them, He must know what He is doing.

Their job was to make sure they didn't do anything to give their enemies justifiable actions to criticize. Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12). Note the word "falsely." Stay faithful to God no matter what. Remember, it's what God thinks that matters, not what anyone else thinks.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

8. NEW FUNCTION

How can I be a shepherd like Jesus to those under my care?
ZECHARIAH 9:1 - 14:21; After 480 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Finally, the temple is rebuilt and worship reinstated by those who returned to Jerusalem from Persia with Zerubbabel. This brought attacks and criticism from neighbors, but the Jews stayed faithful. Time passes. Zechariah had received visions from God 20 years earlier and passed them on to the people to encourage them to live for God. Now God gives him another message to deliver, his final prophecy, and it's a long one!

THE PROPHECY This 'oracle' (9:1) is about two times in Israel's future: 1) the First coming of the Messiah, including His rejection (chapters 9-11) and 2) the Second coming of the Messiah when He is enthroned for the Millennium (chapters 12-14). When things are tough in the present it's always good to look to the future. That is where hope lies, and it reminds us that God is in control of everything.

ALEXANDER AND JESUS Alexander the Great and his conquests are prophesied (9:1-8), about 150 years before they happened. Zechariah is showing that God gets the credit for Alexander's conquests, not Alexander, because God wanted him to conquer. He foretold it and brought it to pass. God comforts the people with the fact that his city and temple will be spared (9:8) and Alexander spared Jerusalem several times.

Then comes the prophecy of God's King who will come and bring peace to Israel (9:9-17). This was a prophecy fulfilled by Jesus during the Triumphal Entry, and Matthew as well as John quote this passage to show Jesus fulfilled it (Matthew 21:5; John 12:15). God then looks forward to when this King will rule and reign in Israel, bringing deliverance and peace to all (9:10-17).

TRUE AND FALSE SHEPHERDS Most will reject God's King when He comes to deliver the people, however. Instead, they will follow impostors – false shepherds. The shepherd analogy is something the Jews would have readily understood. Before being taken to Babylon they were mostly shepherds, and still many of them raised flocks of sheep or goats. They knew how a shepherd went before the sheep searching for water and food. He would protect them, comfort them, rescue them, and watch out for their welfare. Then he would bring them safely to the sheepfold at night and guard the door with his own body. The life of a shepherd was not easy. There was much danger and hardship. Wild beasts had to be fought off, robbers defeated, and dangers overcome. A shepherd willingly did this out of love for the sheep.

However not all shepherds loved their sheep. Some just 'fleeced' the sheep for their own benefit (10:1-5). They didn't care about the sheep, only how they could use them for their own benefit. The Jews will reject their True Shepherd, however, and turn instead to the false shepherds. Despite the fact that their Shepherd will provide all their needs (Psalm 23), they turn to false shepherds instead.

Jesus, the good shepherd, will regather Israel as a shepherd regathers his sheep, bringing them back into His fold (10:6-12). This brought hope and comfort to those listening to Zechariah, knowing the future would bring better than the present. Before that, however, would come desolation, judgment and disaster because of their rejection of the Messiah (11:1-3).

When the Good Shepherd, Jesus, came to lead His people they rejected him and were scattered by the Romans (11:1-9). When Jesus came He claimed to be this shepherd. "Therefore,

Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:7-11).

The reason for their ejection (11:1-3) is that they first rejected the Messiah (11:4-17). This refers to His first coming, but culminates in their acceptance of the Antichrist as their shepherd (11:15-17). Since they ran from the good Shepherd, they are open to a worthless shepherd stepping in and taking advantage of them. That is what will happen.

ORACLE # 2 Now Zechariah moves ahead in time to the end of the Tribulation when the Messiah/Shepherd will return to defeat His enemies and establish His 1000-year Millennial kingdom on earth (12:1-14:21). Physical deliverance of Jews from Gentile oppression is first prophesied (12:1-9).

Then spiritual deliverance for the Jews is also foretold (12:10 - 13:6). The Jews will repent with weeping and mourning for having rejected their Messiah (12:10). The Holy Spirit will then be poured out on them (12:10). They will be forgiven and cleansed (13:1-6). Because the Shepherd was slain (13:7a) the sheep scattered (13:7b), but eventually they will return to their Shepherd (13:9).

Zechariah, or I guess we should say God, closes with more information about just what will happen when Jesus returns at the end of Armageddon to establish His kingdom (14:1-21). Then everything will be turned to perfection. What a reminder that was to the poor Jews as they struggled to make it day by day. We, too, must keep our minds on God's ultimate victory for us and not focus on the trials and difficulties of today. Today will soon be over.

SHEPHERDS TODAY It's comforting, too, to know that Jesus is our Shepherd today as well (Hebrews 13:20; I Peter 2:25; Revelation 7:17; Psalm 23). He is our Shepherd in heaven, but He also provides 'under-shepherds' to watch over us in this life (I Peter 5:1-3). The Bible says that pastors are 'under-shepherds.' Under shepherds were those who took care of someone else's flock. Someone above them was ultimately responsible for the decisions and provision of the sheep. The under shepherd had all the help and assistance he needed, all he had to do was ask for it. He wasn't alone in caring for the sheep.

That is also true of fathers and husbands. Men are to shepherd their family. They must provide, protect, feed and guide them as a shepherd does his sheep. However, it is important to remember that our families aren't ours, they are ultimately God's. He will give us the guidance, teaching, help, etc., we need to lead our families. It makes it much easier knowing we have Someone to turn to whenever we need Him. Actually, our attitude should be one of caring for someone else's family (God's) and doing just what He wants done. If we do only what He wants for our children and wife we will be far ahead, our families will be better, and we'll have more peace. After all, who could do a better job with your family than God? Think of yourself as their shepherd, but remember you are their under shepherd.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

9. NEW ASSISTANCE

How can God use my wife?
ESTHER; 473 BC; PERSIA

ESTHER: PROVIDENTIAL CARE

TITLE: After the main character

AUTHOR: Unknown (possibly Mordecai)

DATE of WRITING: About 473 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Shushan, Babylon

TIME COVERED: 10 years (483 - 473 BC)

RECIPIENTS: Jews dispersed in Persian Empire.

KEY VERSE: *4:14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"*

KEY WORD: The Jews (51 times); also Jew and Feast

PURPOSE: To study how all the Jews were saved from extermination by Esther

THEME: God's providential care

One day a Christian man had an orchard of thousands of trees. His whole family depended on it for food. One morning he found half-grown apples being destroyed by strange worms. Every tree was affected. The family gathered and prayed, then spent the whole day picking off worms, but they multiplied far faster than they could be picked. Weary from working all day at top speed and desperate, they prayed and went to sleep. Early the next morning they started to see hundreds of strange birds landing on the trees. They stayed all day eating worms but never hurt the trees or apples. They spent three days there, then left. All the worms were gone and the crop was saved. Coincidence? No way. Our sovereign God was in control of the whole thing. He cares for and provides for His own. Unfortunately, we forget about that. When we do, we should read the book of Esther!

DANGER TO GOD'S PEOPLE (Esther 1 - 3) A sordid story unfolds (Esther 1) in the first chapter of Esther. The scene is the great Persian city of Shushan. After a series of banquets (really great drunken orgies) King Ahasuerus (Xerxes in secular history) commands his queen, Vashti, to provide the entertainment for the grand finale. Because of her own standards of modesty, she refused and was banished from the kingdom forever. Therefore, the king began a world-wide search for a new queen.

A Jew named Mordecai, who had a minor job at the palace, entered his cousin (who he was raising) in the contest and she won! Now it must be noted that the Jews were not to remain in Persia. They should have returned with Ezra or Nehemiah, but didn't want to leave the prosperity and fine living in Persia for the poverty and difficulties of Jerusalem. Thus, they were out of God's will. As a result, there is no mention of God's name, prayer or sacrifices in the book of Esther. Still, God keeps His promises to protect His people.

After Esther is made queen Mordecai overheard a plot to kill the king, told Esther, and she reported it (Est 3). The plot was stopped and the king saved. That's all part of God's plan.

The plot thickens when Haman, the prime minister and favorite of the king, pushes through legislation to have all the Jews in the kingdom killed. His hatred for Mordecai, who won't bow to him, makes him miserable. That sets the scene for God's deliverance. He uses Esther to save her race and influence her stepson Artaxerxes to allow Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls.

DELIVERANCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (Esther 4 - 10) When Mordecai hears about the plot to destroy all Jews he is really upset and sends word to Esther, asking her to intercede for her people, even though it may mean her death. To speak out to the king was forbidden, and to reveal that she was a Jew could also mean her death. However, she courageously does so, inviting the king and Haman to a banquet she would have just for them (Esther 5).

Meanwhile Haman is miserable because of his hatred of Mordecai. His wife says he will feel better if he builds a large scaffold and anticipates his killing of Mordecai, so he has it built.

One night the king had a hard time sleeping (one of those little things that God uses in a big way). He read from his histories and discovered Mordecai's work in saving his life, and the next day finds out that Mordecai was never rewarded for it. He determines to take care of this.

When prideful, self-centered Haman comes to work the next day the king asks he which he thinks the king should do to honor a man he deeply appreciates. Thinking the king is referring to him, Haman lays out his own prideful dreams of glory and honor, only to find out the king meant it for his enemy Mordecai -- and he had to be the one to honor Mordecai! Talk about a bad day at the office!

Later that day, when Haman showed up for the banquet with Esther and the king, she revealed his legislation to destroy all Jews. The king was furious at how he was tricked and left the room to get control of his anger. Haman fell upon Esther begging her for mercy, and when the king entered he thought Haman was attacking Esther. He had Haman killed immediately on his own gallows! Not only that, but the Jews were allowed to kill those who wanted to destroy them. In addition, Mordecai was elevated to Haman's job as top advisor to the king! Talk about a happy ending!

Even today the Jews celebrate this important deliverance as the Feast of Purim. They give gifts, eat together, and children reenact the events in the book of Esther (similar to the way we celebrate Christmas). Truly this is a wonderful reminder of God's sovereignty and His providential care of His people, even those who are out of His will. What a great God we have!

GOD USES WIVES TODAY Of special interest to men is the fact that God used a woman (actually two) to help Ahasuerus. First, when he was getting away from what was right his wife, Queen Vashti, took a stand letting him know that what he was doing was not right. Then Esther showed him his wrong in signing the decree against the Jews. The first time he was wrong because of his lust and pride, the second was because of ignorance. God still uses wives in these areas, as well as others, to help show men where they have gone wrong and what to do to follow God. While it is true the man is the leader because women can be misled when in leadership (I Timothy 2:11-15), there are other times when a woman's perception, sensitivity and intuition can help a man. That's why we need each other to be one. Worse off is the man who doesn't appreciate the helpful advice his wife can give and know when and how to use it. It's an invaluable resource from God that every man must tap into!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

10. NEW POWER

How can I know when God's hand is on my life?
EZRA 7:1 - 8:36; 458 BC; PERSIA to JERUSALEM

Where would we be without God's working in our lives? Suppose, men, God had never in any way intervened in your life, from birth to now. If God had totally let you go your own way and let things just happen, what would you be like now? What would your life be like, if you were even still alive? Thank God He has His hand on us from birth on. Often, though we don't recognize this and therefore don't thank Him for it. We live as if it is all up to us to make a go of it in life, raise our children, meet our wife's needs, and hold down a job. Carrying all these responsibilities in our own strength can cause stress, burnout and defeat. It doesn't have to be that way. Ezra shows us a better way.

BACKGROUND It's been 79 years since Zerubbabel led 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem from Persia (Babylon). They tried to rebuild the altar and temple, but faced much opposition and discouragement. Haggai and Zechariah preached, encouraging the people to trust and obey God. There were periods of faith and moving ahead, but most of the time was spent in defeat and discouragement. Now God is going to again move the heart of the king (Artaxerxes) and a Jewish leader (Ezra) so that a second group can return.

"THE HAND OF THE LORD MY GOD WAS ON ME" Eight times in Ezra 7-8 and Nehemiah 2 this phrase is used (see Ezra 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Ezra clearly recognized that anything he accomplished was by God's grace and help. He knew he was just God's instrument, His 'under shepherd' as it were. Thus, he didn't see this work as being His work to do on his own. He didn't even see it as something he had to do with God's help. He saw it as God's doing with him just being God's chosen vessel, the channel God used to accomplish His work. What a better way to look at things!

EZRA THE MAN Ezra was well educated in the Old Testament Scriptures (Ezra 7:6, 10). As a scribe he was also a teacher, the same position as 'Rabbi' in the New Testament. Jewish tradition says that Ezra knew the whole Old Testament by heart: all the consonants that were written as well as every vowel and punctuation mark that was passed on only by memory. He is credited with writing 1 and 2 Chronicles as well as Ezra and is recognized as the one who gathered the various books of the Old Testament and form them into our canon today. He edited them, added endings (such as to Joshua, etc.), and compiled them into the form we have today. He is also the acknowledged inventor of the synagogue. The synagogue kept the Jews together when out of the land, and still does so today. Our church was built on the plan and function of the synagogue. Thus, Ezra was quite a man. Still, he wasn't able to accomplish anything without God's hand being upon him, as he so often repeats.

What God accomplished through him was gathering 5,000 Jews and taking them back to Jerusalem. That meant their being willing to go, the king being willing to let them go, the resources to make the trip being available, and the trip safely made. Ezra recognized this was well beyond his human ability and could only be done in God's power and strength.

OBSTACLES FACED Note that just because God's hand was on him didn't mean that everything would go smoothly and simply. That wasn't the case. God did work in the king's heart to allow

them to go (7:27-28) and send a letter with his authority to protect them (7:11-26). However not many Jews wanted to leave the good life in Persia to return to their homeland where life was much harder and less prosperous. Only 5,000 of the hundreds of thousands in Persia were willing to return (8:1-14). Worse yet, NO Levites were willing to go. They were necessary for the function of temple worship, so 258 of them had to be compelled to go (8:15-20). This must have been disheartening for Ezra.

Another difficult issue was whether to ask for a military escort or not (8:22-23). Ezra had made it clear their God was with them and protecting them, so he thought asking for soldiers would be a poor testimony (although under the same circumstances Nehemiah did have a military escort). To make things worse, they were taking, among other things, 40 tons of silver and almost 4 tons of gold (7:22; 8:26). There is a fine line between trust and practicality on one hand and lack of faith on the other. We trust God but lock our doors and wear seat belts. There is no one, simple answer to this tension. We each must seek God in prayer as Ezra did.

To carry that much silver and gold safely, Ezra divided it among various men who were making the trip back (8:24-30). He made an exact record of who had how much. When they got to Jerusalem all of it was turned over and counted (8:33-34). This not only held them accountable so they wouldn't be tempted to take any of it, it kept their name clean in case any suspected them of keeping some for themselves. Just because God is sovereignty working doesn't mean we aren't to use common sense and practical matters. Trusting God is one thing, presuming is another. We are not to put God to the test by our carelessness.

SAFE TRIP Ezra and his small group left April 8, 458 BC and arrived in Jerusalem on August 4, 458 BC. In 4 months, they covered 900 miles. Going is slow with animals, elderly, children and all the supplies they had with them. They were thankful to God for their safe arrival and worshipped Him for His provision (8:35-36).

LESSONS FOR MEN TODAY It's important for men today, too, to realize that all we accomplish is because of God's hand on us. It's not for us to do in our own strength. We are just His tools. We don't have to ask Him for help without job, we do have to have an attitude that it is all His job and He'll show and guide us in the parts He wants us to do.

The text does say that Ezra "devoted" himself to knowing, obeying and teaching God's Word (7:10). That is the one thing we see about Ezra that gives us a clue to his spiritual success. He was devoted to God's word, committed to knowing and obeying it. He wanted to know and do God's will in all areas of his life. When we have that kind of attitude then God will make sure we know His will and have His power.

Men, whatever God has for you to do, remember that 'His hand is upon you.' He is in sovereign control over everything in your life. Even the negative consequences we suffer are under His control. Sometimes His hand is upon us to discipline us to make us more like Jesus. Even then, though, it is a hand of love.

Picture in your mind the very Hand of God being on you in a real, physical way. It's comforting to think of, isn't it? It assures us we won't go wrong. It means we'll never be alone. It proves we are loved and important to Him. What more could we ask for than to have the Hand of God Almighty on our lives!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

11. NEW MARRIAGE

How can I make my marriage more like what it should be?

EZRA 9:1 - 10:44; AUG. - DEC. 458 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND It has been 80 years (538 BC to 458 BC) since Ezra led his group of people back to Jerusalem from Babylon. Thus, the grandchildren of the ones who returned are now in the forefront. The people have again drifted into sin, and the leaders bring the problem to Ezra.

THEIR SIN THEN In general, the sin of the people was in being like the world around them (Ezra 9:1-2). The majority were open to or involved in accepting the practices of their pagan neighbors. This especially was true in the area of marriage (v. 2). They were no longer keeping the Law of Moses, as God had given it, but were conforming to the sinful patterns of those around them. Worst of all, they didn't see this as wrong. This bothered some of the leaders who came to Ezra about the problem.

Specifically, the problem was that Jewish men were marrying non-Jewish women (v. 2). At first this may not seem so terrible, but remember that God explicitly forbid it (Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4). This is repeated in the New Testament by Paul - we are not to be unequally yoked in marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14). If the things of God are important to us they will form our values and priorities, our motives and our view of everything. If our mate doesn't share those exact same values, to the degree we do, we won't be able to pull together correctly in marriage. We will settle to the level of the lowest common denominator – the one with less Godly values. This is what the Jews were doing in Ezra's time.

They could have justified it: not enough Jewish women, good business practice to unite with neighboring businessmen, being deeply in love, etc. the more who did it the easier it became for others to do. Sensitivity was dulled and God's principles abandoned. Sin is still sin.

OUR SIN NOW We live in a time when god's marriage laws and principles are being broken left and right as well. Sex before marriage, even living together before marriage, has become an accepted norm. Same-sex relationships flourish. Believers date, get involved with and then marry mates who don't share their spiritual values. Divorce is seen as a viable option if any difficulties arise in a marriage. Even among those who stay together, God's ways are often neglected for the ways of the world. Men don't take the leadership roles in their families. They are more apt to let their wife lead by default and then follow whichever way the family is drifting. Often it is the children who take the lead in the families downward spiral to more and more sensual and material pursuits. Parents, especially men, hesitate to take a strong spiritual lead in their children's lives and instead let them 'enjoy' all the 'pleasure' the world provides. The values and priorities of Christian families is often not much different than those of the world. For example, the divorce rate among Christians is higher than among those who don't claim to be Christians! It's easy to see how a Godly minority can drift into the ways of the world around them, isn't it? Still, that doesn't make it right. But what are we to do?

EZRA'S REACTION What Ezra did was react in anguish. He tore his clothes, pulled hair from his head and beard, and sat down appalled (Ezra 9:4). After several hours he fell on his knees and confessed their sin to God (v. 5). Why was He making such a big deal about something so little? Because it wasn't little. It only seemed little. It was the reason the nation went into captivity in the first place! Didn't this generation learn from previous generations?

Ezra prayed, identifying himself with God's people (like Daniel had done, 19:5-6, 8-11, 13, 15-16). The nation stood or fell together. Even though it wasn't his sin, he shared their sin and guilt as one of their people. He was responsible for allowing it, and he would suffer the consequences along with the rest. He prayed asking God for mercy (Ezra 9:6-15). He said the land was 'polluted by the corruption of its peoples, made impure by their detestable practices' (v. 11). He didn't pass blame, make excuses or justify the sin. He confessed it.

STEP 1 - CONFESS SIN That is the first thing we must do when we see our sin in any area, including marriage and family. Don't pass blame, make excuses or justify the sin. Just confess it! See it as sin against God Almighty. Humble yourself and repent. Throw yourself on God's mercy. This step **MUST** be taken. Follow Ezra's example. In fact, pray the prayer he prayed in Ezra 9. Change it to apply it to your own situation.

EZRA'S ACTION However, Ezra didn't just confess their sins. He did something about it. When sin has been confessed it must also be turned from. It's not enough to confess our family failures and sins, we must then, by God's power, turn from them to a godlier way of living.

STEP 2 - TURN FROM SIN Ezra didn't force others, he set an example (Ezra 10:1), which others picked up (v. 2). The male leaders came to Ezra recognizing their sin and suggesting they make things right with God (v. 3). This meant sending their unbelieving wives and their children back to their pagan neighbors. This must have been very hard – but then consequences of disobedience always are. As in other sin, the innocent suffer – the wives who were marrying for life in good faith, and especially the children who were born to them.

We can't force others in our family to change, but we can change ourselves. We can take a humble servant attitude to things and set an example for others. Let them notice and be convicted by God, then change. Change can't be legislated, not real lasting change. It must come from within. This is especially important for men, for we are the leaders in our families, too.

Our wives and children often are the ones who suffer from our sins, so the sooner we confess them and make them right the better. Often correcting the sin hurts, too – pulling children out of worldly activities, stating what we feel is right when our wife doesn't agree, etc.

In order to get everyone to obey, they issued a proclamation that had severe consequences for disobedience (Ezra 10:7-8). The majority responded well, but a few didn't (v. 15). Not everyone will go along quickly and easily when you want to have your family start serving God.

The leaders didn't act rashly but made sure the women weren't converts to Judaism and God. They didn't want to judge hastily and be wrong. They were patient but thorough (v. 16-17) as we must be with our children and families.

They ascertained exactly where the sin lie and worked to correct it (v. 18-44). It was hard, but it had to be done. Then growth and prosperity could come.

God wants to bless our families, too, but first we must make sure we put aside all sin. Do it now.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

12. NEW LEADERSHIP

What does God look for in a man He can use to lead others?
NEHEMIAH 1:1-11; NOV-DEC 446 BC; SUSA (Persian Winter Palace)

BACKGROUND Since the Jews have gone into captivity in Babylon, Zerubbabel has led one small group back and Ezra another. The Jews back in Palestine have been struggling financially and spiritually. Now God is about to bring a third group back to the land in order to get things there ready for the coming of the Messiah.

NEHEMIAH TAKES THE SPOTLIGHT Things went well for the Jews for a while after their turning from the sin of intermarriage. However, the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem had been stopped by Artaxerxes almost 100 years before when the Samaritans complained (Ezra 4:12). This not only left them defenseless but was a bad testimony to their gods (Nehemiah 1:3). The worth of a god was determined by how well he protected and provided for his people. If he couldn't even keep a wall around them he was seen as a very poor god! Thus, the God of Israel was mocked and ridiculed because the walls and gates were broken down for so long. This bothered Nehemiah. Even though he wasn't responsible for the problem, it bothered him for the sake of his brethren in Jerusalem as well as for the sake of God. This shows us the first trait of a competent leader as seen in Nehemiah.

MARK 1. A CLEAR RECOGNITION OF THE NEEDS Nehemiah didn't live in a dream world but in reality. He saw the problem for what it was, not magnifying it nor depreciating it. It's easy for men today to blind themselves to the problems in their marriage, family or personal life and just go on as if they don't exist. If the problem isn't recognized it will never be solved.

Some go to the opposite extreme and are always and only looking for problems, seeing everything as major. These perfectionists can't enjoy the good in their lives and family. They do more harm than good by magnifying every little thing.

Men, are you aware of the needs in your life, your marriage and your family? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 in each area, one being the extreme of ignoring problems or of magnifying them and ten being a balance awareness of the problems.

MARK 2. A PERSONAL CONCERN WITH THE NEED After identifying himself with the problem, Nehemiah felt the problem inside. He took it upon himself as being his problem as well as theirs. A common response today would be: "Whose fault is this?" "Who messed up?" "Who's to blame for this?" It certainly wasn't Nehemiah's fault. Why hadn't anyone reapplied for approval to rebuild? Why were they still afraid of their neighbors?

Nehemiah didn't blame. He had compassion. The first step is KNOWING the problem. The second step is doing something about it because you are personally concerned.

Men, that 'problem' you see as so big in your wife – what are YOU doing to help it? Have you ever honestly considered what you are doing to make it worse instead of better? Are you letting someone else, like your wife, take responsibility for problems in your marriage or family which you, as the man, are responsible for? Do you inside think that you wouldn't be having the difficulties you face with your children if she were somehow a different kind of mother to them? What are you doing to help her be a better person and mother? How would you want her to treat you if things were reversed? How does Jesus treat you in your areas of weakness and need? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 on how personally concerned you are with the problems you see in the lives of others around you.

MARK 3. TAKING THINGS TO GOD IN PRAYER BEFORE ACTING Men are great for coming up with instant solutions to every problem, and then wanting to get right to action solving those problems. Sometimes we will send up a short prayer on the way, asking God to bless what we are doing, or even to help us do it. Instead, we should do like Nehemiah did – seek God’s wisdom and guidance first of all (Nehemiah 1:5-11). Nehemiah didn’t come with a solution He wanted to ‘sell’ to God, he came with an open, neutral heart awaiting God’s will. In other words, he prayed the solution, not the problem. Remember that Nehemiah worked closely with the most powerful man on earth, but God didn’t go to him. He went to One even greater – God Himself. Men, rank yourself on how consistent you are in coming to God for guidance and wisdom, not just for help with your own plan. On a scale of 1 to 10, where do you stand?

Note that Nehemiah starts off praising God (v. 5). He didn’t complain, blame, criticize, whimper or whine. He praised God for God’s greatness, especially for His loyal love. We must get our eyes off ourselves and onto God in order for anything in life to work as we want it to.

Next he confessed their sin, acknowledging his responsibility as part of the people (v. 6-7). We, too, are accountable for the sins of America for we are part of it.

Then he claimed God’s promises, given to Moses (8-10). He acknowledges that God faithfully kept His promise to scatter the Jews if they disobeyed. Now He wants God to keep the other part of that promise, to restore them if they repent and turn back to Him. He knows they, at least a solid minority of them, have done so.

Finally, he asks God (petition) for something (11) – to answer their prayers for Jerusalem and to ‘give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.’

MARK 4. BE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE NEED YOURSELF As Nehemiah thought and prayed, it became obvious God has something for him to do with the answer to his own prayer (11). He didn’t just pray for God to send somebody else to do it, but was available to be used by God for that very purpose. When God gives us a burden to pray about something, sometimes that is a prelude to asking us to do something about it. Jesus told His disciples to pray for the fields which were white to harvest (Matthew 9:38). Soon they are the ones being called to go to those fields. Men, are you available to be used by God to meet those problem situations in your wife and family? Maybe God wants YOU to be the one to help your wife through a hard time or to take on the challenge of a difficult child. Rate yourself 1 to 10 on your availability to be used by God to answer your own prayers.

Before you say you are unable to meet those problems that arise in your life, remember that Nehemiah was 800 miles away from Jerusalem. That was a 4-month trip – quite a commute! He had a top job in the administration, being the ‘right hand man’ to the king (11). It seemed there was nothing he could do – but God used him when he became available.

What about you? Are you asking God to help you recognize the needs of those in your family? Are you personally concerned with having those needs met? Do you go to God first with the problem, praying the problem and not your solution? Are you available to meet that need yourself should God so choose? Find which one of these marks is your weakness and write down several things you can do to improve your leadership competency. Learn from Nehemiah. You will benefit, your family will benefit, and the kingdom of God will benefit.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

13. NEW OPPOSITION

What tools will Satan use against me when I try to lead for God?
NEHEMIAH 2:1-10; MAR 445 BC; SUSA to JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Zerubbabel, the cup bearer to king Xerxes, prayed about the terrible situation of the Jews in Jerusalem with the walls still unbuilt. He awaited God's timing and leading in what to do about the problem. For four months he prayed and God seemed silent. Nothing happened. Then God started things working.

TOOLS TO DISCOURAGE LEADERS One of Satan's most successful tools to discourage men is **impatience**. It's hard to be patient. That doesn't come naturally to anyone. Men especially are geared to action, to doing something, to solving problems by positive action. We need to learn patience, awaiting God's timing to act. In the military men must learn to follow orders before they are given the authority to give orders. The same is true for Jesus' soldiers.

Nehemiah was patient. He prayed, using the time to prepare by gathering information and making plans, but he awaited God's timing. He was patient. He didn't rush ahead on his own, nor did he lose his burden and concern to have the problem of Jerusalem taken care of.

A second tool against men when they can't solve a problem is **discouragement**. Nehemiah must have been discouraged that for 150 years nothing was done to build Jerusalem. It was thousands of miles away and seemed impossible for him to be able to do anything. He couldn't leave the king's employment. It would have been easy to get discouraged.

The only solution was to mention the problem to the king, Xerxes, but this was dangerous. **Fear** is the third problem men need to watch out for. Xerxes is the one who had ordered the newly-started work on the walls to stop because he distrusted the Jews' motives in wanting to rebuild. Also, anyone not in a happy mood around the king could be severely disciplined or killed at the king's whim. Truly Nehemiah was in a difficult position.

We men today find ourselves in such situations. We can get caught between our boss and our wife. We can face financial problems that don't seem to go away. There can be relationship problems with our wife or between our children that we just can't seem to heal. It's easy to get impatient, discouraged and fearful in leading our families for God. When was the last time you gave in to your wife or a child to avoid their response if you said what you really felt? That's fear. When was the last time you got frustrated and took things into your own hands without patiently praying and waiting on God? That's impatience. What have you given up on being changed but instead just try to 'live with it'? That's discouragement. Instead, patiently persevere and God will work in His way at His time.

GOD OPENS A DOOR Then God provided an opening. Xerxes noticed that Nehemiah was looking sad and asked him what was the problem (Nehemiah. 2:1-2). Nehemiah used this opening to bring up the subject about the troubles in Jerusalem (v. 3). The walls and gates are still broken down, and everyone then knew that implied that the city's god was unable to protect and defend it. He was defeated and humiliated, and thus His people were seen as 'losers.'

Xerxes then asked Nehemiah what he wanted to do about the problem (v. 4). Nehemiah immediately prayed to himself (v. 4) and laid out before Xerxes a plan he had developed in his mind while he was patiently praying and waiting (v. 5). After asking for some more detailed information (v. 6) which Nehemiah had at his fingertips, the king gave him permission to go to Jerusalem and start rebuilding walls. Note that Nehemiah had used the time while waiting to

research the problem and develop a detailed plan for the solution (v. 7-8). He didn't just 'shoot from the hip.'

It's a good thing he had planned ahead, too, because when he finally got to Jerusalem several months later (v. 9), Gentile neighbors opposed to his work. Without the king's signature and orders, work certainly would have been stopped again. God is behind it this time, though, and it will succeed. It all hinged on Nehemiah's prayerful patience and planning.

PRINCIPLES ON PREPARATION There are lessons here to be learned about preparing to face opposition. Defeating Satan's tools of impatience, discouragement and fear are only the beginning. Replacing them with positive action is the next part of the solution.

1. Changing a heart is God's specialty. Nehemiah left that up to God. He didn't manipulate, force, play games, scheme, trick, deceive, etc. That is never right. The end never justifies the means. We need to pray for God to change the heart of our boss, child or wife when they are clearly wrong and stubbornly opposing God. Only God can change a heart.

2. Praying and waiting go hand in hand. It goes against human nature, especially male nature, to patiently wait for God's action and/or direction. Still, we must persevere in prayer and not just give up. Nehemiah never lost his burden to help Jerusalem, even after four months of praying with no outward results.

3. Faith is not a synonym for disorder or a substitute for careful planning. People of faith need orderly minds. Planning ahead is proper and godly. In the American Revolution the soldiers had a saying, "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry." God is organized and orderly, and He wants us to be that way, too. He doesn't want us to be lazy. We can't just sit around always waiting for God to come do everything.

4. Opposition is to be expected when God's will is carried out. It's rare to follow God without any opposition. Nehemiah wasn't surprised. He didn't panic. It's like he knew it would come and was prepared to persevere anyway. That's what our attitudes should be to it, too. When you walk by faith you WILL run into people who walk by sight! It may be a friend, relative, fellow employee, boss, or even sometimes a wife or child. Opposition doesn't mean you are going the wrong way; it often means you are going the RIGHT way.

Thus, from Nehemiah we men can learn some practical lessons about what to do when faced with problems that can't be solved and removed quickly. God wants to make us like Jesus, so we must learn to respond as He would: with patience and faith. Think of a situation in your life that applies to this. Which tools is Satan using against you: impatience? Discouragement? Fear? Which principle on preparation is God trying to teach you: to trust Him to change someone's heart? To persevere in prayer? To plan while waiting? To not be defeated or surprised by opposition when you do carry out God's plan? Remember Nehemiah. When God's hand is upon us (v. 8) He will carry us through.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

14. NEW WORK LOAD

What can I do when I'm stressed from an impossible work load?
NEHEMIAH 2:11 - 3:32; AUG 445 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Nehemiah has arrived in Jerusalem to help them rebuild the walls, which have been in disrepair for 150 years. A city without strong walls or gates was seen as a city with a weak god. Thus, others looked on the God of Jerusalem as unable to care for His people. This really bothered Nehemiah and he wanted to do whatever he could to remedy the situation.

A GODLY START What do you do when faced with an impossible work load, more than seems humanly possible to get done? Usually, we rush about in a panic, pushing and forcing, trying to get it all done as quickly as possible. Or else we get discouraged and don't attempt to solve the problem but just live with it. Nehemiah did neither when he arrived in Jerusalem.

It's been a full year since he first was burdened to help the Jews in Jerusalem rebuild their walls. For 4 months he prayed, then the king allowed him to come back to work on the problem. The planning, packing and trip back took another 8 months.

He must have been very impatient to finally get started, but the first thing he did when he got there was take 3 days off (Nehemiah 2:11)! That seems strange to us, but I think there was a very good reason for that. He didn't just fly off in any direction. He rested so he would be able to make the best judgments possible. He acclimated himself to the place and people. He got to know the situation first hand as well as develop relationships with the people he would be working with. While no immediate results are seen from this kind of 'work,' it is essential for the long-range success of a project. Too often we get off to a quick start but without the proper foundation or direction. Then all our super energy fails and we have to start over. We can easily do more harm than good in the long run. Nehemiah didn't make these mistakes. He gathers information and paces himself. He doesn't rush. He isn't in a hurry. God never is.

FACT FINDING A decision is only as good as the information it is based upon. Until all the facts are known we shouldn't be coming to conclusions. Nehemiah knew this. Set out at night with a few trusted men to survey first-hand the situation of the walls (v. 12-16). He didn't give orders and force others to obey, even though as the king's representative he could have done so. He knew that isn't the best way to motivate people to action. He didn't let the officials know his plans or reasons until he had them formulated and ready to go. He was patient and thorough in his planning. He anticipated rejection and opposition of his plans, so moved carefully. He didn't bully his way through.

Nehemiah went at night for privacy, so he wouldn't have a lot of questions and speculation to answer. He could focus on the problem that way. He knew the key to handling an impossible work load is to work smarter, not harder. He was a man who acted, not reacted.

Notice, too, that he didn't go completely alone. He took some top-quality spiritually mature men with him, ones hand-picked by him. These were men who could give additional information and point out things he may have missed. Various perspectives of a problem are better than just one. Others see things we may miss. Also, it was helpful for him to have some support, encouragement, and someone to bounce his ideas and thoughts off of. Too often as men we make major decisions about our careers, finances, homes, families, children and futures without consulting other godly men. We miss much godly help that way. Every man needs some other

godly men to stand with him, like Aaron and Hur upheld Moses' hands in his time of warfare prayer when they fought Amalek (Exodus 17).

GOING PUBLIC After thinking and praying, asking God for wisdom and listening to His guidance and direction, Nehemiah took his plan to the leaders in Jerusalem (v. 17a). While he had authority, he knew it worked much better to have those with influence over the people committed to following him. He knew it works much better to motivate people from within than without. Bribes, fear of punishment, threats, etc., appeal to our selfishness and motivate from without, but when inside we see a reason for something the motivation is much greater. Motivating a child to do school work because they need to know these things for their future than to use threats of punishment to force them to go through the motions.

Nehemiah didn't scold, use guilt or blame them for their failure to rebuild the walls. He identified himself with them ("we," "us" v. 17). He didn't just stop with the problem but presented his solution, thus giving them hope and a vision. He encouraged them by showing how God was behind them (v. 18). They picked up his vision and agreed to the plan (v. 19).

FACING OPPOSITION No major work project gets pulled off without opposition, and Nehemiah had his share. Neighboring Gentiles opposed (v. 19) and mocked them. Since they had intermarried and had major business investments in Jerusalem, they had a lot of influence (Nehemiah 6:17-19) but Nehemiah stood firm (Nehemiah 2:20) and persevered.

Other opposition came from some of the nobles among the Jews who felt they were too good to work (Nehemiah 3:5). There will always be those within who won't cooperate. Nehemiah ignored them and went ahead with the work anyway.

DIVISION OF THE WORK LOAD A central part of Nehemiah's plan was to have the work divided so each section of wall had a group of people assigned to it (Nehemiah 3:2-32). On top of that, he assigned everyone to work on the section of wall closest to their home (v. 23). This showed great wisdom. They wouldn't have so far to travel to work and back, they would take pride in their work for they would see it all the time, their family would see them working or loafing, and if attacked by their enemies the men wouldn't flee for their own homes but would stand where they were to protect their own homes and families. Breaking down work into manageable sections and spreading out the work load is important. Having helpers take pride in their work and being motivated by the importance of it instead of greed or fear are also key principles in getting a big job done. Can you imagine how having their names recorded in the Bible with the section of wall they rebuilt was a positive motivation to them?

Nehemiah never used failure, guilt or power to force his way. He patiently trusted God, awaited God's timing, gathered his facts, bounced his ideas off a few trusted advisors, and then implemented them. He did his best to sell the reason for what he was doing, not just force outer obedience. All these principles apply to us as husbands and fathers today. They aren't always easy to follow, and sometimes we must just pull rank and force an issue. Still, from Nehemiah we can glean some important lessons about how to face an impossible work load and accomplish what needs to be done.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

15. NEW ENCOURAGEMENT

How can I overcome discouragement?

NEHEMIAH 4:1-23; AUG-SEPT 445 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Nehemiah has arrived in Jerusalem to help them rebuild the walls, which have been in disrepair for 150 years. He rested, gathered information, and surveyed the walls in private (at night). Then he told his plan to those who shared his vision, and they helped spread the word to the people. The work on the walls had begun.

OPPOSITION TO REBUILDING God's work seldom goes forward without opposition. There are always some who will resist and oppose change and progress. This doesn't surprise us, but the fact that God doesn't immediately and completely remove all opposition often does surprise us. Nehemiah did everything right: prayer, organization, listening to and obeying God, etc. However, that doesn't guarantee that everything will flow smoothly. Actually, the opposition is part of God's plan and will. Nehemiah needs it, and so do the people, as part of their own spiritual growth and maturity.

OUTSIDE CRITICISM First, Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the Jews for trying to rebuild their walls (Nehemiah 4:1-3). They were leaders of neighboring tribes who didn't want to see Jerusalem strengthened and rebuilt.

RESPONSE OF PRAYER Nehemiah doesn't answer the criticisms or try to criticize back. Instead, he takes it all to God, asking God to deal with them (v. 4-5). He knew he was following God's directions and therefore their opposition was really to God, not him. He knew he shouldn't take it personally. There's an important lesson in that for us, too.

REASONS FOR DISCOURAGEMENT In his prayer Nehemiah said that "the strength of the laborers is giving out" (v. 10). There were several reasons they were discouraged. **1) Loss of strength** (10a) They were worn out but not near done. Elijah was discouraged when he was physically drained after the victory at Mt Carmel. **2) Loss of vision** (10b) They were becoming discouraged because of the enormity of the task still before them (v. 10b). They weren't looking at the final product but at the work load. They needed to take it one day at a time, one shovel full at a time. They saw it as an insurmountable task. **3) Loss of confidence** (10b) They were at a dangerous place: halfway done. The initial exhilaration had worn off. The motivation of seeing a job almost at its end hadn't set in. The middle of a project is a hard, discouraging place to be. **4) Loss of security** (11) They became afraid that their neighbors would come and kill them. They were fearful of the opposition and threats made against them.

DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT You can't ignore discouragement. It doesn't just go away, it gets worse. It's like driving with a flat tire. Ignoring it won't fix it! It must be dealt with head on. What did Nehemiah do to counter the discouragement the people were feeling?

1. UNIFY YOUR EFFORTS TOWARD A GOAL (13) Nehemiah took some time off from the work to reorganize, 'retool.' He reorganized the people and the work so that they could protect themselves from any possible enemy attack while working. Positive action was taken. He even

armed the women and children. This would look like a larger army to their enemies, and would certainly keep the men from running if an attack came.

2. DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE LORD (14) In addition, he challenged them to replace their fear with faith in God. They needed to look at the Lord, not the rubbish that needed to be removed nor the enemies who were threatening to attack. God alone is the One to be feared (Deuteronomy. 3:22; 20:3; 31:6). Claim God's promises, focus on the greatness of God, not the problem.

3. MAINTAIN A BALANCE IN THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS (14) Nehemiah told them to trust the Lord completely, but also armed them to fight off any attack. Faith and works. Each must be done 100%, as if they are the only one. Trust God completely. Do your best to do all you can. And do both of these at once. Our battles are spiritual. We must trust God to give us victory, but we must skillfully fight, using all the weapons at our command.

4. MAKE SURE YOU AREN'T IN IT ALONE (20) Nehemiah also planned so that if one part of the wall was attacked, a trumpet would sound and people were to rally there to help with the fight. That helped the people know they weren't in it alone. If they needed help, it would be available. We, too, need to have others we can call on when discouraged. We need those who will rally around us to help us through those times.

5. DEVELOP A "SERVING OTHERS" MINISTRY (21-22) Nehemiah wanted everyone to stay in Jerusalem at night, inside the walls where it was safe. This meant sacrifice for all. For those from without Jerusalem it meant giving up their own homes to help their brothers in the city. For those in the city it meant sharing their housing and food with others. When we serve each other's we get our eyes off of ourselves and onto others with needs. This is why Jesus so challenged His disciples to wash each other's feet.

Let's learn these lessons from Nehemiah. When opposition increases, don't get discouraged. Instead, push ahead even harder. When you face difficulties it just shows you are moving in the right direction. Any dead fish can float with the current, it takes a live fish to swim upstream against the current.

By the way, tradition says that Nehemiah himself was the hardest, most sacrificial worker of them all. He didn't expect others to do anything he wasn't willing or able to do. He set the example for them. We must do the same. We men can't sit back and expect our wives or friends to do it all. We must take the forefront in fighting discouragement in our lives and in the lives of those in our families. We must take the lead and move ahead against the enemy. We must be like Nehemiah: reorganizing, encouraging, strengthening both faith and works, using our weapons of spiritual warfare, and setting an example by being in the forefront. As men that is our responsibility. We are the men. We are to lead in the battle.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

16. NEW PROBLEMS

How should I respond when attacked from within?
NEHEMIAH 5:1-19; SEPT 445 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Work on the walls has begun. Criticism and threats from those living near Jerusalem have been handled by trusting God for help while arming themselves as they worked. Now that outside opposition has been resisted, Satan moves to his second trick – inside opposition. That can be worse in a nation, business, church or family.

PROBLEMS FROM WITHIN It seems there was a famine (Nehemiah 5:3) and therefore **food was in short supply**. This bothered the women (v. 1) as well as the men. They made their concern for their families heard. As the saying goes, “If Mamma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy!” Working on the walls kept them from working on what crops they had.

In order to get money to buy food, others were **mortgaging everything they had** to get money to buy food (v. 3). It wasn’t easy to get money for food, because most coined money went to the king’s tax (v. 4-5). Thus, inflation was high (about 50%). **Money was borrowed at a very high interest rate**.

What could a person do when all money and resources were gone? What did one have to exchange for food for his family? Just his children. Some Jews were forced to **sell a child into slavery** in order to have food to keep the other children alive (v. 5b). That was very difficult but sometimes the only way to save the lives of other children.

This really bothered the people, though. Naturally, morale was really low and this distracted the people from continuing to build the walls.

NEHEMIAH’S RESPONSE When Nehemiah found out about what was happening he was very upset. In fact, he was **very angry** (v. 6). There are times that we, as fathers and husbands, need to get angry at the sin around us, even the sin within our families. “Be angry but sin not,” Paul says. When someone gets hurt, when something unfair happens, etc., we as the leaders should be angry at it as Nehemiah was.

However, when we get angry we lash out. Nehemiah didn’t do that. Instead, he “pondered” what to do. Literally ‘ponder’ means ‘to give one’s self advice, to counsel oneself.’ He listened to God, let God speak peace and wisdom to his mind – not so he wouldn’t do something, but so he wouldn’t do the wrong thing. He wanted to do the right, positive thing, not just lash back and take revenge on those whom have hurt us.

Then he channeled his anger into a positive action to set things right. He **confronted the situation head on**. “You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!” (v. 7). Nehemiah knew that this was against God’s Word (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:35-38; Dt 23:19-20; 15:7-8). He knew what God expected in the situation and applied God’s Word to it. This is what we as men must do when problems arise within our families. Look at the situation in light of what God’s Word says and then confront the sin head on. It may be a rebellious teen, a child being cruel to siblings, a mate who does or says unloving things, or some worldly practices or attitudes that have slipped in. Whatever it is, it must be confronted.

Nehemiah then **took positive action**. He called a meeting of everyone to deal with the problem (v. 7). He told them what was wrong in what they were doing. He had been buying Jews

back from slavery, but here they were selling others into slavery (v. 8). They were willingly disobeying God.

Not only was what they were doing wrong for them, it was a **bad testimony for those watching them** (v. 9). As fathers and husbands, we are responsible for our family's testimony to those around us. Showing Jesus by our lives is the best way to attract others to Him.

Then Nehemiah gave a **specific plan to correct the situation** (10-11). He told the rich Jews, who were taking advantage of the others, to immediately give back the possessions and interest they had received. The response of the people was immediate and positive. "We will give it back!" (v. 12a) they all agreed. It was the right thing to say, but Nehemiah knew it took more than a few words to right the situation.

Because of this Nehemiah led them in **taking an oath** (12b). They needed to do more than say they'd do differently. They needed to make the commitment to God, for the sin was against God. They needed to be accountable to God. They needed God's help to keep what they promised. Nehemiah showed them the importance of keeping their promise by acting out what would happen if they didn't – they would be rejected (v. 13).

NEHEMIAH'S EXAMPLE Then Nehemiah seems to do something unexpected. He tells about what he has been doing to help (v. 14-19). He hasn't been taking his allotted government food. This is to save the locals taxes to buy such food for him. In fact, he was serving 3 meals a day to about 200 people, all at his own expense!

He didn't tax the people as was his right as governor. He could have speculated in land, confiscating or buying prime property for low prices in order to resell them for a large profit. He could have done any number of things to become rich from the circumstances, but he didn't. He set an example of servanthood.

MEN AS SERVANT LEADERS TODAY We as husbands and fathers today must take our example from Nehemiah. We must serve, not be served. Instead of thinking about ourselves, we must realize that we are to serve our family. We start this by example. It doesn't matter what is fair, who is right or what our need are. We are to follow Nehemiah's example. Even more we are to follow Jesus' example. We are to be servants.

What a privilege to be a servant to our wife or to our children. In doing so we show them Jesus. We set an example of what God is like. Who are we to expect them to be the first to give in, to yield, to show love even when hurt. If we don't set an example in that it won't happen in our family. As men God will fill us and enable us to put others first and serve. His spirit's power is available within each of us who let Him fill and use us.

Being a servant to our wives and children is perhaps the hardest thing we will have to do. It doesn't come naturally at all. Our flesh rebels against it. The world and the devil oppose it. And for good reason. There is nothing more powerful than the example of a servant leader. It can change hard hearts and get through barriers that seem insurmountable.

Be a servant leader to your family. Be Jesus to your wife and children.

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

17. NEW ENEMIES

How should I respond when personally attacked?
NEHEMIAH 6-7; SEPT-OCT 445 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Work on the walls is continuing, but not without opposition. The greed of rich Jews has caused them to take advantage of the poorer Jews in Jerusalem. Nehemiah got angry and set things straight. The enemy still doesn't stop the opposition, however. Now Nehemiah is attacked personally.

SCHEME 1: ASSASSINATION (v. 1-4) 'Almost done' is a dangerous time, for it's easy to let our guard down and coast in. It's a time when we can start patting ourselves on the back for a job well done. Pride is up, guard is down. That's when David sinned with Bathsheba. Nehemiah is almost done rebuilding the walls, but Satan's artillery is hitting closer and closer to home. Now he takes a direct hit – in fact several!

It all seems innocent enough. The enemies of the Jews invite Nehemiah to a peace conference about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Nehemiah correctly suspected treachery (v. 2b) so he refused to go. He told them his presence was needed in Jerusalem. What a good example Nehemiah is to men today! He wasn't blinded by pride and ego, or he would have gone. He didn't think he could do everything by himself (bring peace between Jews and Gentiles). He recognized that leaders are more susceptible to attack and must watch themselves closely.

He also persevered in what he knew was right. Four times they tried to lure him away (v. 4). Many men today make a good start but continued temptation or difficulties wear them down and they give in. When the enemy perseveres against us, we must persevere even more!

SCHEME 2: SLANDER (v. 5-9) When Sanballat and the other Gentile enemies of the Jews realized he wouldn't come they tried a different tactic. They tried spreading false accusation against Nehemiah, ones to get him in trouble with the authorities back in Babylon. The insinuation was that he was going to revolt against Babylon by making himself king, and the threat was that Sanballat was going to tell Artaxerxes, the king of Babylon. Of course, it was worded in such a way as to imply he was only trying to 'help' Nehemiah (v. 7) by offering to get together and talk about this. What Christian leader hasn't faced manipulation by someone who was 'only trying to help' him?

The enemy was trying to use fear to discourage him, to take the heart out of him so he wouldn't continue doing God's work. Men, is that happening to you today? Don't be surprised, it's one of Satan's best weapons against those who would serve God. Nehemiah knew he was weak against all of this, so he prayed for God's strength and protection (v. 9b). That's the place we need to turn to right away, too. There's no other place for us to turn but to God. Sometimes He allows those situations to arise just so we will turn to Him more. Why is it that prayer is so hard for some men? Jesus Himself spent hours and hours in prayer. If He needed that contact with His heavenly Father, don't we?

SCHEME 3: TREACHERY (v. 10-14) Sanballat realizes that he won't be able to lure Nehemiah out of Jerusalem in order to kill him. So instead of stopping and giving up, he gets even more deceitful. Our enemy doesn't quit, he just gets nastier and dirtier in his tactics.

Sanballat hired a priest who was a close friend of Nehemiah's to betray him. The plan was for the priest to lure him into a part of the temple where only priests could go, thus making him

subject to the judgment of God (v. 10). He did this by pretending to be thinking of Nehemiah's welfare. He encouraged Nehemiah to flee to the temple for safety and protection. He might have even said something like, "God told me to tell you to"

Nehemiah kept his mind in control of things and didn't let his emotions take over. Even though a trusted friend has betrayed him he didn't over react. He knew God's standards and principles and he knew he was no exception to them. That's one of Satan's tricks today, too. He'll have us think we are an exception to God's Word and we can get away with something the Bible forbids because of the special circumstances we are in!

Don't ever think the end justifies the means! There are no exceptions. We reap what we sow. God NEVER leads us contrary to His Word.

Even when a close, trusted friend, even a pastor (this man was a priest) gives advice that doesn't line up 100% with God's word we aren't to be misled. Adam let Eve influence him against what he knew was right and look at the consequences. There is NEVER a 'good reason' to sin! It seems there were many religious leaders who were giving wrong advice to Nehemiah (v. 14). It doesn't matter how many tell us something, it's what God and the Bible say that really matters!

How could Nehemiah stand against all this? Again, he goes to God in prayer (v. 14). He prayed when he heard the walls were broken down (1:4), about the ridicule of the workers (4:4-5), about the plot to attack the city (4:9), about the slander against him (6:9) and about the plot here (6:14).

WALLS COMPLETED Because of his faithful perseverance the walls were completed 1 month after Nehemiah first heard they were down! This victory discouraged the enemies who were trying to prevent it (v. 16). However, they didn't quit, they never do.

Tobiah, a leader of the Gentiles who, like Sanballat, was opposing the Jews, kept up a campaign of lies and threats against Nehemiah. Jewish nobles were allied with him by marriage (in disobedience to God's law) and they kept spreading his criticisms of Nehemiah among the Jews. They stayed loyal to Tobiah because they were making money through their business contracts with these Gentiles. It can be very discouraging to have friends become disloyal just over money. It's easy to become angry and bitter when that happens. Jesus faced the same thing, though, with Judas and others. We must follow His example in not letting anger build inside. We must allow ourselves to feel the hurt as hurt and work it through as hurt. That's the only way.

PEOPLE NAMED Nehemiah 7 gives the names of those who had been the first to return. It is a list similar to Ezra 2. While it might not be interesting reading to us now, it would have been if we had been living when Nehemiah wrote it or soon after. Imagine seeing the name of a friend there. Better yet, imagining seeing your own name there! Knowing that God Himself noticed and remembered was certainly very humbling as well as encouraging. It set an example for generation after generation who could look back to an ancestor who was so honored. Men, remember that God still keeps His lists and writes down our faithful deeds. He will reward and bless us for all eternity based on them. They pass on down to our children and grandchildren as well. What is God writing about you? What can you do to improve it? Do it now!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

18. NEW REVIVAL

What should I do when there is sin in my life?

NEHEMIAH 8:1 – 12:47; OCT 445 - 444 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND The walls are repaired and all the various attacks against Nehemiah and the Jews have been resisted by God's strength. Now it's time for spiritual rebuilding to begin.

This is the first recorded revival in the Bible. Nehemiah 1-7 shows the reconstruction of the walls. Nehemiah 8-13 show the reinstruction of the people. The fact that God helped them complete the wall rebuilding shows them their need of Him, and renews their hope for better things to come. They are ready to again take their place as God's covenant nation.

EZRA Ezra is the leader of the revival. He is a scribe and priest who arrived back in Jerusalem 14 years before Nehemiah. His preaching and teaching was interrupted by Nehemiah's wall-building. Now the people are ready to listen again. They are motivated to want to know more about God and serve Him. God uses both Nehemiah (civil leader) and Ezra (spiritual leader) together as a team.

Ezra is truly an outstanding man. Tradition says he knew the whole Old Testament by heart. He is credited with being the man God used to assemble the Old Testament in the form we have today. He edited the books, adding endings where they were incomplete. He wrote his own summary of history from God's perspective – 1 & 2 Chronicles. He installed the newer square Hebrew characters as the norm and standard. He is also credited with instituting the synagogue system while in Babylon. This has kept the Jewish nation together for 2,500 years. It is also the basis of the church today. We owe much to this man of God.

Anyway, there was something about the wall being rebuilt and greed being dealt with by Nehemiah that paved the way for this revival. It could have been discouraging for Ezra, who had not seen results to his preaching for 14 years, and then had his preaching interrupted by Nehemiah's building project! What a lesson is perseverance and faithfulness Ezra is!

REVIVAL When the Feast of Trumpets began (Oct 445 BC) the people requested that Ezra again teach them. They finally had an appetite to learn. Women and well as men came to learn, even children listened to Ezra. They didn't send the children off separately but taught them the deep truths of God's Word, too. For six hours a day Ezra would read and expound God's Word to them. He taught what it meant, then applied that to their present situation. He didn't entertain them, but taught the basic truths of God's Word. That's what men today need to teach to their churches and families, too! By the way, everyone stood to listen for those 6 hours. Ezra stood on a high wooden platform. Other priests whom he had trained helped him.

REVIVAL RESPONSE The people responded to God's Word in a total way that is a pattern for us today and shows what real revival is. **1. Intellectual Response** (6-8) The people mentally affirmed what Ezra said. They agreed with God and humbled themselves by bowing in worship. **2. Emotional Response** (9-12) The people repented of their sins with weeping and mourning. Revival doesn't start in our emotions but usually reaches out to touch them. RE-vival refers to bring something back to life that once had life but had lost it. We don't lose our salvation, but do loose the joy of it. When we come back to God it is a moving experience that touches all parts of our being. **3. Volitional Response** (13-18) The people decided to start obeying God again right away

by observing the Feast of Trumpets which had been neglected along with the rest of God's laws and regulations. It took 2 weeks to get everything ready, but their joy was great when they again followed God (v. 17). Why do we ever think we can find real joy apart from obedience to God? Why do we, too, continue to run after poor substitutes?

REVIVAL RESULTS When the feast was over the people still didn't go home. They wanted to stay for more teaching, fasting, confessing of sin and worship! They spent 6 hours a day there: 3 in teaching, 3 in response to that in confession and worship. How thrilled Ezra must have been! Men, God will reward your faithfulness and bring a day when you will say "It was all worth it." Persevere.

REVIVAL PRAYER An example of their prayers during the revival is given in Nehemiah 9:5-38. In fact, it's the longest recorded prayer in the Bible. The pattern of the prayer is to show God's grace and power (similar to Psalm 78, 105-106). God's power and grace are shown by His work in history: creation (6), Abraham's Covenant (7-8), Egypt and the Red Sea (9-11), through the desert (12-21), during the conquest of Canaan (22-25), through the judges (26-28), through the prophets (29-31) and in their present situation (32-37). This is an excellent pattern to follow in praising God. Use these very words yourself to praise Him. In your own life, go through everything you can think of from your birth that shows God's grace and care. That is not only a great way to worship God, but it is a tremendous faith-builder!

REVIVAL COVENANT In response to God's great care and grace, the people make a binding agreement (9:38) to put God first in all things. They put it in writing and signed it, always a good practice to help us take seriously our promises to God as well as a way of helping us remembering past promises. Nehemiah was the first to sign (10:1), followed by 83 other men. As men we must take the lead spiritually, not letting our wives or children do that. We must be in front trusting God and challenging them to do the same. We must set an example for them to follow, not just try to keep up with them.

Following the pattern of Near East covenants, this one starts with a preamble (9:5-6), a historical prologue (9:7-37), a record of acceptance of the covenant (9:38-10:29) and then a list of stipulations (10:30-39). They promised God they would not intermarry with unbelievers (10:30), that they would keep the Sabbath Day and year (10:31), that they would support the temple financially (10:32-33), that they would provide wood and other necessities for the burnt altar fire (10:34), that they would give of their firstfruits to God (10:35) and that they would be faithful in paying their tithes to God (10:36). Notice that some are deeply spiritual promises (deep Sabbath, tithe), others deal with their relationships (not intermarry), and still others with the mundane activities of daily life (wood for the fire). God cares about all these areas, and real revival results in change in all areas of our daily lives. Sometimes it seems like God doesn't send revival today because He knows we really don't want to change all that much. We want the spiritual highs that come but aren't willing to pay the price of a changed life. Are you?

JERUSALEM POPULATED Now that Jerusalem's wall is rebuilt and God is back in first place, lots are cast to see who will move into Jerusalem to populate it (11:1-2). There wasn't enough room for everyone. Those so chosen have their names recorded in Nehemiah 11-12. Then the wall is dedicated with prayers and a parade (12:27-43). What an example of revival this is!

Old Testament Men – III. EZRA, NEHEMIAH: Be a New Man

19. NEW CHALLENGES

How can I stay faithful when life keeps throwing challenges at me?
NEHEMIAH 13:1-30; Malachi; 443-432 BC; JERUSALEM

BACKGROUND Jews have returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. The walls have been rebuilt and the people revived. Now come the final events before the Old Testament closes and 400 years of silence come until John the Baptizer steps on the scene. Too bad it couldn't have been a happier end!

NEHEMIAH LEAVES Nehemiah was recalled to Persia (13:6) April 1, 433 BC. His brother replaced him while gone. The people soon slipped into sin. The groundwork have been set before he left. Revival doesn't last forever. In fact, for a revival period to last through a whole generation is rare. Each generation needs its own reviving, it can't coast on its parent's relationship with God.

Nothing is recorded about the 11 years since the revival to where we pick up the story in Nehemiah 13. By looking between the lines and also at Malachi we can build a pretty clear picture, though, of a people who slowly drifted back into their old sinful ways. Once established, sinful patterns are very hard to break!

ENTER MALACHI Malachi lived and ministered during the time of Nehemiah, who was the leader. Malachi was the prophet who preached to the people. Almost 90% of the book was spoken directly by God. The book concludes with a call to repentance. This book is a link, a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.

COMPASSION (1:1-5) The book opens with God clearly declaring His love for His people, but they doubted His love. "How can you love us?" they asked in their doubt and self-pity. God answers by saying His actions in the past prove His love. No matter what they did or didn't do, God still loved them. He wants His people to feel loved and secure and to respond to that love by loving Him in return.

COMPLAINT (1:6 - 3:15) God expects and deserves the total honor and devotion of His people, but often He doesn't receive that. In Malachi's day the leaders were leading the people astray because of their unfaithfulness. While outwardly claiming to follow God, they married unbelieving Gentiles and let them bring their heathen idols into Israel. Throughout the nation the family was breaking down and divorce was common. Because God hadn't judged their life styles they said God approved of what they were doing! They didn't support God's work and workers financially as they were commanded to do. They were prideful and arrogant. They needed to repent, to "change their mind" and reverse their direction. They needed to do a U-turn, an about-face, in attitude and action. If they don't there will be judgment from God.

CONDEMNATION (3:16 - 4:6) There is a faithful minority in Israel and God promises to remember them even though they will suffer the consequences the whole nation faces. The majority, though, need to repent or suffer judgment. Unfortunately, they didn't repent when Malachi preached or even later. The book ends with a promise of coming judgment unless God's messenger's message of repentance is accepted. Mal 4:5-6 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

This prophet is to be like Elijah. He will preach a message of repentance like Malachi did. If the people repent, they will be forgiven and restored. God so deeply desires this that He will soon send His Messiah, but first He will send this messenger to prepare the way for Him (3:1-6). With this call to repentance and promise of a coming messenger the Old Testament closes. Four hundred years later the New Testament opens with John, who fulfilled Malachi's prophecies, coming preaching the same message of repentance.

God's message of repentance is still being delivered today. He wants and deserves our whole being, not just some parts some times. Anything less must be repented of and changed. God still loves His people and welcomes them home. The longer we put off repentance the more we will have to repent of and the less time to repent in!

NEHEMIAH RETURNS We don't know what happened to Nehemiah in Persia, just that the king needed him back there. A year later he was able to return to Jerusalem – April 19, 432. The first thing he did when he saw the people had drifted back into sin was just what Ezra had done to begin the previous revival. He read God's Word to them (Nehemiah 13:1-2). He read passages that dealt with the sins the people were guilty of. This showed that it was God they were disobeying, not Nehemiah. A man must take a stand against sin, even by those in his own family. He must do it lovingly and by standing behind God's Word.

Sin 1: Gentiles in the Temple (13:1-9) Tobiah, one of the Gentile leaders who had opposed the building of the walls, was able to convince the high priest to let him have one of the temple store rooms for his own merchandise. This was in direct violation of God's law which forbid Gentiles from entering that part of the temple. Nehemiah got righteously indignant at this compromise. Again, people were putting profit before God's law.

Sin 2: Not Tithing (13:10-14) Greed again is behind this sin, for instead of sharing with the priests the people kept all their money and crops for themselves. Therefore, the priests had to work to feed themselves and weren't available to carry out their spiritual duties.

Sin 3: No Sabbath (13:15-22) In order to have more time to earn a profit, God's Sabbath rest was being neglected. We certainly have secularized the Sabbath principle today as well. It's important for men to still lead their families in a day of rest and worship.

Sin 4: Intermarriage (13:23-28) Despite their promise to not do so, the people again marry Gentiles who have not converted to Judaism. The principle of the unequal yoke must be observed, or the results are disastrous. Nehemiah was furious, hitting and pulling their hair. Didn't they learn from Solomon's evil example?

Nehemiah responded with prayer again (13:29), as he always did whatever the situation he faced. Then he purified the priests and made provisions for their needs so they could spend their time ministering to people. Nehemiah knew wrong had to be dealt with, sometimes severely. It couldn't be ignored or avoided. Action must be taken, but action backed up by lots of prayer. Men today must do the same thing. Either we pray and don't take a strong stand, or we take a strong stand without praying enough. Learn from Nehemiah, it takes both for anything to succeed! God bless you as you serve Him as a man of God!

Old Testament Men

IV. MOSES and the Deliverance from Egypt

Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Esther

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Old Testament Men – IV. MOSES & the Deliverance from Egypt

1. SLAVERY & OPPRESSION

EXODUS 1:1-22

A visitor to Israel saw a shepherd bringing flocks into their fold. All walked on their own but one, which he carried because it had a broken leg. When asked how the leg got broken, the shepherd said he had broken it himself because the sheep was stubborn and kept wandering away from the shepherd. With its leg broken, the sheep was dependent on the shepherd for everything: food, water and transportation. The shepherd said that by the time the leg healed the sheep will have learned to trust the shepherd and obey him, not wandering off on its own any more.

You know, God does that same thing to His people – only we don't learn so quickly! He's been doing that throughout history, up to today. A clear example of it is with the Jews in Egypt.

INTO EGYPT No nation on earth is so mixed up with the history of Israel as Egypt. From patriarchal times through today, Egypt and Israel have been closely connected. When God formed a nation from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph He told them to stay pure, to not marry unbelievers. This was necessary for Him to grow a nation of His people. Instead, they intermarried with the Gentiles around them and their faith in God fades as they brought idols and other gods into their families. Thus, God had to intervene to save them from themselves.

Through Joseph and the famine, He had all 70 of them move into Egypt (Exodus 1:1-5). There they had to stay pure and marry only among themselves, for the Egyptians were very prejudiced towards them and would not intermarry among them. This was God's loving way of teaching them to obey and depend on their Shepherd (Hebrews 12:5-10; Revelation. 3:19). It was, in effect, a "time out" for the nation of Israel. The prodigal son had to go into the world to learn his lesson the hard way. Often we must, too.

IN EGYPT Eventually Joseph and his contemporaries died (Ex 1:6) and the nation of Israel grew (Ex 1:7) from 70 to 2 ½ million over 400 years. God has said He would make a great nation of them, and God always keeps His promises. However, Egypt wasn't a vacation spot but a furnace to refine and mature them. They were there to grow spiritually. When they didn't God kept gradually turning up the heat more and more.

PLAN 1: LABOR CAMPS When a new dynasty arose in Egypt which was antagonistic to outsiders, the Jews felt the brunt of his persecution (Ex 1:8). In the Bible, Egypt is a type, a picture of the world system under Satan's (Pharaoh's) control. It is the place of material wealth and power (Hebrews 11:26) and fleshly wisdom and false religion (Ex 8:7; I Ki 4:30). It appeals to the flesh with its leeks, garlic and onions. God's manna is not found there. It persecutes God's people (Deuteronomy 4:20) and is eventually overthrown by God's judgment (Ex 12:29; 15:4-7).

Pharaoh took out his hatred of foreigners by oppressing the Jews. Of course, Satan is always behind anti-Semitism just as he is behind persecution of Christians. If he can't get at God directly, he attacks those He loves – His children.

To keep them from growing larger (and joining with enemies of Egypt to overthrow the government) he put them to hard slave labor (Ex 1:9-14). This would weaken them, discourage and disorganize them, and also help his economy. God allowed it to happen to the Jews so they would turn to Him for help. He did it for their benefit, because He loved them (Psalm 119:67, 95).

God was behind all this. He even foretold that they would be slaves in Egypt (Genesis 15:13). In order to cut loose the bonds that bound them to Egypt, the sharp knife of affliction must be used. Pharaoh was God's instrument in weaning them from the Egyptian world and helping them take up their own place as God's people.

A little girl was traveling on a train, romping up and down the aisles, free from care and worry. Suddenly the train entered a long, dark tunnel. She was terrified and immediately fled to her father's lap as fast as she could.

All of us sometimes need a tunnel to send us back to God's lap. Slavery in Egypt was such an event, only they didn't run back to God. Even so, God kept His promises and they continued to grow stronger (Ex 1:12), so Pharaoh came up with another plan.

PLAN 2: SUBTLE GENOCIDE Pharaoh turns up the heat by ordering the midwives to kill all male babies (Exodus 1:15-16). It was a simple matter of shutting off their breath while being born and having them born dead. By killing the males there would still be women as slaves to work for Pharaoh, but no soldiers to fight against them. Obviously Satan was behind it all – trying to destroy the line of Christ (the same as he had babies killed in Bethlehem).

The plan didn't work, though, for the midwives put God before Pharaoh and didn't kill the male babies (Exodus 1:17-19). God limits Satan's opposition, and uses it for His purposes (Romans 8:28). God controls and limits Satan's efforts against His people, using it for His purposes. Here is was to cause the Jews to turn back to God.

The people continued to increase, as He had promised, and the midwives were rewarded by God for their obedience to Him (Exodus 1:20-21). But Pharaoh/Satan isn't done yet!

PLAN 3: OVERT GENOCIDE Then Pharaoh turned up the heat, ordering that every male born be cast into the Nile River. Gradually the pressure gets worse, all to get the Jews to turn back to God. God allows painful experiences to come into the lives of His children when they drift from Him so they will turn back to Him.

One day a workman was stuck on a high ledge of a building. He needed to get the attention of someone below so they could send for help for him. He called and no one heard. He dropped a little pebble but it fell unnoticed. A larger one wasn't felt by the person it hit, either. He kept dropping larger and larger objects until finally someone felt the hit and looked up. That's what God was doing to the Jews. He was dropping larger and larger objects on them so they would look up and He'd get their attention. He does that today, to us, as well. How big an object does He have to drop to get your attention? Could He be trying to get your attention about something now.

Unfortunately, it's going to take another 80 years before the Jews finally look up. Then they will be ready to obey God and follow Moses out of Egypt.

Please understand that not all suffering is discipline from God. You should know in your heart if things are right between you and God or if there is something there that needs attending to. His Spirit will convict you of anything wrong. Make sure you don't rationalize, justify or explain away what His Spirit may be convicting you of. If He isn't showing you anything then there is nothing to confess, but if there is something between you and God please confess it now. Remember, "All things DO work together for the good of those who love the Lord" (Romans 8:28).

Old Testament Men – IV. MOSES & the Deliverance from Egypt

2. MOSES' BIRTH

EXODUS 2:1-9

Sometimes God makes everything as dark as possible just so the light may shine through more brilliantly. Ishmael must faint before Hagar is led to water. Joseph must go into slavery before his family can be preserved. Daniel must go into the lions' den before being made the number two man in the nation. The early church had to be persecuted before it grew. We must face trials to stretch and mature us. The same was true when Moses was born.

MOSES HIDDEN FROM PHARAOH Amram was a grandson of Levi and Moses' father (Ex 6:20). He was the 3rd generation in Egypt, making Moses the 4th – when God said He would deliver them (Genesis 15:16). Jochebed was Moses' mother (Ex 6:20). They trusted God and lived normal lives in times of extreme danger and trials. They married and started a family while in slavery and male babies were being killed. They hid Moses for 3 months after he was born, for he was something very special about him (Ex 2:2).

This brought a great risk to everyone in the family, including Aaron (4) and Miriam (12). Still they hid him by faith (Hebrews 11:23). Most of their neighboring Jews were apostate and idolatrous, but Amram and Jochebed had a strong faith in God. Maybe their faith wasn't as 'glamorous' as stopping lions' mouths or marching through fire, but it was just as great. It wasn't a once-and-done, spur-of-the-moment faith. It was a planned activity every minute of the day and night for 3 months. As God was allowing the pressure to come on the Jews to turn them back to Him (see article 1), some were responding and returning to God.

But before long they could no longer hide their baby. As he grew he cried louder and louder. Jealous neighbors were sure to find him, or spies among them would hear, or even a periodical house search by the Egyptians would find him. Thus, they came up with another plan. This didn't mean they lost faith, for using common sense doesn't mean we don't have faith. Being reckless and presumptuous isn't a sign of faith. Faith does overcome carnal fear, but not common sense. They made some wise decisions and didn't 'test' God by foolish actions. We drive carefully, watch our health, lock our doors and look both ways before crossing streets. Is that lack of faith?

MOSES PROTECTED BY PHARAOH What a plan they came up with to preserve Moses! At first it seems strange to put him in a basket and float him in the river (Exodus 2:3-4), but when we look at their thinking it seems to make perfect sense. Let's develop the story and see what was really happening.

The 'basket' they made was woven reeds. I guess this makes Moses the first 'basket-care' in the Bible – but not the last! The word translated 'basket' is really the Hebrew word for 'ark.' It is also used of Noah's ark and the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle – both places of protection and deliverance. That it was covered over with tar and pitch is also significant. 'Tar' was mud from the Nile which was very hard when dried. 'Pitch' was mineral tar, waterproofing. It is the same word used for 'ransom' in the Bible - a picture of Christ's atonement. Thus this 'ark' is a picture of Christ's atonement as being our deliverance and redemption. What a beautiful picture this is, but there's more. Many years ago, the director of Standard Oil Company read this verse and knew that where there was tar and pitch on the surface there was oil underneath. He drilled there and found much oil, with 30 wells soon functioning there. That shows the amazing accuracy of the Bible.

Back to our story. Notice the text says Miriam put him in the reeds by the bank – right where he'd be found! He wasn't floated out in the water, as if this would hide him. He would drown or starve to death – and people would certainly hear his screams when he got hungry. No, there was more to the plan than that.

For one thing, this was the only branch of the Nile that wasn't infected with crocodiles and therefore safe (Psalms 78:12-13). Thus, baby boys thrown into the river weren't drown, they were eaten by crocodiles – as an offering to their crocodile gods. Isn't it ironic that the way God chose to save Moses from death in the Nile was by putting him into the Nile? The world and Satan's instrument of death became God's means of life – just like with the cross and Jesus. Worldly wisdom says to run from the Nile, but God says "I'll use their evil for my own purpose" (Romans 8:28). Maybe what He is doing in your life doesn't seem to make sense, that He is leading you in the wrong direction. Trust that He knows what He is doing! That's what Miriam did.

Miriam risked her own life to help those in her family. That's how families need to work together. She wasn't watching to see if he was found, the plan was to put him where he would be found. They put the basket in the path where they knew Pharaoh's daughter would come about that time that day. They wanted her to find Moses!

It seems she was coming for a religious ritual (Ex 2:5-6) – that isn't where she'd go for a bath, it was way too muddy and public a place. Moses was crying and making a real racket. When she looked at him she knew he was Hebrew. She could probably tell by the material he was wrapped in. Also, when a servant changed his diaper to stop the screaming, they could see he was circumcised – something the Egyptians abhorred and never did. But then why did she keep him, why not throw him back into the river as her father commanded?

Here's where Amram and Jochebed's plan and faith came in. They must have known something of the princess. Some say they worked on the grounds and that's how they knew her habits and their way around. They knew she had a kind heart, and trusted God to touch it. They knew that Egyptians believed strongly in life after death, based on the record of their deeds done during life (one of Satan's oldest lies). One of the most important considerations was how they treated helpless babies. To make it even more certain, and to explain the reason they chose to put Moses in the Nile to be found, we need to understand some Egyptian history. The great Egyptian pharaoh Sargon I of Akkad, had been placed in a basket of reeds covered with pitch and put him in the river. Pharaoh found him and raised him as he own son, to be the next Pharaoh. Pharaoh's daughter knew the story, and would see history repeating itself.

The plan worked! Major events in history often turn on small hinges. Because of this act God's promises and prophecies will be kept. Pharaoh's daughter will be heart-broken and Egypt's power crushed. The Jews will be delivered from Egypt to their own land.

Now here's why Miriam was waiting. A diaper change is a start, but a hungry baby won't stop screaming until fed. Babies were nursed in those days – there were no bottles. The princess and her servants were unable to feed the baby, so what to do? Up steps Miriam, who as a servant working there would be permitted access to the area, and offers a wet nurse to solve their problems (Ex 2:7-9). Who better than a Hebrew wet nurse, for an Egyptian woman wouldn't want to nurse a Jewish baby, and it was against the law!

Notice how marvelously God works? Moses is saved alive, his own mother is allowed to keep and raise him, and she is actually PAID by the Egyptian government to raise him! Is that wonderful or what? God does take care of His own in times of adversity, despite what enemies may try to do (Proverbs, 15:6). Trust Him to take care of you in your situation, no matter how impossible or ridiculous it may seem! God takes care of basket cases today, too!

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3. MOSES' FIRST 40 YEARS

EXODUS 2:10

The US Army Naval War College has a course known as “Command and Decision” to teach officers how to make decisions. One class was talking about the importance and difficulty of making sound decisions under pressure. A visiting officer from a small foreign navy was sitting in one day and spoke up: “You talk about decisions. I was 700 miles to sea in my destroyer when I received a dispatch from my country which said, ‘We have just had a revolution. Which side are you on?’”

That decision has major consequences. Naturally one would want to go with the winners. Moses had a similar decision to make. He could choose to go with the winners (Egyptians masters) or loses (Jewish slaves). The decision had eternal consequences.

MOSES' DELIVERANCE (TO EGYPT) Moses was raised by his mother, Jochebed, and father, Amram, until he was about 4 years. At that time, he was weaned and turned over to Pharaoh's daughter to be raised. Still, those years formed the rest of his life (Proverbs 22:6). The faith his family instilled in him lasted and was the basis for his life-changing decision. The first few years in life are very important in planting the seeds for future spiritual growth and faith.

It was actually the Princess that gave him the name “Moses” (Ex 2:10) meaning “born of the Nile God” in Egyptian but “drawn out of the water” in Hebrew. Years later the passive “drawn out of the water” will change to the active “the one who draws out of the water” as Moses leads the people through the Red Sea. From the delivered he will become the deliverer.

MOSES' DEVELOPMENT (IN EGYPT) The rest of the first 40 years of Moses' life were spend growing up in Egypt (Acts 7:21-22). Moses was raised in Thebes, a city of splendor with the finest cultural benefits in the world. He had the best education and was raised to be the next pharaoh. Hebrew tradition, Josephus and archaeology fill in some details about these years. It seems Moses was an excellent athlete, perhaps the best in Egypt. He had a very pleasing personality. He mastered Egyptian hieroglyphics in 40 years, a feat which usually takes a lifetime. He also could read and write in Akkadian and Ugaritic cuneiform. He was a fast learner, brilliant, a real genius in many areas. He would go on to write more of the Bible than any other person, 25% of it (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Job). He was reputedly a tremendous public speaker and also very advanced in mathematics (Egypt was very advanced in this, even beyond some things we can do today) and music. He designed some of the great cities of Egypt. He had a great reputation as a soldier, too.

Reportedly the Ethiopians conquered north Africa and moved against Egypt. One by one Egypt's four armies marched to face them, and one by one they were destroyed, leaving Egypt open to their advance. It seems Moses gathered the remnants of these armies and the national guard, organized them, and marched against the Ethiopians and defeated them. Of course, this made him a great public hero! The world was at his feet!

With the possible exception of Solomon, no other Old Testament person was superior to Moses in training or ability. He was one of the greatest men who ever lived, a real genius. Charleston Heston in the “Ten Commandments” actually falls short of the real man!

In order to correctly understand all that was involved in Moses' decision, we need to know something about Pharaoh's family. First of all, “Pharaoh” is a title, not a name. It's like ‘king.’ It actually means ‘crocodile’, which was a sacred animal. Not too long after Joseph and his family

moved into Egypt a group of foreigners called 'Hyksos' took over key government positions. They were disliked, actually hated, by the Egyptians. Ahmose I drove them out and brought power back to the Egyptians. His son, Amenhotep I, was the ruler who put the Jews into slavery. Hatred for all foreigners (non-Egyptians) was strong.

Thutmose I, his son, was Pharaoh when Moses was born. He didn't have a son by his official wife, just a daughter Hatshepsut. He did have sons by concubines, but they weren't in line for the throne. Hatshepsut, who found Moses when she was a young princess, was forced to marry one of the concubine's sons, who was called Thutmose 2. She was a strong woman who was the real power behind the throne but she, like her mother, failed to produce a son as an heir. She had a daughter, Nefrure. It seems she actually poisoned her husband and took over the throne herself. The people followed her because she was of royal blood and a strong leader. She was the first great queen in history, superior to the better-known Cleopatra.

She legally adopted Moses and groomed him to be the next Pharaoh. His only rival for the throne was an illegitimate son of Thutmose I. Because of this Hatshepsut hated this person and did all she could to keep him from the throne. History will prove that he, Thutmose III, would go on to be one of the greatest Pharaoh's in Egyptian history but Moses was more gifted and far more popular. All he needed was to marry Nefrure to make him legally the Pharaoh. History tells us that he deeply loved her and she greatly loved him. According to Jewish law he couldn't legally marry and take the throne until he was 40, and Hatshepsut was holding the throne open for him until he reached that age. Now the state is set for Moses' decision.

When he turns 40 Moses must decide. Why not be Pharaoh and help the Jews that way? The Egyptian Pharaoh was also the priest of Heliopolis, trained in the Temple of the Sun there. To be Pharaoh would be to present himself as a god and to lead the people in worship of false gods. It was all the world had to offer to the maximum: all the wine, women and song, versus faithfulness to the God of the Hebrews which his family had taught him about during the first few years of his life. Take all the world had to offer and be a god, or turn it all down – what a choice?

MOSES' DECISION (FROM EGYPT) Moses' faith in God caused him to turn it all down (Hebrews. 11:24-26). It's one thing to decide to give it all up to follow God when you are on the bottom, but to do so when you are on the top is much greater. And we think we have some hard decisions, some things to give up for God! Moses looked beyond the day to the future. He made his decision based on what would be best 100, 1,000 even 1,000,000 years from then. That's an important part of maturity, not doing what is easiest and most pleasurable for the moment but what is best for eternity.

Moses wasn't satisfied with just having salvation, he was committed to living for God in this life. That's the difference between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is free for us; Jesus paid the price and all we do is accept the gift. Discipleship does cost us everything. It means giving up our own pleasure now to serve Jesus and do what He wants, to live for His kingdom not ours. Salvation is for eternity; discipleship determines who we will live for in this life. God wants and needs us to accept salvation but then make the commitment to be disciples.

Moses knew he had only one life to live, and NOTHING he could gain in this life for himself was better than serving God and living in light of eternity. He now has no regrets. What about you? Whose kingdom comes first for you? When you get to heaven, will you have regrets if you keep living as you are? NOW is the time to do something about that.

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4. MOSES' SECOND 40 YEARS

EXODUS 2:11-25

Have you ever watched a child trying to get a knot out of its shoelace? He will pull here and there with all his might. What happens? He just makes it worse. Only when he realizes he can't do it on his own will he turn to a parent for help and then the knot will come out. This is true in our lives, too. It was true of Moses as well.

Moses made a great decision to give up the throne to Egypt as well as the woman he loved so he could stay faithful to God. But then he developed a knot in his life. The more he pulled at it the worse it got until, finally, he took it to his heavenly Father for help. Let's see how this all developed for Moses.

A NEW KNOT We are always very vulnerable to defeat after a great victory. Following through on his commitment to serve God and identify with His people, Moses acted quickly. He killed an Egyptian who was beating a Jewish slave (Exodus 2:11-12). He knew it was wrong for he looked around to make sure no one saw him and he hid his body in the sand to cover up his sin. He wanted to help God, but wasn't doing it God's way with God's strength. It was Moses' plan and Moses' strength, and it backfired!

Moses was guilty of murder, as was Paul (both leading writers and theologians, Moses of the Old Testament and Paul of the New Testament). Covering up the sin didn't eradicate it. Man has been trying to cover up his sin from Adam on. Think of David. Think of President Nixon. Sin leaves its mark.

A NEW DIRECTION Moses expected the Jews to respond to his actions on their behalf but instead rejected his sacrifice for them (Ex 2:13-14; Acts 7:27-28). Israel isn't ready for deliverance. The heat has to be turned up higher. Both the nation as a whole and Moses have lessons to learn before they are ready to be in God's perfect will.

Thutmose III, Moses' long-time rival for the throne and the new husband of the woman Moses loved (and whom Moses loved), found a perfect excuse to get rid of Moses – kill him for murder (Ex 2:15; Acts 7:29). Somehow word had gotten to him of Moses' rash act. Sin will find you out. No one is immune to its consequences, no matter what you have given up to follow Jesus. Moses' decision to follow God puts him in the position to be trained and taught by God, and that's next on the agenda for Moses. To save his life Moses runs away from Egypt.

A NEW COUNTRY Geographically there weren't many directions for Moses to go. He fled southeast to the area of Mt Sinai, at the bottom of the Sinai Peninsula (Ex 2:15). It is very likely he knew the area, having traveled there to oversee Egyptian mining operations in the area. Also, he may have been aware that there were those living in the area who were followers of the true God. He would end up living with one such family.

A NEW FAMILY Again Moses has an opportunity to help the oppressed (Ex 2:16-17). This time there is no murder, no looking around and hiding his actions. Male shepherds are taking advantage of some female shepherds, using water they drew from the well to water their sheep. Now he has nothing to gain personally, he just does it because it is right.

God uses this to bring him into the family of Reuel, a follower of God (Ex 2:18-20). He married his oldest daughter, Zipporah (Ex 2:21). He finds himself with a new family (Ex 2:22), new country and new opportunity. God isn't punishing him, but educating him.

A NEW EDUCATION At 40 years of age, after all he has gone through, Moses now finds himself a shepherd. For the next 40 years he will lead a herd of sheep. Little did he know that at the end of those 40 years God would have him leading a people worse than sheep – the Jews. They will come to this same place. God is now teaching him the geography of the area so he will know it when he leads the Jews there. God is beginning a new phase in Moses' education.

Moses has lots of knowledge, not God is teaching him wisdom. He needs to learn to do God's work God's way. With all his responsibilities and activities in Egypt, Moses probably didn't have much opportunity for time alone with God. Now he will have 40 years in the wilderness, traveling from water hole to water hole with his sheep. Perhaps God allows us to find ourselves in a desert so we will spend more time with Him, learning what He wants to teach us.

All the luxuries of Egypt are gone in the desert. It is hot, sandy, dry and rocky. Old patterns and habits need to change for Moses to be used by God. He must learn to be content with just God. He had no way of knowing he would ever leave the desert. He must have assumed, and rightly so, that he would be there the rest of his life.

Obviously God is trying to teach Moses' patience. In Egypt he went ahead on his own and killed the Egyptian. Now he will spend 40 years, from age 40 to 80, his most productive years, taking care of sheep in a desert. For 40 years he will learn patience. All together God is training Moses for 80 years. God is quite patient, in no hurry at all. We must be the same.

All of this must have been very humbling for Moses. From the grandeur of Pharaoh's court and the adulation of the whole nation, now he sits alone with sheep. What will it take for God to humble us? He can't use us until He does.

The lessons Moses must have learned during those years! He got his B. S. degree (Back Side of the desert). Moses really learned about God during that time. Reuel must have taught much. God used him to write down the story of Job during this time. What lessons that must have had for him!

A NEW BEGINNING God is a God of new beginnings. If you have failed God, I mean REALLY failed Him, God will use that to train and mature you for a new beginning. Even if you haven't failed God, He will put everyone He is going to use through a personally tailored training program. God found a desert for Moses (Deuteronomy 32:10). He will find a desert for you, too. There God will spend time with you, train you, teach you patience and humility, and prepare you for upcoming service. In doing so He'll give you a new start, a new change.

He did this with Moses and Abraham, with Jacob and David, with Peter and with Paul. Abraham became a 'friend of God' after being a coward and liar. Jacob started as a 'chisler' but became the 'Prince with God.' Jonah was very disobedient, but was used to lead the greatest revival ever. David was an adulterer and murdered, but then became 'am man after God's own heart.' Peter denied Jesus, then led the early church. Paul murdered Christians, then became the greatest missionary ever.

He'll get the knot out of your life when you let Him. Then he'll teach you what you need to keep that from happening again. Jeremiah 18 explains how God, our great Potter, will take a vessel that is misshapen or marred and remake it into a thing of beauty. He doesn't reject it and throw it away, but transforms it by His hands into something beautiful and useful. Let Him do so with you.

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5. THE BURNING BUSH

EXODUS 3:1-4:17

majority of those who have no church involvement. But look at our country: the crime, hatred and morality show that belief in God is far different than obedience to God.

That is nothing new today. It was true on Moses, day too. In fact, it was true of Moses himself. He firmly believed in God, but he didn't always obey Him. God had put Moses in a desert for 40 years, turning up the heat on him so He would follow God. At first it didn't seem to be working. The same could be said for the Jews in Egypt.

THE LOCATION Moses is now 80 years old. He spent the first 40 years of his life in Egypt learning the world's knowledge and skills. Then he spent 40 years in the desert shepherding sheep learning God's wisdom. Now it's time to put it to work. God meets him as he is shepherding near Mt Sinai (Ex 3:1).

THE BUSH It wasn't unusual to see a dry, dead bush burst into flames in the hot, dry air of the desert. It would flair up and soon be gone. But when the one Moses was watching kept burning and burning it got Moses' attention (Ex 3:2). Of course, it doesn't take much to get one's attention when sitting around the same desert day after day (Ex 3:3). When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, Moses really started paying attention (Ex 3:4). "Here I am," Moses answers. That's what God is looking for from Moses: availability. Moses looks at his ability but God doesn't care about our ability, only or availability.

THE REVELATION As a sign of respect, Moses was told to remove his sandals (Ex 3:5). Where ever God is, the place is holy. Moses was in the presence of God almighty. It was His Shekinah glory that was in the bush, no ordinary fire. Then God reminds Moses of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6) and says He is ready to fulfill them at this time (Ex 3:7-9). God's people had forgotten Him, but He hadn't forgotten them. Things were bad for them, but things were about to get much worse. God would deliver, but they had to be willing to let Him.

THE COMMISSION God tells Moses that He will now do what Moses tried on his own to do 40 years earlier, but this time it will succeed (Ex 3:10). "I will send you," God says. This is why success is guaranteed. All He needs is for Moses to be available for God to work through him. It's not Moses' ability but availability. To God, any bush will do. It's the fire in the bush, not the bush itself. "My grace is sufficient," God says. "You tried in our own strength and failed, Moses. Now let me do the work through you." But Moses isn't so willing.

He should have said, "You bet I'll go! I'm sorry about last time and I appreciate another change. This time I'll trust you, just use me!" But Moses doesn't say that. At least you'd have thought he'd say "At last! It's about time I get to do something worthwhile, after all the time I've wasted watching these sheep!" He doesn't say that, either. What he does say, in effect, is "No."

Was he afraid to take the risk, choosing instead to stay safe and secure in a familiar environment? Had he lost zeal and become apathetic, in a rut? Was he thinking only of himself and no longer willing to sacrifice to help God's people? Was he afraid of rejection again?

THE OBJECTIONS **1. Who am I?** Moses' first response is to question God's choice (Ex 3:11). He doesn't oppose God delivering the Jews, but why did God choose Him to do it? God tells Moses that He will be with him (Exodus 3:12). It's not that God needs Moses; it's that Moses needs to do this as the next step in His growth and spiritual maturity. God doesn't ask Moses for His sake but for Moses' sake. Moses needs to do it for himself. The next step in his training is practice trusting God for more than a few sheep.

2. What's Your name? Then Moses, still thinking only of himself, says he is afraid he won't know what to say if the people don't believe that God sent him (Ex 3:13). It sounds very similar to the excuse we often use to not witness. God reminds Moses that He is in charge (Ex 3:14-22). He explains that He is Almighty God of the universe. He has everything planned and is in charge of each detail. His plan will be done!

3. What if they don't believe? "What if" is the worry-wart's motto. Moses is worried, fearful, thinking only of himself (Ex 4:1). What if he is rejected again? Moses hasn't forgotten the pain of last time. In response God gave Moses 3 signs that he could use to convince the Jews that God was with them (Ex 4:2-9). First Moses, rod turned into a snake. Then God told him to pick it up by the tail. Anyone familiar with snakes, as Moses was, would know you pick it up behind the head so it can't turn and bite you. Moses obeyed God and the snake turned back to his rod. Second God turned Moses' hand leprous – a deadly and incurable affliction. Moses knew he was as good as dead – a slow and painful death where he'd have to avoid any contact with any other people the rest of his life. God then healed His hand, showing His greatness to Moses. Finally, God turned some water to blood. What more would Moses need to convince the people that God was with him. It truly wasn't Moses's ability God wanted, just his availability.

4. I can't talk well. Moses still thinks of himself, underselling the gifts God has given him and focusing on his ability (Ex 4:10). He was a good speaker (Acts 7:22). God reminded Moses that He had made Moses' mouth and could put the necessary words there at the necessary time (Ex 4:11-12). Moses would only have to trust God. Moses was just to be the vessel, the mouthpiece. Unfortunately, Moses hasn't learned his lesson yet.

5. Send someone else. "Do it, but use someone else!" Moses says (Ex 4:13). "Stop asking me so I won't have to keep saying 'No.'" This is the final stray. God gets angry, very angry at Moses (Ex 4:14-17). He's done trying to work with him. "OK," God says, "I'll let you off the hook and send Aaron instead." Moses must have felt relieved, but it turned out that was a tragic mistake for Moses.

For one thing, Moses is now in God's permissive will, not His perfect will. For another thing, Moses lost the priesthood to Aaron and his family. Instead of Moses' sons and descendants being the priestly family, that privilege went to Aaron.

Worst of all, Moses had to put up with Aaron's blunders and sins. He eventually got so disgusted with him that he went ahead and did the speaking himself anyway. He could talk – he just didn't want to!

THE LESSON What about you? Does God have someone He wants you to speak to? Is there something He wants you to do? What excuses are you using? Are you too busy? Do you think you won't know what to say? Are you afraid of being rejected or criticized? Is there some past hurt you haven't gotten over? Are you fearful - a worry wart? Remember, God wants your availability, not your ability. He doesn't care about ability – He can give or take that at will. He wants availability. He won't force us against our will. He wants us to be willing.

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6. MOSES' RETURN TO EGYPT

EXODUS 4:18-31

Have you ever moved from one area to another? You get a big opportunity for a new job or home. You pack and get ready to move. Your good-byes are said. You are all packed and ready to go. Last minute details are completed. You are anxious and excited with anticipation. However, there is also a sadness, a hesitation about cutting the ties with good memories and experiences. Feelings are mixed. Finally, it is time to go. The door changes on one chapter in life and opens on another one. That is what Moses was experiencing when he left Midian and started back to Egypt.

LEAVING MIDIAN Moses has spent the first 40 years of his life in Egypt learning worldly wisdom. Then he spent 40 years in the desert learning God's wisdom. Now he is ready for the last 40 years of his life. Moses has said his good-byes to his father-in-law Jethro (v. 18). God had gotten things ready in Egypt, for Moses' rival for the throne, the one who would have killed him if possible, was dead (v. 19). Moses then packed up his family and started back to Egypt (v. 20). Before he left, God reassured Moses that He would be with him so Moses could perform the miracles God showed him. God also said that He would harden Pharaoh's heart so he wouldn't let the Jews go. This must have confused Moses, but He trusted that God knew what He was doing. The same is true for us today. God will ultimately have his will done (v. 22-23).

Notice that there is no arguing from Moses. He obeys God. He leaves and follows. But there is some area where Moses is not ready. He knows it. God knows it. Now that he has committed to follow and serve God, God must remove this problem.

TRIP TO EGYPT When Moses, Zipporah and their two sons stopped for the night, God struck him down so he almost died! It might seem strange that God would do this. Here was Moses, His servant, obeying and giving up all to follow Him and serve God. Why would He kill His obedient servant? Because there was an area in his life where he wasn't obedient. It was no little thing, or God wouldn't have done this. At least God didn't kill him instantly, but gave him in effect one final chance.

SIN UNTO DEATH I John 5:16 says that if we see someone committing a sin not leading to death he should pray for that person, but that if it is a sin unto death we shouldn't pray for the person. The question is, what is this sin unto death? Nothing is mentioned, here or anywhere in the bible. If it is that serious, why doesn't God say what it is? Because it isn't any one (or group of) sin. It is an attitude to any sin we won't give up, a willful and continual refusing to give up the sin, even after God prods and disciplines. The result is death. Examples of this abound in the Bible. King Saul died for his sin (1 Chronicles 10:13), so did Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and Corinthian believer who partook of the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin (1 Corinthians. 11:30). All of these were believers and didn't lose their salvation. God just removed them prematurely, as He does the branch that doesn't bear fruit (John 15). Why does God do this? For one thing, He is showing the seriousness of sin and that He is a holy God. For another thing, He wants to keep the sinning believer from more sin in life (he won't lose salvation, but will lose reward). Also removing him keeps him from having a negative influence on others. Actually, it is mercy. It's like pulling a

football player who is fumbling, causing penalties, and hurting his team and his reputation. That is mercy for all, not punishment. That's what God does for His people.

MOSES' SIN So what was Moses' sin? He listened to his wife! No don't misunderstand, that in itself isn't a sin, but when a man listens to his wife when he knows God is telling Him the opposite, then it is sin. Evidently when Moses' first son was born he was circumcised, as God had commanded the descendants of Abraham. For whatever reason Zipporah didn't like this and seemed to put her foot down when the second son was born. As a result, he was never circumcised. Zipporah had a rebellious attitude. She wasn't following God or Moses. Still, Moses, as the head of the family, was responsible. Man is the leader of the family and God directs the family through him. When Satan removed Job's whole family he left his wife, who told him to curse God and die.

Don't think that all women lead all men into sin! It's just that women are more subjective, more feeling-oriented than men. While that adds richness and meaning to life, feelings can be misleading. That's why God says men are to be leaders (I Timothy 2:11-15). Men are more rational, objective. This doesn't make them superior to women, but it does mean in the area of judicious decision-making men as a whole are usually better able to consider just the facts and consequences of each. Zipporah emotionally didn't like to see circumcision done to her son, even though on day eight suffering was very minimal. Maybe Moses wasn't the father he should have been. Maybe he was gone with the sheep too much. How much of Zipporah's rebellion against God and Moses was her free will choice to sin and how much was because Moses failed as a father and husband, we will never know. Still, it was up to Moses to be the leader in his family and guide them in obedience to God (I Timothy 3:14). No matter how much Zipporah would nag, pout, get angry, etc., Moses is responsible to obey God. Since this had been going on since the birth of the second son, and that could have been as long as 35 years ago, it's natural to assume that Moses and Zipporah didn't have very much of a loving relationship between them. She couldn't respect a man she could manipulate. He couldn't honor a woman whom he allowed to control him.

MOSES LIVES! Moses is too sick to perform the circumcision so he tells Zipporah to do it. Local superstition, though, said that if she didn't carry out her husband's dying wish she would be cursed for life. Thus, she did it, not for Moses or for God, but for herself. When she was done she threw the foreskin at Moses' feet in rejection of what circumcision stood for. She called Moses a "bridegroom of blood." Then she stomped out in anger. The implication was that "If you want to be with me and you sons you'll stop this nonsense and come back home with me. Then you better straighten up! You owe me big time and you know I always collect!"

Moses could either have his wife and sons or His God. He had to decide between the two. Jesus says this will happen when we follow Him (Luke 14:26). This was actually the second time Moses gave up a wife to follow and obey God.

THE REST OF THE STORY Zipporah did return home with the sons. It seems her father tried a reconciliation about a year later but nothing came of it. God did provide Moses with a fine wife later, however. Still, it doesn't seem he saw his sons again. That was the sequence of his sin of compromise, of giving in to 'keep peace' with Zipporah.

God did provide for Moses, though. Long before this ever happened He had started Aaron on a trip towards where Moses was. Seeing his brother again must have really encouraged and helped Moses. The Jews in Egypt were glad to see him and responded well to his message from God and the miracles he did. God came through again!

Old Testament Men – IV. MOSES & the Deliverance from Egypt

7. PHARAOH'S DENIAL

EXODUS 5:1-7:7

Have you ever had a day that was a bad day, I mean a REALLY bad day? We all have ordinarily bad days, but I'm talking about a bad day to beat all bad days? The day starts off like all others but soon you can't believe all that's happening. It's more like a dream than reality – EVERYTHING seems to go wrong. Can you think of a day like that?

Moses certainly could. In fact, his terrible day is recorded in Exodus 5.

MOSES TALKS TO PHARAOH (5:1-4) The big day for Moses finally arrived, the day he was to go before Pharaoh and ask for the Jews' freedom. This was the culmination of the first 80 years of Moses' life. God had trained him in human wisdom for 40 years and then in spiritual wisdom for the next 40. All his training, gifts, natural ability and God-given talent came to this point. He's ready to obey and serve God. He even lost his family over this commitment. So, Moses gives Pharaoh God's message. To make it easier for Pharaoh to comply, God starts out only asking for a short leave of absence so the Jews could go worship to their God. God is making it as easy on Pharaoh as possible.

The Pharaoh now is Amenhotep II who was a very great pharaoh. God chose the greatest nation in the world up to that time, and at its peak in greatness, to challenge. This will all the more show His greatness. The stronger our adversaries, the more impossible humanly speaking our situation, the more God is glorified as He provides and protects His people.

Amenhotep II had never met Moses, but he certainly had heard of him! His father, Thutmose III, was Moses' rival for the throne of Egypt and the hand of the princess Nefertiti in marriage. Moses beat him out in both counts. His grandmother Hatshepsut had kept the throne open for Moses, but he turned it down instead of worshipping false gods and being worshipped as a god. When Moses murdered an Egyptian for beating a Jew, Thutmose III sought to kill Moses. Now, with Thutmose dead, Moses' life was no more in danger, but it is easy to understand why Amenhotep II hated this man whom his own mother chose over his father!

Thus, Pharaoh had no desire to let the Jews go to worship their God. He didn't want to recognize their God's claim on them, and he didn't want to let them stop working. Also, he didn't want them to organize as a group for they were far too large and he didn't want them to turn against the Egyptian rulers.

Why didn't God immediately destroy Pharaoh right away? It would have made things quicker and easier, but that isn't important to God. He wanted to give Pharaoh more opportunity to obey. He was willing to let Egypt (and Satan) take their best shot at His people so that His deliverance would be all the more obvious. This would bring more glory to Him. Also, the Jews weren't weaned off Egypt yet. God knew they weren't ready to leave. Oh, they were tired of the misery Egypt brought, but that didn't mean they were ready to follow God wherever He led them.

PHARAOH TALKS TO THE JEWS (5:5-14) Not only did Pharaoh say the Jews couldn't go to worship their God, he then makes a proclamation that the Jews would have to gather their own straw to make bricks. This was a real hardship on the Jews. God is allowing this so the Jews will want to follow Him completely. This day isn't going the way Moses had figured, for God has assured him of success and told him that Pharaoh would let the Jews go free. God didn't say that it wouldn't

happen right away. Moses needed patience to await God's deliverance, as do we today! The day isn't over, though, it's going to get worse!

JEWS TALK TO PHARAOH (5:15-19) The Jews went to Pharaoh asking for relief. They were told this was all Moses' fault for asking them to go worship their god.

JEWS TALK TO MOSES (5:20-21) Instead of trusting God to bring their deliverance, the Jews complained and blamed Moses. All he is doing is obeying God. When we follow God we, too, will get blamed for things that are less than perfect, even by (especially by) God's own people. There's never been a godly leader who hasn't experienced this.

The day started out with so much promise. Now Pharaoh is against Moses, and so are the Jews. God is using this to stretch Moses' faith. How does he respond to this test?

MOSES TALKS TO GOD (5:22-23) Moses does the right thing in going to God with his problems, but he does the wrong thing in that he blames God for it all! Moses' old weakness, impatience, is still active. He was impatient when he killed the Egyptian. He'll be impatient and strike a rock twice and thus not be able to enter the Promised Land. God is working on Moses to help him develop patience. Tribulation brings patience (Romans 5:1-5). You see, there are real advantages to our disadvantages!

So, Pharaoh dumps on the Jews who dump on Moses who dumps on god. How does God respond? With lightning and judgment? No, God has what Moses and the Jews lack – patience.

GOD TALKS TO MOSES (6:1 - 7:7) First (6:1-9), God reaffirms His plan and purpose to Moses. He reassures him that He is in charge and control of it all. He promises ultimate deliverance from Egypt. What God does is give Moses promises to claim. That's where we need to turn when things are tough for us, when we have a bad day. God has promised all we need!

Second (6:10-13), God reaffirms His charge to Moses to lead the people out and tells him to go back to Pharaoh and insist on their release. Nothing has changed, Moses is just impatient.

Then God inserts a genealogy of Moses and the Jews (6:14-27). I think He does this at this point to remind all that He is in sovereign control over history, as is seen in the lives of Moses' ancestors. Also, He is composing a passenger list of those who will leave Egypt as proof that the Jews will leave Egypt.

Third (6:28 - 7:7) God again repeats His orders to Moses and His command for Moses to carry them out. Moses must be patient and trust God. That is lesson number one in serving God! Moses is willing to obey God and do what God says (7:6). Now when he talks to Pharaoh it isn't with the assurance everything will work out right away, but with the knowledge that Pharaoh will use the might of Egypt and do all he can to keep Moses from carrying out God's orders. Moses must trust God's promise of deliverance and act on it!

It's been an awful day for Moses, but God uses it for His glory and Moses' growth.

GOD TALKS TO US

Today, too, God expects us to patiently trust God and His promises no matter what happens. That means we must know God's promises. Memorizing promises that apply to your situation is wonderful ammunition to fight whatever comes your way. Writing the promises out and putting them in prominent places is another good idea. Make sure you know and use God's promises – it's our only refuge when we have a bad day. And any day without God's promises is a bad day!

nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:38-39

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Exodus 33:14

PEACE

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians. 4:7

REST

Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew. 11:28

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Exodus 33:14

REWARD FOR PATIENCE, FAITHFULNESS

But those who hope (wait upon) the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isa. 40:31

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Psalms. 40:1-3

SECURITY IN CHRIST

I am the gate: whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. John 10:9

STRENGTH FOR WHATEVER COMES

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians. 4:13

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Cor. 12:9

Your strength will equal your days. Deuteronomy. 33:25

He gives power to the tired and worn out, and strength to the weak. Isaiah 40:29

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Cor. 10:13

PROMISES

ALL OUR NEEDS MET

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalms. 84:11

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Psalms. 23:1-3

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew. 6:33

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians. 4:19

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

ANSWERED PRAYER

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew. 7:7

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Matthew. 21:22

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. John 14:13

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it John 14:14

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. John 5:14:15

Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24

You will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. Jeremiah 29:12

BLESSING THROUGH TRIALS

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Psalms. 126:5

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem. Isa. 66:13

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

You know the testing of your faith develops perseverance. James 1:3

No temptation/testing has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted/tested beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted/tested, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Cor. 10:13

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield. Psalms. 91:4

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble I will deliver him & honor him. With long life will I satisfy him & show him my salvation. Psalm 91:14-16

FAITHFUL WITNESS

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. Matthew. 10:32

I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever. But now the LORD declares: Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. I Samuel 2:30

FEAR

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Psalms. 118:6

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me. Psalms. 23:4

"I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." Genesis. 26:24

Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1

"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. Exodus 14:13

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isa. 41:10

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:6

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Matthew. 14:27

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and fight our battles. 2 Chronicle. 32:7-8a

FORGIVENESS OF SIN

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Matthew. 6:14

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me. Jeremiah 15:19

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

GUIDANCE

For this God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end. Psalms. 48:14

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Psalms. 23:1-3

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs. 3:5-6

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Psalms. 32:8

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. Isa. 42:16

NEVER ALONE

"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Genesis. 28:15

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height

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8. MIRACLES

EXODUS 7:8-13

Satan is a deceiver who will do everything and anything to draw people from God and to himself. Nature provides a fitting illustration of Satan's tactics. Observers tell us that in the spring of the year the cuckoo bird can be seen mimicking the flight of the sparrow hawk. Flapping, gliding, and soaring like a natural predator, this impostor frightens songbirds and distracts them to the point that they leave their nests unattended. She then moves in and devours an unguarded egg, leaving one of her own in its place. Satan counterfeits God to distract mankind so he can swoop in to destroy and kill. This has always been his way. We see it clearly in the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, which was really a confrontation between God and Satan.

GOD'S MIRACLE (7:8-19) God had already set Moses up with 3 miracles, which He had used at the burning bush to prove to Moses that He was with him. Moses then used them to show the Jews God was with him. But when Moses spoke to Pharaoh, his request was flat denied. Now he uses the first 'sign,' the walking stick to a snake and back to a stick, to show Pharaoh that God is really with him.

SATAN'S MIRACLE (7:11-12) Instead of believing, though, Pharaoh sent for his "wide men and sorcerers" and they were able to do the same miracle. We know the names of the two leaders as Jannes and Jambres. Their reputation went so far as to be known by Paul, so he called them by name in 2 Timothy 3:8 when talking about false teachers who imitate the product of godliness but instead bring uncleanness and death.

As we said before, Pharaoh is a picture, a type of Satan as Egypt pictures the world which tries to hold God's people in bondage and oppression. Pharaoh or his wise men don't try to discredit Moses' miracle for they know it is genuine. What they do instead is to duplicate it to depreciate its value. They counterfeit it. Perhaps they thought Moses, whom they had taught 40 years earlier, was using the same power source they were using to bring this about.

Note that this was not a trick, a slight-of-hand deception. Satan has the power to do miracles. In the past he used the forces of nature such as storms and lightning (Job 1:16) and strong winds (Job 1:19). He instantly took Jesus to the top of the temple when he was tempting Him. Paul was confronted by this same power in Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8).

In the future Satan will give the Antichrist power to do signs and false wonders. "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders," 2 Thessalonians 2:9. "He (the Antichrist) performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived." (Revelation 13:13-14).

Not only with the Antichrist do miracles, but the False Prophet as well. "But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur." (Revelation 19:20)

In fact, in the last days "false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible." (Matthew 24:24)

It's not just a few select ones that will be used by Satan to do miracles, Satan will use many to confuse and deceive. "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23)

Satan's purpose in all this is to get attention away from God and onto himself, so he is worshipped instead of God. He counterfeits God and His words in order to deceive man (Revelation. 12:9,11). "For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). The closer it appears to the original, the more dangerous a counterfeit is.

Nature provides us with an illustration that closely parallels the insidious tactics employed by our adversary. According to scientists, Arctic polar bears feed almost entirely on seals. To enjoy such a meal, they sometimes resort to a cunning bit of trickery. If the hole through which the seal gets his food is near the edge of the ice, the polar bear will take a deep breath and swim under water to its exact location. Remaining below the surface, he will then make a tiny scratching sound, imitating a fish. When the charmed seal hears this, he dives in for a quick supper, only to find himself suddenly entrapped in the huge, hungry embrace of his predator. One of the ways Satan does this with people is by counterfeiting God's miracles. He has power and he uses it to get people to follow him.

Today the occult is in and is growing rapidly. There are over 200,000 registered witches in the U.S. and many more are not registered. In fact, the famous witch, Sybil Leek, who now resides in Melbourne Beach, FL said in the New York Times that there are over 8 million witches in the world today.

GOD'S MIRACLE IS GREATER (7:12) So if Satan has power equal to God's, how can any of us be safe from him? Even though Satan has power, God's is greater! It must have been exciting to watch Moses' serpent slither over to the many serpents the smug wise men had created – and swallow them all whole! "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). That was an obvious statement of who was greatest!

PHARAOH'S CHOICE (7:13) Now it's up to Pharaoh to decide if he will submit to God's power or not, and he doesn't. He wanted an excuse to not believe in God, and his wise men gave him one. No matter that they didn't have as great power, it was enough to distract glory from God and give man an excuse to not follow God. Satan is a master at that strategy today, too. He throws an inferior scientific 'theory,' called evolution, against the pure facts of creationism but that is enough to give many men an excuse to keep from giving God the glory due to him.

A boy and his father went to the zoo. While there they saw a lion in a cage. The boy was really frightened while the father was not. The boy was frightened because he saw the lion. The father was not frightened because he saw the cage with the lion in it. Which do you see? The lion has power and can cause fear if you focus on him. Jesus defeated him on the cross, thus the bars. When we look to Jesus we can have peace. Satan has power, as seen in the life of Job. However, he can't do anything without God's approval, also seen in the life of Job. When we stick close to our Shepherd, we are safe from the onslaught of the lion who would devour us. Don't fall for Satan's tricks. Just because something miraculous or supernatural happens doesn't mean it is from God. Test the spirits. Just wait for God's power to 'eat up' Satan's counterfeits!

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9. BLOOD, FROGS, LICE & GNATS

EXODUS 7:14-8:32

In Virgil there is an account of an ancient king who was so unnaturally cruel in his punishments that he used to chain a dead man to a living one. It was impossible for the poor wretch to separate himself from his disgusting burden. The carcass was bound fast to his body, its hands to his hands, its face to his face, its lips to his lips; it lay down and rose up whenever he did.

Repulsive as that sounds, it shows how man is locked up with sin. We may not think of sin as that disgusting, but it really is. We get locked into our sin and get so used to it that it doesn't seem bad to us anymore. God tries to open our eyes, but we don't see what we don't want to see. That was true of Pharaoh and the people in Egypt in Moses's day as well as today.

God's electrocardiogram of the human heart says it is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:10). God's solution is a new heart - being 'born again' (John 3:3). Sinful man must see his sin and need for cleansing. Man, like Pharaoh, has a sinful, stubborn heart and refuses to turn to God no matter what (Exodus 7:14).

THE NILE TURNS TO BLOOD (Plague 1) To alert Pharaoh to his sinful condition God turned the Nile to blood (Exodus 7:14-15). The Nile was the heart of Egypt. Egypt was the Nile. The country was 10 miles wide and 750 miles long, following the Nile River. The Nile brought life. There was no rain water so the Nile provided water for drinking, cleaning, industry and agriculture. The priests called the Nile "Father and Savior of Egypt." Many gods were associated with it. Khnum was the guardian of Nile sources. Hapi indwelt crocodiles and was the spirit of the Nile. Crocodiles were very special. In fact, 'Pharaoh' means 'crocodile.' Osiris was one of their greatest gods, the god of the underworld, and the Nile was his bloodstream. Neith was a warlike goddess who took special interest and care of the large fish in the Nile. Hathor protected smaller fish. Fish were an important food source. Without them starvation would come to many people. The Nile was worshipped daily (as when Hatshepsut found Moses). One reason Moses rejected Egyptian priesthood was because he would have to worship the Nile. The main time of worship of the Nile was yearly when it began to rise (mid-June), for that fertilized the whole land and assured crops for another year. Parades through the streets (like Mardi Gras) celebrated this. It seems this was what was going on when the water turned to blood. What a way for God to take on the greatest gods of Egypt and show His superiority! The Nile, bloodied with the blood of Hebrew babies, now turns to blood (7:16-21). What an obvious way of showing that judgment on sin requires blood!

However, the Egyptian magicians were able to also turn water to blood. What was needed was to turn blood to water, but God didn't allow them to reverse His judgment (7:22). This was enough, though, to give Pharaoh the excuse to reject that he wanted (7:23-25).

FROGS (Plague 2) To the Egyptians, frogs were a blessing. When the Nile receded in late August frogs were left behind. They were a sign of fertilization completed and thus they were worshipped. Hapi was the god who controlled the waters and deposits on land. Heqt was a goddess composed of a woman's body and frog's head. He was the symbol of resurrection and fertility. Frogs were so sacred they couldn't be killed – even accidentally, under punishment of death. So, God, in effect, said, "If you want frogs, we'll give you frogs"! And He did (8:1-6).

Frogs came everywhere! Small green frogs, distended toads the color of mud, mottled frogs like bloated vegetation, frogs motionless, frogs that leaped into the laps of screaming children, frogs like droppings of much, frogs trailing their slime after them, frogs that died and bred death. Like a blanket of filth, the slimy wet monstrosities covered the land until men sickened at the continued squashing crunch of the ghastly pavement they were forced to walk upon. If a man's feet slipped on the greasy mass of their crushed bodies, he fell into an indescribably offensive mass of putrid uncleanness, and when he sought water to cleanse himself, the water was so solid and soiled from frogs that he got no cleansing there. There were frogs in the dough when they tried to break bread. There were frogs in their beds when they tried to sleep. There were frogs in their hair, clothes – everywhere. For a people who worshipped cleanliness this was awful! God was attacking their pride, showing them how awful their sin of pride was. The magicians could make more but not remove others (8:7). Pharaoh said the Jews could leave if they would make the frogs leave (8:8-14) but when relief came Pharaoh changed his mind (8:15). Still, there were huge piles of rotting frogs left all over Egypt.

LICE & GNATS (Plague 3) God again shows Pharaoh and the people the awfulness of their sin and the coming judgment it brings by sending lice, perhaps from the rotting frogs. He sent great amounts of lice, gnats, ticks and similar insects that suck blood and carry disease (8:16-17). This brought judgment on the land of Egypt. Seb, the earth god, was unable to protect his ground from these.

These insects came from the dust (8:18). In Genesis 3:17 the ground was cursed, and this curse comes upon the ground, which they worshipped for its fertility. It was a picture of what results from man's sin. Adam's sin resulted in the ground of Eden being cursed. Pharaoh's sin results in the ground of Egypt bringing forth a curse.

This time, however, the magicians were unable to do what Moses did – not that more of these insects were needed (8:18-19). They were stopped in such a small matter, turning dust to lice and gnats. Satan's power is limited, as seen in Job. He can bring judgment (water to blood and frogs) but can't tamper with that which speaks of God's curse on man. Gnats and lice are small but have great results. They defeated the idols, gods and demonic powers in Egypt. They defeated the priests of Egypt, but their pride kept them from turning to God. Still, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he did not listen to them (8:19).

Still, despite these things, God's grace is shown in that He always gave a chance to repent. God is trying to show man the awful sin he carries around with him so he can come to God for cleansing and deliverance. His first step is to recognize our sin and need for forgiveness.

Today, too, God tries to show man his pride and rebellion, the sin he carries around with him everywhere. Why would anyone want to carry a dead corpse around all the time if it could be removed? Why would anyone want to carry sin around, when a loving and merciful God is available to forgive and remove it? Have you accepted His gift of salvation so that your sin is removed? Don't let your pride stand in the way! If you have accepted this gift of salvation, you may still be carrying a sin around with you. Come to Him for its removal. Only God can defeat sin, and it's already been done! Don't live in that bondage one more moment, confess it now (1 John 1:9). There is mercy and forgiveness in God!

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10. DISEASE, HAIL & LOCUSTS

EXODUS 9:1-10:20

One day Satan called a meeting of his officers to discuss the best method of getting sinners into hell in the greatest numbers. Each one made a suggestion. One said, "Tell them there is no God." "No," said Satan. "Only a fool would believe that." "Tell them there is no hell," said another. "No, conscience refutes that." Finally, one said, "Tell them there is a God and there is a hell, but there is no hurry!" The resolution was unanimously endorsed. It's been said that Satan has many whiles, but his favorite is 'wait awhile.'

That strategy works today, as it worked with Pharaoh. He didn't disbelieve in God or hell, he just kept putting off obeying God. God kept the pressure on him, though, through a year-long series of plagues. God turned the Nile to blood. He covered the land with frogs. Then he sent lice and gnats to suck blood. Still Pharaoh is putting off doing what God has required of him. Therefore, more plagues will come.

SWARMS (Plague 4) Pharaoh was probably lading a procession to open the solemn festival which was held 120 days after the first rise of the Nile. Thus, it would have been in late September. Even though the Nile had been totally defeated, they still worship it. God says that if they don't obey Him they will be hit with swarms of insects (8:20-21). The test just says they are 'swarms' and doesn't say of what, but the Septuagint translation (done in Egypt) is more detailed. It says these are dogflies, which are worse than gnats or lice. Their bite is more painful and they, too, suck blood. They were abhorred in Egypt because they contributed to the unusually high rate of blindness. Isaiah 7:18 says that flies were part of these swarms. This was the most numerous and troublesome insect in Egypt (and often a symbol of Baal-zebub, Satan himself). They fasten to the moist and tender parts of the body and won't let go (eyes, nose, ears). In addition, Psalm 78:45 says "devouring beetles" were included. These devour vegetation and food as well as biting people. They were very rare, and thus worshipped as a sign of the sun god. "Have a beetle" in Egyptian meant to "have a good day." Probably similar insects were included like mosquitoes, bees, wasps, hornets, etc. There were huge amounts of them eating, stinging, biting, ruining food and crops and spoiling property. They brought much destruction, torment and even death. They are a picture of the eternal torment in hell for those who continue to put off submitting to God

Notice how the plagues gradually get worse and worse as they go on. The first plagues pictured consequences of sin in this life, something believers and unbelievers had to face. Now, however, they picture eternal judgment on sin. This only applies to unbelievers. Thus, God keeps His people, the Jews, free from this and all coming plagues (8:22-23). There is no judgment for God's people (Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21) for Jesus took all of it on the cross. That was God's way with Noah as well as Lot. That's why we won't have to go through the Tribulation or ever face God's judgment.

This plague shows an increase in God's warfare against Satan and his forces in Egypt. The magicians are out of the picture. The judgment is worse. There is an obvious pattern in these plagues. The first 9 lead up to number 10 which is death. Thus these 9 can be divided into 3 groups of 3. 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9. In each group Pharaoh was warned about the first plague in the morning, the second was announced beforehand, and the third not announced. These aren't arbitrary, random acts of nature. These are well-planned, meaningful announcements by God. These clearly show God's greatness and His desire for all people to repent and turn to Him. They may seem like judgment, but they are mercy for they are warnings of judgment to come. Their purpose isn't to punish but to alert people, to give them opportunity to repent. Still, Pharaoh rejects. He tries to get Moses to compromise, but Moses doesn't (8:25-32).

ANIMALS DISEASED (Plague 5) Plagues 1 and 2 were against the Nile (blood, frogs), 3 and 4 composed of insects (lice/gnats and swarms), and 5 and 6 are of disease (on man, then on animals). When Pharaoh refuses God's warning (9:1-3) a "severe pestilence" comes on the land. This is some kind of highly infectious

and very fatal disease on the livestock. Naturally, this has a great impact on the land. The economy is based on livestock for labor (oxen), transportation (camels, donkeys and horses) and for food (cattle, etc.).

Many of these very animals were worshipped as God. They believed Jupiter dwelt in the ram, Apollo in the crow, Bacchus in the goat, Diana in the cat, Juno in the white heifer, Venus in fish and Mercury in birds. We know that demons do like to take refuge in animals. Apis was worshipped as a sacred bull who was treated like a king in life and embalmed and buried in a pyramid when dead. Hathor, a cow, was a goddess of love. Mnevis was a sacred bull and Osiris, their savior-god, lived in a bull. These gods couldn't even save the animals their own souls dwelt in.

Again, God protected the livestock of the Jews (9:4). He had grace on the Egyptians, though, in that He gave them a day's notice (9:5) and a way out. This only applied to animals "in the land" (9:1-5). Those inside or in barns would be safe. Still, most didn't avail themselves of God's grace but instead suffered the consequences of their sin (9:6-7).

PEOPLE DISEASED (Plague 6) This plague, being the last in its group of 3, comes unannounced. Moses it to take soot from a kiln and throw it into the air, bringing boils on people (9:8-9). These boils were open, running sores which were very painful and could result in death.

This was a direct attack on many Egyptian gods. Imhotep was the god of medicine and the guardian of healing. The Egyptians were very advanced and skillful in their medical treatments. Sekhmet was a lion-headed goddess who had power over epidemics. Isis was the most celebrated goddess. She was a preventer and healer of disease. Typhon was the god of healing. God is taking on some of their greatest gods and showing them to be powerless before Him. The severity of the plagues continues to increase.

The connection with the kilns is clear, too (9:10-11). These were used for making bricks, which the Egyptians used to plague the Jews. They were also used for human sacrifice to Typhon, the god of evil. God is turning this around and using it to curse, not bless them. The magicians, who were extra responsible and accountable for misleading the Egyptians, received extra punishment from this plague (9:11). Still, Pharaoh didn't repent (9:11-12).

HAIL (Plague 7) Next God sends hail which destroys all the crops which were growing (9:13-18). He gives them opportunity again to bring in livestock to keep it safe (9:19-21). This plague attacked Nut, the sky goddess, Shu, god of the atmosphere, and the gods of agriculture, Iris, Osiris and Seth. Water (hail) and fire (lightening) which brought destruction were also worshipped (9:22-25). The Jews were safe (9:26). Pharaoh submits until the plague is over, then again refuses permission to leave (9:27-35).

LOCUSTS (Plague 8) Locusts can be one of nature's most awesome example of collective destruction. God sent this plague (10:1-6) to destroy what vegetation grew back after the hail. Seraphis, the god which protected them from locusts, was impotent. This was in March, when vegetation was at its full and it brought tremendous economic troubles and famine. The Egyptians wanted Pharaoh to let the Jews go (10:7) and Pharaoh tries another compromise (10:8-11) but the judgment comes anyway (10:12-15). When Pharaoh gives in it is stopped (10:16-20) but once more Pharaoh turns back.

The 'wait awhile' attitude of Pharaoh and the Egyptians is making things much worse for them. Not only are they suffering the consequences in this life, but they are in danger of passing into the next without God's forgiveness and thus having much worse consequences of sin. Don't put off getting right with God. Don't put off serving Him. Don't put off living for Him in all ways. It may be that God, in His love and mercy, is allowing you to suffer the consequences of some of your sins so you will turn to Him for forgiveness and cleansing. Remember, Satan's strategy is to get you to "wait awhile." God says that "NOW is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Don't wait!

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11. DARKNESS

EXODUS 10:21-29

Man always denies what he doesn't want to face. A perfect example of that is hell. Surveys show that 70% of people believe in life after death but only 30% believe in hell. Hell has become so trivialized it has even lost its force as a curse. It is a whimsical place, more joke than a reality. It's no wonder people want to deny its existence. Pharaoh denied it, too. God gave him a preview of what it was like but he chose to ignore the warning.

DARKNESS (Plague 9) This is the worst plague so far (only #10 will be worse). God sent a darkness like none other (Exodus 10:21). It's the same word used for the darkness the world was in before God created light. It was a perpetual, supernatural, absolutely impenetrable blackness of darkness. If you've ever been way down in a cave when the tour guide turned off the lights you'll know what it was like. You couldn't see your hand 1 inch in front of your face. It was a picture of God's judgment of hell, showing the nearness of His final judgment of hell on them.

Hell is described as being bound in chains of darkness (2 Peter 2:4; John 8:12), bound in everlasting chains under darkness (Jude 6), blackness of darkness (Jude 13), and outer darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:113; 25:30). God is light (1 John 1:5). He will be the light for eternity when even the sun won't be needed. Therefore, the absence of God (hell) is the absence of light. Satan and his demons today try to bring darkness to the world. With it comes depression, despair and hopelessness. Hell will be eternity in darkness with unsatisfied desires, hopelessness and terrible physical and emotional suffering.

What made this plague all the more powerful was that it was directed at one of Egypt's greatest gods, Ra, the sun god. Egypt had a cloudless, rainless climate so nothing hid the sun. This also defeated Orpheus, the god of darkness, which was Satan worship pure and simple. He couldn't control or remove that which he was to be a god of.

For three days there was this total darkness over all Egypt (10:21-22). It was so bad, so oppressive, that people didn't move from where they were for 3 days. Imagine: they couldn't eat, wash, get comfortable, or go to their bathroom facilities. They could talk to each other but not see each other. For three days this went on. To really make it a picture of hell, Psalm 78:49 says God allowed demons to have free access during these times. Jewish tradition says Satan and his angels went among the Egyptians, frightening them with fearful apparitions, piercing their ears with hideous shrieks and groans, driving them almost to madness with the intensity of their fears, making their flesh creep and their hair stand on end. It would be worse than the most awful horror show on TV or in the movies – and it was real!

Contrast this with God's people in Goshen. They had light in their homes (10:23). God's Presence was with them, and God is light. It was the same Shekinah glory that would lead them in the cloud and dwell in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. This is how Noah had light on the 3 levels of the ark (with only one window at the top). God's presence provided the light. Thus, the Egyptians had a darkness they couldn't light but the Jews had a light that couldn't be put out. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior you, too, have gone from darkness to light (1 Peter 2:9).

Unbelievers prefer darkness to light, so God is just giving them what they want and warning them of eternal hell judgment at the same time. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one

and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (John 3:16-21)

Today, too, sin is attracted to darkness. Bars, X-rated stores, seances, occult worship – all take place in the dark. Windows are shut, lights are low. Crime is higher at night than during the day. Darkness is a picture of spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4; I Corinthians 2:14; I John 2:11). When Jesus healed physical blindness, He was showing He could heal spiritual blindness.

COMPROMISE... this darkness so affected Pharaoh that said the Jews could go – on his terms (10:24-26). He offered Moses a compromise. This wasn't the first time he did that. Satan is good as offering compromises. If he can get us moving just the slightest bit from 100% strict obedience to Jesus he knows he has us moving in the right direction and it's only a matter of time until we move a little more, and then a little more. Satan is very patient.

Compromise 1 was for them to go worship, but to stay in the land (8:25). Worship God, but don't get so carried away that you leave Satan's system! Be a Christian, but stay in the world! God is OK, but don't give up everything for Him. There's room for everyone to worship however they want right here. Don't be a fanatic! Moses turned the offer down (8:26-27). Pharaoh then modified the offer to let them go, but not so far they couldn't easily return (8:28). Satan is willing to lengthen the chain, as long as you don't cut it! Don't give up everything you have here! Keep the best of this world nearby so you can return when you want. Don't leave your friends, priorities and values. Follow God, but stay close to the world, too.

Compromise 2 was for them to worship, but leave their children back in Egypt (10:8). Moses knew that if they didn't take their children they wouldn't be obeying God, so he rejected this, too (10:9-11). Today, too, Satan tells us that we can be totally sold out to God, but not bring our children. We don't want to deny them all the 'fun' the world offers!

Compromise 3 was for them to leave the land, with their children, but not take their possessions (10:24). Moses knew that they couldn't leave their possessions in the world and still serve God, that we much bring our material things with us and offer them to God, so he rejected this compromise as well (10:25-26). You can't give your heart but allow your possessions to be controlled by worldly principles. God wants all of us and all we have!

When Moses turned down this compromise, he told Pharaoh it was over, he'd had his last chance and Moses would never be back with another offer of mercy from God (10:27-29). They never met again. This was Pharaoh's last warning. For a year God has been gradually turning up the heat. Next would come death: first of the firstborn, then of the army in the Red Sea.

Yes, sad as it is to think about, hell awaits those who reject God. He is merciful in trying to warn the Egyptians of what they are bringing on themselves, but He is holy and will judge sin. Thank God that, if you have accepted Him as Savior, you never have to fear hell! Thank Him for the light in your life, and make sure you live in that light without any compromise.

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12. DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN

EXODUS 11"1-11; 12:29-36

On July 3, 1826, Thomas Jefferson, ill since February at Monticello, aroused himself from sleep. "Is it the Fourth?" he asked. When the doctor said it soon would be, he appeared content. He died at 1 PM on July 4th. In Quincy, Mass., John Adams, his political opponent, lay dying on the very same day. "Thomas Jefferson survives," he said. He was wrong. Both died on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which they had much to do with.

How people die is sometimes surprising. That people die shouldn't surprise us at all. "It is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). A sociologist traveling in a third world country asked an official there what the death rate was. "The same as everywhere else," the man replied. "One per person."

We all know we will die, yet somehow many people manage to ignore that fact. They live as if they will never have to give an account of their lives. They live as if this life is all there is. That isn't new. Pharaoh was a prime example of this as well.

DEATH (Plague 10) Moses had told Pharaoh he would never see his face again (Exodus 10:28-29) and he was right. God had told him that deliverance was coming, that Pharaoh wouldn't just let them go, he would force them to leave (11:1). God also told Moses, during the 3 days of darkness, that the Jews should ask their neighbors for silver and gold and they would be given much of it (11:2-3). This would be payment for the work they did as slaves and would finance their building of the Tabernacle as well as their years in the wilderness.

God also told Moses that it would be the death of the firstborn that would bring about their deliverance (11:4-6). The firstborn male had the prime position. He received a double portion of his father's inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). He received the special blessing from the father (Genesis 49:3). He took over family leadership when his family died. The firstborns were groomed for positions of power and leadership in the nation. They were (and still are) the overachievers. Almost all the astronauts are firstborns. The vast majority of those listed in "Who's Who in America" are firstborns. In Egypt the firstborns owned all the property and therefore ran the country. Thus, they were responsible for the cruel treatment of the Jews. They are 'reaping what they sowed.' They killed all the Jewish baby boys, now their firstborn males would die. This included all firstborn males, no matter how old. This was true of the cattle, too. Thus, there was no way anyone could say it was a sudden illness or some such thing. It was totally obvious it was God and only God doing this.

Israel was called God's 'firstborn' because they enjoyed this place of special privilege in His sight. Thus, God was, in effect, saying, "If you don't let My firstborn (Israel) go, I'll take your firstborn." God called His people to leave and offer sacrifices to Him. They weren't allowed to. They were supposed to worship where they were, but they couldn't offer blood sacrifices. God offered the blood sacrifice for them – the firstborn of Egypt, the very ones who wouldn't let them go!

THE MERCY OF DEATH Death shows God's mercy. Without it we'd live in this world, separated from Him, for all eternity. Death is a warning sign to everyone that this short life is temporary. Just think how people would live and act if they knew they would never die! Like pain, death is a warning sign. Suppose you never felt pain? Sounds great – but think about it. Suppose the warning lights on your dashboard didn't work... Death is a warning that this life is temporary and we will then live

somewhere for all eternity. God lets us slowly age to show us that this life will one day be over. The threat of death at any moment should help keep us 'honest' and keep this life in its proper perspective.

God is using this threat of death to warn them of the coming eternal death and judgment. He tells them the firstborn will die at midnight. Would you like to know when and how you would die? I don't think that would be good at all! The Egyptians knew the firstborn would die at midnight – but God didn't tell them what day. Actually, it was 2 weeks until the death came. That was plenty of time to repent and turn to God – or ignore it as something that wouldn't come to them. Funny how people always think of death as something affecting others but not them!

NO DEATH FOR THOSE UNDER THE BLOOD Another act of mercy was God's provision of an escape from the death to come. Those who were 'under the blood' of the sacrificial lamb wouldn't have their blood shed (11:7). It wasn't because the Jews were better than the Egyptians that they were spared. Actually, they were worse, for they were much, much more accountable to God since they and their ancestors had clearly known His word for generations. The reason the Jews were spared was because they applied the innocent blood of the lamb to their homes and lives. Any Jew who didn't would also die, and any Egyptian who did was spared. There were probably many of each.

Unfortunately, most of the Egyptians followed Pharaoh's lead (although they were accountable on their own as seen by their suffering the consequences of their own disobedience). Two weeks after Moses delivered this final warning (11:8) it happened, just as God has said it would (11:9-10; 12:29-36).

DEATH COMES Death came to every home in Egypt that didn't have the blood applied. It seems Pharaoh himself was either exempt (a worse penalty than death for he would see what the consequences of his disobedience were) or not a firstborn. Any male of any age who was the first male born to his mother died, unless the substitutionary blood had been used. What an awful time for those families!

They shouldn't have been surprised. They had been amply warned. That they would die should have been no surprise. When it came might have caught them unprepared, but they had plenty of warning, as do we all. We should never be surprised when we die, for we have known all along it was coming.

If you visit Washington and Lee University you can see Lee's study just as he left it the last time he went out of his office. He thought he'd be back the next day to continue his work but he never returned. He was prepared, for he was a fine Christian man. The timing might have surprised him, but he never should have been surprised that he would die.

Imagine going into a nice restaurant and ordering a fine meal then walking out without paying. When stopped you'd say that you didn't expect to pay and aren't prepared to pay. You just wanted a nice meal; you didn't want to pay for it! That's how many face death. They don't want to pay, but they haven't made provision for another (Jesus) to pay for them. How foolish. How inexcusable. How about you? Are you ready?

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13. PASSOVER PREPARATIONS

EXODUS 12:1-10,22,46

Sheep are mentioned more frequently than any other animal in the bible - about 750 times. This is natural since the Jews were wandering herdsmen, an occupation well suited for Palestine's dry plains. The sheep were used for food (milk, cheese, butter and mutton) and clothing (wool, skins). By nature, sheep are helpless and depend on the shepherd for water, pasture, guidance and defense. They are often used as an example of how God takes care of us (John 10:1-18; Psalm 23).

'LAMB OF GOD' It is no coincidence, then, that the first descriptive name used of Jesus was LAMB. It happened when He first went public in His ministry. He wasn't seen as King, Lord or even God, although He was all these things. He was seen as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36). That's what John called Him when Jesus came to where John was baptizing. Why 'lamb'? Because that describes Him and why He came. Sure, He was called Jesus, Savior and Christ/Messiah, but all of these refer to what He did as the Lamb of God. Jesus means 'saves,' Savior means 'deliverer,' and Christ/Messiah refers to His being 'anointed' for death. By calling Him the 'Lamb of God' the people would all understand that He was the one come to pay for the sins of all. How would they know this? Because they knew all about the Passover Lamb.

ANIMAL SACRIFICES When Adam and Eve sinned innocent blood had to be shed to cover their sin. It was God Himself (God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the One who appears to man in both Old and New Testament). This picture of covering sin by innocent blood continued through Able, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

This is clearly seen when Abraham took Isaac to offer to God as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:7-8). God provided a ram to die in Isaac's place, as a substitute. This very rock became the spot where the temple was built, and the blood poured each year on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) to cover the nations sins. It was on this same mountain that Jesus was crucified and died. Ultimately Jesus was Abraham's substitute for Isaac, so he didn't have to kill his son. God, however, had no other Substitute, for Jesus was the only One who could pay for our sins, so Jesus Himself died there as our substitute. The analogy is beautiful and striking.

THE PASSOVER LAMB The most complete and detailed picture of this, though, is given in Exodus 12. The Jews were in slavery and bondage in Egypt and, after a year of plagues, God is about to redeem them by killing the firstborn in all of Egypt. The problem, though, was that the Jewish firstborn was as deserving of death as the Egyptian firstborn, maybe more so because he was more accountable to God. How could God just overlook their sin? As a just and holy God, He couldn't. What He could do, though, was provide a substitute. The Passover lamb was the substitute, a picture of the ultimate Substitute which would one day die for all of our sins.

The blood of animals only 'covered' sin. Only Jesus' blood removed it. It would be like having a grape juice stain on a nice white rug. Without any way of cleaning the rug, all you could do was put a throw rug over it and 'cover' it up. Then one day someone shows up with a stain remove that will get the stain out. The throw rug is no longer needed. Animal sacrifices are like that throw rug. The blood of Jesus is the only cleanser for sin

THE LAMB CHOSEN (Exodus 12:3, 5b) Lambs were innocent, gentle, meek, helpless animals, a picture of Jesus as a man. The lamb had to be unblemished (perfect, spotless Jesus) and a male (the strength and energy of Jesus). It had to be 1 year old (in the prime of life).

THE LAMB KILLED (Exodus 12:6a) The lamb alive did no good, though. It had to die. Its blood had to be shed. Jesus' perfect life only condemns us, showing that a perfect life can be lived. It is only His death that saves us.

The person owning the lamb would place his hands on the animal's head and confess his sins, thus making the lamb accountable for the sin. Thus, the animal had to die, for sin brings death. It was killed by having its throat slit and the blood caught in a bowl.

The lamb to be the Passover substitute was chosen and set aside on 10 Nisan to make sure it was spotless and unblemished. Four days later, on 14 Nisan, it would die. For almost 4 years Jesus ministered in public, under the careful eye of all who watched, showing He was perfect and without sin. Then He died on 14 Nisan. Both died at 3 PM – same time on the same day. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Passover lamb.

Killing a lamb, you had raised from birth was a good picture of the wastefulness and death that sin brings. Innocent blood must be shed to cover the guilty. The whole sacrificial system was built on this premise. Within the next year the Jews would be putting the finishing touches on the Tabernacle, where sacrifices would continue until the time of Jesus. The tabernacle, then the temple, were designed by God to show that innocent blood must be shed to cover sin.

THE LAMB'S BLOOD APPLIED (Exodus 12:7) The living lamb couldn't save, neither could the lamb killed. It was only as the blood was applied personally that sin was covered. If the blood was on the door, the family was safe. If there was no blood then death entered. Nationality didn't matter, or how well educated, or how rich – only the blood mattered.

"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Hebrews 9:27). "The life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11). Our good works are like "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6) or a "dung heap" (Philippians 3:8). Only the blood counts, because it stands for Jesus' life.

The blood had to be applied in such a way that it was publicly visible. It was applied to the front door by the person responsible for the house. Hyssop was used. It was used in rituals of purification and cleansing. The lamb was slain on the door stoop and the blood painted on the top and sides of the door. Actually, this formed a cross, with the blood being at the same places where Jesus bled on the cross: head, hands and feet.

After the blood was applied the people had to enter into the house, 'through the blood' as it were. When they entered there was blood above, below and on both sides of them. Then they had to stay inside all night to be safe. Outside was death, inside was life. When the angel of death saw the blood he would "Pass over" and not stop to bring death to that home. The blood was sufficient. "When I see the blood I will pass over." It was a 'sign' – to the angel of death, to neighbors (believers and unbelievers alike), to angels and to Satan and his forces. It was a 'brand' of security. Jesus' blood is our security, our 'sign' of eternal life (Eph 1:7; I John 1:7; I Peter 1:19; Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:12; Revelation 1:5; Romans 5:8-9).

(Continued in next article.)

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14. PASSOVER CELEBRATION

EXODUS 12:11-14,21-28

(Continued from last article.)

THE LAMB'S BODY EATEN (Exodus 12:8-10, 46) After the lamb died the blood was applied, and the body had to be used in its way, too. The body was eaten. The lamb didn't die just to be looked at but to be personally identified with by eating. This would give them nourishment and sustenance for the coming journey. Jesus died for our sins, but He also provides the nourishment and strength we need to go on after salvation (John 6:53-57). The Jews had to feed on the lamb that same night, we can't put off partaking. There was nothing to be left over so it didn't decay (Jesus' body didn't decay). It was to be eaten roasted, not raw or boiled. This was to be a picture of Jesus facing not just death but also fire – hell judgment on the cross. It couldn't be eaten raw, it had to go through the fire. Jesus had to go through our hell to redeem us. It couldn't be boiled in water, for there was no water to slacken Jesus' thirst. No bone was to be broken, a common practice to eat the marrow within. This was prophesied of Jesus.

Thus, the lamb had to be chosen (Ex 12:5) as Christ volunteered to die for our sins in eternity past (1 Pt 1:20). It has to be kept (Ex 12:5), a picture of Christ in life (Mat 3:17; 17:5). Then it was slain (Ex 12:6), Christ sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7). Then it was roasted (Ex 12:8), a picture of Christ's sufferings (Psalms 88:7; 89:46). Then it had to be fed on (Ex 12:5, 8) as we feed on Christ, pictured in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 5:8).

INSIDE The Jews were to eat standing up, dressed, with outdoor traveling clothing on, sandals on their feet and walking staff in one hand. This was a reminder that Egypt was not their home, they weren't to settle there, they were there temporarily and just passing through. That must be our approach to life in this world as well.

UNLEAVENED BREAD Along these same lines, they were to not take time to let their bread rise. There was to be no leaven in it. Leaven is a picture of sin. It is a yeast (fungus) which grows and decays. It will destroy the whole batch unless stopped (by cooking). Sin is like that (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). For 7 days they were to eat unleavened bread. This pictures Jesus' sinless life and body, and why we are to make sure there is no sin in our lives when we partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

DEATH OUTSIDE While those with blood on their door were inside, safe, feeding on the lamb, the others were facing God's judgment of death. They were not safe. In the early days of this country those crossing a prairie were in danger of fires out of control traveling rapidly to where they are and beyond. The Indians showed them a way to be safe. When they saw a fire coming they would start a fire near where they were, then when it burned itself out move into that area with their possessions. Thus, when the main fire came roaring through they were safe. As the Indians said, "Where the fire has been, the fire cannot come." When we enter through the blood, and place ourselves at the foot of the cross, we are in God's 'burnt-over' area. Jesus took our judgment so we have no danger of ever being under judgment (Romans 8:1).

SACRIFICES THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT When the Jews left Egypt they went to Mt. Sinai. There got gave them many regulations about offering sacrifices: who, when, why, where and

how. Much of Exodus and most of Leviticus cover this. All this was to cover sin until God's stain-remover came. For 1400 years this picture continued, then came the Lamb of God.

JESUS THE LAMB OF GOD It was prophesied that the Messiah would be the Lamb of God (Isaiah 53:7-8). John recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of this (John 1:29, 36), as did Paul (1 Corinthians 5:7), Peter (1 Peter 1:19) and Philip (Acts 8:32).

LORD'S SUPPER REPLACES PASSOVER When Jesus had the Last supper with His disciples, He took the matzo that represented the Jews leaving Egypt and said that it now applied to His body. "Take, eat; This is my body" (Matthew 26:26). The cup of grape juice that they drank was a picture of the lamb's blood. When the Jews left Egypt and were living in tents they didn't have door posts to paint with blood, so they used the blood of the grape as the same picture. By drinking it they were identifying with the lamb's blood, applying it to their lives. Jesus said this way now to picture His blood. "This is My blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:28). Thus, Jesus was saying that the Passover no longer applied to the lamb of Exodus 12 and the physical deliverance from Egypt, it now pictured the Lamb of God and the deliverance from sin and death.

The number one miracle in the Old Testament was the Passover and Red Sea deliverance. This was a picture of what would be done by Jesus and was the focal point of the Old Testament and Jewish history. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was, of course, the number one New Testament event. In fact, it was the number one event of history of all time.

THE LAMB AROSE In the Old Testament, when the Passover lamb died it stayed dead. However, when the Lamb of God died, He came back to life!!! Imagine a dead lamb, blood applied and body eaten, come back to live and run and jump around – not with a physical body but with a new, eternal body! It's amazing, but it's true! The Lamb still lives today, that's why we worship and praise Him. Dying paid for our sins, coming back to life assures us of eternal life.

THE LAMB TODAY The Lamb continues to live today, in heaven. In fact, "The Lamb" is the title given to Jesus throughout Revelation. Thirty-three times He is called the 'Lamb'! As the lamb, He is in the position of sovereign glory and honor (Revelation 7:17). He shares glory and grace equally with the Father (Revelation 22:1, 3). He is the leader and shepherd of His saints (Revelation 7:17; 14:4). Angels and believers are worshipping the Lamb (Revelation 5:6,8,12,13; 15:3) singing "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise." 'Lamb' is more than a title; it is the description of Him. When we see Him we will see gentleness and purity which was slain for us. The marks of crucifixion will be on Him. We will worship Him, not because of His sovereign power, but because of His work for us as the Lamb of God, which took away the sins of the world.

THE LAMB IN THE FUTURE One day soon the Lamb will return for His bride – us. Then we will together share in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7,9) while the Tribulation rages on earth. Many of those who come to salvation during this time will be martyred and will gather around the throne praising the Lamb in heaven (Revelation 7:7-14; 13:8; 15:3).

Then the Lamb, to whom all judgment is committed (Revelation 6:1,16; 13:8), will come and do war against the dragon (Satan - Revelation 17:14; 12:11). This return will end the Tribulation (Revelation 14:1) with a marvelous victory (Revelation 19:11-16). No one will escape the wrath of the lamb (Revelation 6:16). The Lamb will return as a lion. When Satan and sin are gone, the Lamb will reign on the throne forever, with all worshipping Him forever. Truly, "worthy is the Lamb!"

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15. UNLEAVENED BREAD

EXODUS 12:15-20.34.39' 13"6-7

There is a true story about how a stolen bucket started a war and ended a career. One day long ago a soldier took an attractive bucket from a public well, just for the fun of it. The bucket got passed on from one person to another until it was given to prince Henry of Sardinia. A great fuss was made over it, ending in a war to get it back. Prince Henry himself was captured and put in prison. His father, the king, offered a golden chain 7 miles long to get him back. The offer was refused in anger. The prince lay in prison for 20 years until he died. The war continued until most of the governments of Europe were involved. Thousands of lives and much property was lost, and all because of such a 'little thing' like taking a bucket! It was just a little thing, but look at the consequences.

Now think for a moment. Is there such a thing as a 'little' sin? Maybe in our sight some sin has more serious consequences and brings greater guilt, and other sin seems to be beneficial and pleasurable – but is there really any difference in God's sight? "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet offends in one point is guilty of breaking the whole law" (James 2:10). It doesn't sound like God thinks ANY sin is small, does He?

SIN IS SIN 'Sin' means 'to miss the mark.' "For all have sinned (missed the mark) and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Our target is to be like Jesus, as holy as God. It doesn't matter if we miss by 1 inch or 1,000 miles, we still miss. A pass is incomplete in football if it is off the fingertips, or 20 yards over the receiver's head. All sin is sin. In fact, 'little' sin can be said to be worse than other sin because it is more subtle and dangerous. We are more apt to commit 'little' sins, as our enemy knows. That's why we are tempted in that way more often. Often we get so used to them we don't realize they are really sins. Actually, victory in the Christian life doesn't come so much from winning the big battles as the little battles, for if the little battles over sin would be won, there wouldn't be any big battles. Big battles mean sin has been left go and not defeated when 'little.' The only way to win big battles is to start winning some of the 'little' ones related to that area of life, then the big battles will be won. Thus avoiding 'little' sin is a very key truth for God's people. It is an important lesson to learn.

In fact, it is so important, it is the very first lesson God teaches His people after salvation (Passover blood on the door). The first truth He teaches them is not prayer, knowing God's will, or spiritual gifts. It is about the deadliness of 'little' sin. God uses leaven as an illustration of this point, making His point clear.

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD During the time of darkness God had told Moses all about eating bread without leaven (Exodus 12:15-20). Moses passed this on to the people (Exodus 13:3-10) and the people obeyed God's instructions (Exodus 12:34, 39). On the 10th day of the new month, Nisan, they were to set aside an unblemished male lamb one year old and then on the 14th kill it and eat it after applying the blood to the door posts. They were to eat the meal standing and ready to leave Egypt, so there was no time to let dough rise and then bake it. They were to mix dough and take it with them to cook along the way, but to not put any leaven in it. For 7 days they were to eat bread with no leaven, Nisan 14 to 21. This became called the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

LEAVEN Everything focused on the leaven – or lack of it. Yeast is a microscopic plant invisible to the naked eye which is placed in a substance called leaven. It is actually a fungus which can be dried for long periods of time which springs to life when it comes in contact with moisture and warmth.

The cells will multiply with tremendous rapidity. Starch and sugar turns into carbon dioxide gas and alcohol. This causes the dough to 'rise' as the air bubbles in it expand. This process would continue and turn the dough sour if the yeast wasn't killed by high temperatures at the right time. This is where the baking comes in. The heat kills the growing cells and stops the fermentation (decomposition). Thus, unleavened bread is flat, more solid, lacking in air bubbles. For this reason, leaven is a picture of sin.

LEAVEN = SIN Nothing in the world spoils like sin. It ruins whatever it touches unless stopped by confession and cleansing by the blood of Christ. Leaven must be destroyed before bread can be eaten. Sin must be destroyed before a Christian can become like Jesus. Paul, in I Corinthians 5:6-8, uses leaven as a picture of sin. He says it is little and hidden, but grows and spreads to destroy everything unless stopped.

Recently a huge tree in Colorado fell to the ground with a resounding crash. It was over 400 years and had just started growing when Columbus came to America. It had been struck by lightning 14 times, stood through winds, earthquakes, fires and storms. Yet it was killed by a little beetle which bored under the bark and chewed away the mighty fibers of the tree, one tiny bite at a time. That's how sin works. That's what leaven pictures.

Paul takes this leaven analogy a step further. He equates leaven to Christ, referring to Christ's sinlessness in order to be our sin sacrifice. Just at the unleavened bread was 'sinless' (no leaven), so Christ Himself was sinless. The unblemished Lamb of God was also the unleavened Bread of God. Thus, when Jesus said 'this is My Body' about the bread, it truly applied for it was a picture of His sinless body.

PASSOVER TO LORD'S SUPPER Every year since He was 12 Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover and Unleavened Bread. The events of His final days and hours on earth center around these feasts. In fact, Jesus changed the meaning of the juice from the blood of the Passover lamb to His blood. He also changed the meaning of the unleavened bread from being a reminder of their quick flight from Egypt to be a reminder of His sinless Body broken for us (Luke 22:14-22).

Paul passed this significance on in I Corinthians (11:23-32). He enlarged the analogy to show that we, too, must be sinless when we partake of the Lord's Supper. Like unleavened bread, we must not have sin we hold onto in our lives. We must remove all leaven/sin from our lives. If not, God will discipline us to remove it. It is a serious contradiction to partake of that which symbolizes Jesus' work for us on the cross while still having sin in our own lives.

In Mexico and tropical zones of South America a so-called 'Strangler' fig grows everywhere. It is a tree-killer. This fig can only be eaten by cattle and birds. It is so sticky a bird must clean its beak on a nearby tree after eating it. Small seeds can stick to bark and germinate in rainy season. Tiny roots make their way down into the heart of the tree. In a few years it covers the once beautiful tree and kills it.

That is exactly the way sin is. It starts small and grows until all is destroyed. That's what leaven is a picture of. Why not take a moment now to search your heart and life, asking God to help you find and root out the 'little' sins that lead to big defeats in your life? Confess each one and ask for His victory over them. Become like unleavened bread for the Lord.

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16. DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT

EXODUS 12:37-51

A man was once visiting a large sheep ranch in Australia at the time of shearing. The guide took a baby lamb from its pen and placed it with thousands of other sheep where the noise of their bleating and the shouting of the shearers was absolutely deafening. The unweaned animal, looking dazed, remained still for a moment. Then, realizing it had been separated from its mother, began to let out weak, distressed baa's. The faint cries were answered immediately by the mother even though she was at the far end of the enclosure. Amid the noise and confusion, she still heard the pitiful bleating of her own frightened offspring.

If sheep are like that, what was the God that created them? God sees us as if there are no others around. He rushes to our aid at our faintest cry. Witness the Jews in Egypt. They cried out to God and He heard them. He sent Moses, then the 10 plagues ending with the death of the firstborn. Now He is delivering them.

DELIVERANCE! During the plague of darkness God had revealed to Moses information about the last plague of death, asking neighbors for riches and the Passover as well as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Moses warned Pharaoh of this but Pharaoh didn't repent.

Two weeks later, at midnight, the firstborn of all without the blood died while those with the blood celebrated the first Passover. Pharaoh sent word that the Jews **MUST** leave Egypt. At sunrise they started their trip. They had their wagons packed and everything ready to go. There wasn't even time to let their bread rise. Out they came, one by one, through the blood applied to the door posts. They were saved by the blood, now they are delivered by the blood.

POPULATION There were about 600,000 men who could be fighters (Exodus 12:37). Add to that young men, cripples and older men and the total must have been at least 750,000 men. Add the same number of woman and the total is 1 ½ million. The approximately 600,000 family units would average at least 2 children each (many had grown children) so that would be another 1+ million. All total then, there would be about 2 ½ to 3 million people leaving - quite a mob! That would be like all Philadelphia and its suburbs in southeastern Pennsylvania leaving their homes one morning to hike to California!

Remember, too, that they are slaves. Slave mentality doesn't initiate, get creative, or work together. Slaves do what they are told while resenting those who tell them what to do. These Jews had no inner structure, no organization of leaders and no chain of command. It was a most difficult situation indeed for Moses!

JEWS & EGYPT Not all the Jews left Egypt. Many stayed, others moved back later. Alexandria developed into the largest Jewish area next to Jerusalem. Jeremiah was taken there when the Babylonians attacked. The Septuagint was translated there. Mary and Joseph fled there with baby Jesus. There is still a large Jewish population there to this day.

While not all the Jews left, it is also true that not all the Egyptians stayed. A 'mixed multitude' of non-Jews also left (12:38). These were Egyptians who married Jews, Egyptians who converted to Judaism, and other Semitic slave people in Egypt who saw a chance to escape. Scholars say there were about 20,000 of them – a small percentage but one that had a large negative impact on the whole group. Some were godly, dedicated people (Moses' second wife came from this group)

but most caused trouble by their complaining and rebelling. They kept wanting the group to return to Egypt. Unfortunately, that same story repeats itself in most Christian groups and organizations today. Even Jesus had one who was not with His program.

PROVISION The Jews left with all their possession, much gold and silver given them by their neighbors, and large herds of animals. Their clothing and shoes never wore out during the next 40 years, and they had perfect health (Psalm 105:37) until it was time for their death.

They didn't just flee like slaves on the run, but marched out like a victorious conquering army. There was organization and plan to their movement (13:18). God was taking care of His people in a grand way!

According to the U. S. Army Quartermaster General, Moses would have needed 1500 tons of food a day, filling two freight trains a mile long each. For fuel to cook food and stay warm on cold desert nights (and it does get cold in a desert at night) they would need 4,000 tons of firewood (3 more freight trains a mile long). Then what about water? For enough to drink and wash a few dishes (no bathing) would take 11 million gallons a day, enough to fill a train of tanker cars 1800 miles long! The space of their campground each night would be 750 square miles – the size of Rhode Island. Yet God provided all this.

PREPARATION The Jews left in total obedience to God. All sin had been confessed and turned from. That they left without any leaven in their bread was a picture of their leaving without any sin in their lives (12:39). When we follow God, too, it must in 100% sinless obedience.

PROMISE Moses is quick to point out that the Jews left exactly on the day God had prophesied they would leave – to the very day (12:40-41). God promised they would leave on this day and they did! Only God can do that. God keeps His promises.

This is a great lesson for us today, too. There are 7,000 promises in the Bible for us today. They are like coupons which can be used over and over again. However, there is an expiration date on them for they are only good while we live on this earth. If we don't use them, we lost them. From time to time, we hear of someone dying of malnutrition in poverty, but those who clean up after the person find large sums of money in the shack. They had resources to live a better life but didn't avail themselves of them. That is true of us spiritually as well.

God has promised to help us in time of need (Hebrews 13:5-6), strengthen us in time of weakness (Isaiah 41:10), cheer us in despondency (Matthew 17:27) and guide us in perplexity (Psalm 32:8). He said He will give us peace in trouble (Isaiah 66:12-13), joy in sorrow (Isaiah 61:2-3) and power in service (Acts 1:8). We know these promises. We hang them on our walls, print them on our greeting cards and sing them in our songs. However, we often don't claim and use them. We live as if they aren't true. What a waste!

When Crowfoot, the great chief of the Blackfoot Indians, gave the railroad permission to cross his land he received a lifetime pass to travel on the railroad for free. He was so proud of this that he hung it on a pouch around his neck for the rest of his life. However, he never rode on the railroad. He walked or rode a horse wherever he went. How like us this is. We have God's promises but, unless we trust Him and await His provision, we will live in fear and worry. He will keep His promises to deliver us, as He did the Jews, but we will lack peace and joy while awaiting their fulfillment. Do you know His promises to you? Do you trust them? Or do you live in fear and worry as if God weren't in control? The choice is yours.

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17. DEDICATION OF FIRSTBORN

EXODUS 13:1-16

Years ago, an Englishman was watching a group of slaves being auctioned off in the south. He was deeply touched at the plight of the victims. Especially touching was a fine young man who brought high bids. For some reason he joined in the bidding, even though the price kept going up and up. Still, he was determined to have him. When the slave was transferred to his new owner the Englishman unlocked the chains and said, "You are a free man!" In heartfelt devotion the slave fell down at his feet with tears, "No. master, I will be your servant forever!" He became the man's most trusted helper, living with him for the rest of his life as a free man and a son.

This is what God did with the Jews in Egypt. He bought them for Himself and set them free. Their response was to commit themselves to live for him in devotion and faithfulness the rest of their lives. For most this was a commitment they couldn't or wouldn't fulfill, but when God freed them it was their heart's desire. Because of God's free gift of salvation, which has freed us from sin and bondage, He wants us to voluntarily commit to living for Him forever.

SANCTIFICATION As a way of teaching this truth, God commanded that all the firstborn males be sanctified to Him (Exodus 13:1-2). Since the Egyptian first-born died in the last plague and He spared the ones who had blood on their door, He owned them. He paid the blood price to save them, so they are all His possession. Remember, the firstborn is symbolic of the whole nation. Thus, by owning the firstborn, God is in effect saying the whole nation is His.

"Sanctify" means literally "set apart." It is translated "sanctify," "holy," "consecrate," "cleanliness," "godliness" and "separation." The root meaning is to set something apart from ordinary, regular use to be used for God's service. The person or object is set apart from worldly use and committed to God's use. The word is used of places like the ground at the burning bush, of God's dwelling place (the Tabernacle), of Jerusalem and of heaven. It is used of things like the priests' garments, offerings and Tabernacle vessels. It is even used of times like the Sabbath, Feast days and days of fasting. Being 'sanctified' does not mean it is made perfect, but that it is set apart to serve God.

IN GOD'S SIGHT At the moment of salvation (Deuteronomy 7:6-7) we have been sent apart to God. That's why we are called 'saints,' the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Sanctify." God sees us as perfect, because He sees us through the blood of Jesus. Therefore, He expects us to live up to that in our daily life. It's like being born into a royal family and therefore being a prince by position. Still, it is up to that person to live like a prince – live up to what he is. God wants us to live up to our position by living in daily commitment to Him. Over 1500 verses in the Bible command us to be set apart to God (Lev 19:2; 1 Pt 1:15; etc.).

We are set apart from the world and sin (2 Corinthians 6:17-18) and to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). That's why the Bible so many times tells us not to live for self or the world because we have been set apart by salvation for God's service.

TURN FROM SIN Knowing this and doing it are two different things, though. Why don't we live lives of separation from sin? Because we choose to sin instead of turning from it. God taught this to the people by including instructions about the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 13:3-10). Sanctification means separation from sin.

DONKEYS AND MEN God then included instructions about firstborn animals belonging to Him as well, since they also were spared in Egypt (Exodus 13:11-12). The firstborn of all animals was to die, too.

God's provision was that a substitute could die for firstborn people. When Jesus was born He was taken to the temple to be circumcised and pigeons were killed in His place. Only a perfect animal could be used, as a picture of Jesus, our perfect substitute.

Lest people think of themselves as superior and become prideful, there was one animal that also could have a substitute offered for it. That was a donkey (v. 13). It's not that donkeys were superior animals for they weren't. They were unclean, had no spiritual sense, self-centered, stubborn, lazy and mere beasts of burden. Donkeys and people are discussed in the same sentence, with the same substitute and the same consequence if the substitute is neglected. It's like saying people and donkeys are interchangeable, no real difference! God is showing them (and us) that we must see ourselves as an unclean donkey to be saved! Self-righteousness has no place in our lives. We can't do anything about our sin, only God can do that. Thus, the donkey was a vivid object lesson to them, and to us.

FOR ALL GENERATIONS ... This setting apart the firstborn for God in a special way was something the Jews were to do for all generations. Mary and Joseph did this for Jesus. This was to be done as a teaching aid for generation to generation (Exodus 13:14-16). As they recognize they have been redeemed by an innocent blood sacrifice, their response is to be one of willingly committing themselves to live for God their whole lives.

We, too, are to be set apart, holy, because our substitute died for us. For us today baptism pictures that public commitment. It shows we are setting ourselves apart from life without Jesus in order to live for Him in His death and resurrection.

On my desk at home, I have several notes from my children hanging up. They aren't very neat, most have misspellings, and the art work isn't great. On the open market they would bring nothing. But they are invaluable to me because they are love notes from my children. It's their love that makes them special, not their beauty or artistic talent represented in them. When God looks at us and our works, He doesn't see the sin marks and the mistakes, but He sees our love for Him. That's what He wants from us. That's why He created us. That's why the things we do for Him in His strength He hangs on His 'heavenly refrigerator,' awaiting the day we come to heaven when He can reward us for them. It's not our perfect lives He wants as much as our loving hearts. He wants us sanctified, set apart from all other loves to be His alone. Does He have your undivided love? Make sure He has it today and always.

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18. TO AND AT THE RED SEA

EXODUS 13:17-14:20

Tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified like Jesus. A famous artist painted a picture of this and placed it in the cathedral at Cologne. When Napoleon ransacked the city, he stole this painting. When the artist found this out he created another from memory. Eventually the original was found and returned, and now both hang side by side. Experts view them in great detail and can find almost no difference between them.

God is doing the same thing in our lives. As the Artist, he is working to make us as much like the original, Jesus, as possible. This is often a painful process of stretching, carving, sanding and polishing. When we have committed ourselves to live for God (Exodus 13:1-16), though, He then begins this process (Exodus 13:17-22).

GOD THE FATHER DIRECTS When the Jews marched out of Egypt they could have gone directly to the Promised Land in a few days, which is what they assumed would happen. We assume that we will quickly grow in spiritual maturity. God knew that they weren't ready for the kind of warfare it would take to get by the Philistine forts. The quickest way is not always the best way. God took them instead in almost the opposite direction! He knew they'd need time away and apart, with Him alone, to receive, learn and apply His word. So, God the Father directed them to head toward the wilderness (Exodus 13:17-18).

God knows what will be too hard for us, too, and sends us in safer directions. Sometimes they seem far and roundabout, but God knows best (Psalm 103:13-14; 1 Corinthians. 10:13). His purpose is to make us into the image of Jesus, not give us heaven on earth ASAP.

GOD THE SON ACCOMPANIES Moses took Joseph's bones (mummy) with them (Exodus 13:19). Joseph is one of the clearest pictures (types) of Jesus in the Bible: lived a holy life as a servant, hated by brethren, conspired against, rejected, falsely accused, suffered at the hands of Gentiles, becoming the savior/deliverer of the world, forgave his brethren and then exalted and seated on a throne with a Gentile bride. Today, too, God the Father directs but God the Son goes along with us. He accompanies us. He will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 3:16; 31:8; Josh 1:5; I Kings 8:57; Hebrews 13:5).

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES It was the custom of ancient leaders such as Darius and Alexander to lead their armies by having a small iron vessel with a wood fire in front. It would send up much smoke, and the army scattered for miles in all directions could see it and follow. At night highly flammable materials were burnt so the flames shot into the air. God, as the leader of Israel, sets up His own similar command station. He sends a cloud to lead during the day which was a pillar of light in the dark (Exodus 13:20-22). This is a picture of the Holy spirit. Both are freely given after salvation to guide God's people and light their journey. They are a protection (for the Jews the cloud gave them shade in the hot desert) and spokesman for God.

Thus, God the Father directed them, God the Son accompanied them, and God the Holy Spirit guided them. With this the Jews were assured of victory; how could things go wrong? All they had to do was follow and everything would be fine. Right? Right! Only God led them right into a great big trap (Exodus 14:1-2).

THE TRAP Please note that they were in God's perfect will, following His leading, when they entered the trap. The Sea was in front of them and large mountains on each side with an old fort (migdol) at the entrance. They walked right into it. God led them there. He was using them as bait for the Egyptian army. Can you identify with that? Do you ever feel like 'bait' left out to dry? Here the Jews thought their problems were over, they were on their way out of Egypt and would be in the Promised land in a few days, they had great riches given to them before they left, and God promised to feed, clothe and care for them. That's when God throws a pop quiz – unannounced. They are given an opportunity to practice what they learned at the Passover, to trust God for their deliverance.

Humanly speaking they are in a hopeless situation. Moses is the only one who realizes it right away, for he knew the area. Still, he obeys God's leading and follows Him. God wants all of the people to trust Him and obey. This is part of His process in making them like Jesus.

When Egyptian spies report that the Jews are wandering lost and boxed in, it gives Pharaoh the idea to follow them and take their revenge out on them (Exodus 14:3-9).

THE TRAPPED However when the people realize they are trapped they panic (v. 10) and blame Moses for it all (v. 11-12). They question his motives in leading them, one of the tricks Satan still uses on people today. What is your first reaction when you realize you are boxed in, trapped with no way to go? Do you, like the Jews, look for someone to blame? "Whose fault is it?" "Who messed up?"

Moses, though, stands faithful to God. "Do not fear" he tells them (v. 13). Fear is the opposite of faith. We can't have both, one replaces the other. Fear is a feeling that has no patience. It must be satisfied now. Faith raises above the visible and present to the unseen and the future. When afraid, put your trust in God (Psalm 56:3).

"STAND STILL" Moses told the people to stop panicking and stand still (v. 13-14). Evidently they wanted to do something, anything. They wanted to get back out if they could, cross a mountain, do something! They had no patience to quietly trust God. Long-suffering is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, not something we can whip up on our own. The patience of Job is developed by facing trials and tribulations with faith in God as Job did. God uses all these things to form us more and more to the image of Jesus.

Abraham patiently waited for God to provide a son, Isaac, then was willing to sacrifice that son to God. He didn't understand what God was doing. He didn't see deliverance until his knife flashed over Isaac's heart. He patiently trusted God and God provided.

When tempted to panic and run around trying to do something, anything - "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (v. 13). But then there is a time to act.

"GO AHEAD" When they calm down and pray to God for help, He gives them directions – keep going ahead, no matter if the sea is there (v. 15-16). He even tells them to stop praying and act! There is a time to stop the panic and quietly trust, but then when God says to move ahead we must do so! Maybe some of us right now are still crying out to God when He has told us to move ahead. We see the obstacle, but God sees the deliverance. We must move ahead, even if we feel we are going to our destruction in the sea. There are no obstacles too great for God. Just move ahead, it's all under God's control (v. 17-20). There are no traps with God on your side!

Old Testament Men – IV. MOSES & the Deliverance from Egypt

19. THROUGH THE RED SEA

EXODUS 14:21-15:21

An article in the “Humor in Uniform” section of Readers Digest many years ago tells of an Air Force pilot on his last leave before going overseas. His wife reminded him to keep his trust in the Lord no matter how bad the situation became. Upon his safe return a year later his wife told him, “I told you that God wouldn’t let you down.” He grinned at her and said, “I know, but he sure left me dangling there a couple of times!”

I’m sure that could be your testimony, too. God has never let you down but you sure felt like He left you dangling a few times!

God does that to us. In increases our faith and trust in Him. He did that to the Jews when they left Egypt. Remember it was He Who led them out, and right into a trap. They were bait for the Egyptian army. What a situation to be in!

THE TRAP OPENS There they were at the Red (Reed) Sea with large mountains on either side and the Egyptian army blocking the way in. God told Moses to tell the Jews to go ahead, to keep moving in the direction He was taking them. (Exodus 14:15). Any other time they wouldn’t even consider that. Sometimes the vest reason for doing something is lack of an alternative! God removes our other options to force us to go in the direction He wants us to go. Would Peter have gotten out of the boat to walk on the water if it was a peaceful day and the boat was in no danger of sinking at any second?

Everyone’s first thought when God said to go ahead was of the obstacle before them – as if God had forgotten about it and they had to point it out to Him! He has that all planned: the sea will open (v. 16) and the Egyptian army will be destroyed (v. 17-20). Moses obeyed God and, sure enough, the water opened for them to walk through (v. 21-22, 29).

We don’t know how deep the water was, but ships sailed on it and all the Egyptians drown in it so it was no shallow marsh, as some would have us believe! The opening must have been a few miles wide so that 3 million could cross, with their animals and possessions, in just one night.

The Red Sea had been the problem. Now it becomes the solution. God delights in turning our problems into our very means of deliverance. He loves splitting our difficulties and getting us through without even getting our feet wet. It must have been very impressive to those watching to see the sea part for them, like they could hardly believe it. But God did it. He was in control of everything.

His sovereignty created the sea and mountains, setting up the place to be trapped. His love brought them there and protected them. His justice brought judgment on the Egyptians. His redemption brought them through safely.

Note, too, that they went through on dry ground. What do you think the bottom of a freshly-drained sea would be like to walk on? With millions of people, animals, children and wagons crossing it had to be dry. God knew that and took care of it before they could even ask Him to. This is what lured the Egyptian chariots in, too, or they would have stayed back. God’s little touches sometimes go unnoticed and unappreciated. Look for them in your life.

“A WAY OUT” God always provides a way out when we are trapped in temptation or testing. “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so

that you can stand up under it (I Corinthians 10:13).” What makes this passage especially meaningful in our present context is that Paul draws it from the example of the Jews being trapped at the Red Sea (I Corinthians 10:1-12). Just like God provided them a way out of their impossible situation, so He provides a way out of ours as well. Traps become open doors. That which we dread most becomes a blessing when God touches it.

God truly cares for His own. But what about His enemies?

THE TRAP CLOSSES God’s presence in the cloud had blocked the Egyptians from attacking the Jews while they crossed the Red Sea. Then the cloud lifted so they could see what was happening. When they saw the opening through the Red Sea they forgot all the plagues and judgments on Egypt and, in anger and bitterness, chased right after the Jews. How many times people rush to their own destruction when trying to destroy someone else? They charged through the opening after the Jews (Exodus 14:23).

Then the trappers became the trapped. God’s master plan unfolded at the last minute. After all, what good was it to have the Jews escape through the Red Sea if the Egyptians could follow them? That would be no deliverance. Immediately circumstances flip and reverse themselves. The Jews are now free and the Egyptians are trapped.

What seems to have happened was that a very, very rare occurrence in a dry climate happened at that moment. A thunderstorm struck (Psalm 77:16-20). The thunder and lightning panicked the horses and the water pouring down made the ground muddy. That bogged down the wheels of the chariots. God had this planned all along – but He didn’t tell the Jews ahead of time about it. Why not? They had to trust Him, that was all. It didn’t matter HOW He would deliver; the fact was that He said He WOULD do it. If He told them the enemy (Satan) would find out and fight it, the Jews wouldn’t believe and would try to ‘improve’ on God’s plan, as we so often do as well. God had promised to deliver them, not to tell them everything ahead of time. These are important lessons for us to learn and apply as well!

Anyway, while the Egyptian army was panicky and bogged down the waters came back upon them and drowned them all (v. 26-28). Just like the cross, the worst thing becomes the best thing when God uses it for His purpose (Romans 8:28).

An interesting touch of God’s is that the Egyptians washed up on the shore where the Jews were, not the other shore or sank to the bottom (Exodus 14:30). This showed them what could have happened to them. It also provided them with an army’s worth of armor and equipment. They’ll soon need this, and God again is providing ahead of time, before they even know to ask.

RESPONSES When the Jews realized all that happened they trusted in God (v. 31) and praised Him in song (Exodus 15). This war ballad, like the song of Deborah in Judges 5, became their emancipation song, their national anthem, their redemption song. How could they not praise God for such wonderful deliverance?

Do you stop and praise God for His deliverances in your life? When you feel like you’re hanging, just dangling on the edge of disaster, do you remember all the times He’s come through in the past and continue to trust Him now? And when the danger or tough time is past and He brings you safely through to the other side, do you, too, stop and praise Him? Why not sit down with Exodus 15 right now and read it as your prayer of praise to God, thinking of all the times and ways He has delivered you.

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20. AMALEK

EXODUS 17:8-16

Often we think that becoming a Christian will mean the end to our problems and troubles. Actually, it is often just the start, for when we put Christ first and serve in His army we are declaring war against Satan, the world and the flesh. These do not give up easily and push back very hard. Don't be surprised at the battles that come AFTER salvation, for that is when the warfare starts. That's what God had to teach His people, the Jews, after their deliverance through the Red Sea.

MARAH, MANNA & MERRIBAH After leaving the Red Sea area the Jews needed to apply what they learned about trusting God. When they ran out of water God sweetened the waters at Marah so they could drink. He fed them with manna from heaven. He provided water from the rock at Merribah. He was showing in little, daily ways that He could and would care for them.

THE ATTACK OF AMALEK The Amalekites were descendants of Esau, the man of the flesh with no spiritual concern (Hebrews. 12:16-17). The nation he started was like him: not fearing God (Deuteronomy 27:17-18). It was the vilest nation of its day (Num 24:24). They followed the Jews. Moses probably thought that as they followed God they would lose the Amalekites, but you can't run from the flesh! We can't escape its attacks.

Amalek hits when least expected (Exodus 17:8). The Jews have been victorious over the Egypt (a picture of the world) and Pharaoh (a picture of Satan). God was feeding and protecting them. They thought their difficulties were over. Often, though, it's not until we get some victory over the influence of the world on us and Satan's attacks against us that we are able to start struggling with our flesh.

Notice, too, that Amalek attacks at the weakest point. They attacked the Jews at the rear (Deuteronomy. 25:17-18) where the weak stragglers are. The flesh hits us at our weak spot, not at our strength. We are all strong in some areas and weak in others. Guess where we get tempted most?

THE ATTACK OF THE FLESH Just what are we talking about when we refer to the 'flesh'? It is also referred to in the Bible as the 'old man,' 'carnal believer,' sin which indwells me,' 'evil present in me' and 'law of sin in the members of my body.' Romans 7:15 - 8:4 clearly show the conflict of the new nature with our 'flesh.' Thus the 'flesh' is that in us which makes sin come more naturally than holiness, it is our natural tendency to sin. Fear comes easier than faith, revenge than forgiveness, greed than contentment and pride than humility. 'Flesh' is our sin nature, which entered when Adam and Eve sinned and which has passed on to ALL of us (I John 1:8-10).

Sometimes the word 'flesh' is translated 'carnal' (I Corinthians 3:1-4). Both literally mean 'meat.' Chili con carni is chili and meat. While there is nothing innately sinful with our flesh, our 'meat,' it is where our sin nature dwells. The thing within is called by the name of its container (see also Galatians 5:16-17).

VICTORY OVER AMALEK/THE FLESH The only way to have victory is by warfare. The Jews had to stop and fight (Exodus 17:9). Before salvation/deliverance God did their fighting for them. They weren't able to fight. But now, with the new nature (Holy Spirit), being fed by God's water and manna, and covered with the armor God provided them from the dead Egyptians (Ephesians 5 lists the armor god provides for us) they are able and even required to fight. They can't sit back and expect God to

make life perfect. God the Father is guiding them, God the Son is present with them (bones of Joseph) and God the Spirit (cloud) is leading and protecting them. Still, they must stand and fight against Amalek/the flesh. They can't run from it and they can't compromise and give in to it. "Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war."

The solution to the Amalek attack was two-fold. First, the **fought behind Joshua**, who is a picture/type of Jesus. This is the first mention of Joshua in the bible. He is about 45 years of age, capable, dependable and the tribal chieftain of Ephraim. "Joshua" in Hebrew means the same thing as "Jesus" in Greek - "YHWH is Savior." "Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before." The Jews had to fight. They couldn't just sit around and wait for God to change it all. But fighting alone wouldn't bring victory.

At the same time as the fighting was going on **Moses was praying** (Exodus 17:9). He had to stand with his arms raised, holding over his head the staff which God has used to perform many miracles. One of the main ways Jews prayed was with their hands lifted to heaven. And by holding the staff Moses was showing faith in God's provision. Salvation is free, we just receive it. However, victory in our Christian walk takes warfare: fighting and praying together.

In fact, when Moses' hands were raised the Jews were winning but when he put them down as they got tired and heavy, the Jews started losing (Exodus 17:10-11). This pictured him not praying, and when prayers ceased so did victory. To have victory over the flesh one must fight and pray. We fight behind Jesus, following His leadership and depending on His strength. We don't give in but fight. At the same time, we must pray in faith. Prayer is not preliminary to the battle; prayer IS the battle. To win the battle over the flesh we must win the battle over the flesh. Victory means both fighting and praying. We usually are good at one and poor at the other. We strive to the best of our ability but fail because we don't have the prayer cover we need. Or we pray hard and long, but don't fight with all our might and so we also lose.

HELP! "But it's impossible to keep praying that hard all the time we are fighting," you might think. True. Moses, too, grew weary. He needed the help of his friends, Hur and Aaron, one on either side, to help hold his arms up (Exodus 17:12). We need others to hold us up in prayer as well when we are having battles. Unfortunately, our fear or pride or something keep us from asking for that much-needed help. We **MUST** have those we can turn to for help. Also, we must be alert to those around us, especially in our own family, who are going through similar battles. We must intercede for them, holding them up in prayer before the Lord. Then victory will come.

VICTORY! With this winning combination the Jews defeated Amalek (Exodus 17:13). It was a clear, total victory. Moses was told to make a record of it for all to remember (Exodus 17:14-15) because that would help their faith the next time they battled Amalek. Battling the flesh isn't a onetime thing. It is a continual warfare, a lifelong battle.

It was the Amalekite giants that kept the Jews from the Promised Land (Numbers 14). It was the Amalekites who attacked the Jews at Kadesh (Numbers 31) and who oppressed the Jews until God used Gideon to defeat them. Saul fought them but compromised instead of destroying them all. Later he was defeated by them and killed by an Amalekite. Hamaan, in Esther, almost succeeded in having all the Jews killed. He was an Amalekite. Gradually the Amalekites became part of the Arab nations around them, and as such still oppose the Jews to this very day. When Jesus returns they will be completely destroyed. It won't be until we die or Jesus returns that we will have final victory, but until then we must fight and pray.

Old Testament Men

IV. CALEB: Standing on the Promises

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1. When Challenged with Chief Choices (Major Decisions of Life)
2. When Meet with Mundane Matters (Mundane Dreariness of Life)
3. When Greeted with Gargantuan Giants (Mega Discords of Life)

A first-person dramatization by Caleb

INTRODUCTION

(Girl, run to front of church waving scroll, shouting) “Grandpa! Grandpa! I found your name in this scroll! It says, ‘Caleb, son of Jephunnah.’ That’s you! Moses wrote all about you!”

(Caleb walks toward her from front) “Well hello granddaughter! That’s right, Moses did write about me. So did Joshua and the writer of Judges!”

(Girl) “Then you’re famous!”

(Caleb) “No, not really. Maybe lots of people have read my name, but not many of them know much about me.”

(Girl) “But Moses and those other writers thought you were special enough to write about!”

(Caleb) “Well, that’s not exactly right. They didn’t mention me to brag about me, but to use me as an example so their readers would understand what they were trying to teach by their writings. They wanted people to know that God would do what He had promised and so we should always trust and obey Him. Actually, when you read about me it’s sad, because of the thousands of people only Joshua and I took God at His word. You see, the focus in your scroll isn’t on me but on who God is.”

(Girl) “Can you tell me more about it, Grandpa? I mean more about the example you set by trusting God to do what He said He’d do?”

(Caleb) “I sure can. Let’s look at that scroll. Why don’t you sit down over there and I’ll try to explain it to you.” (Get scroll while she sits down, go back to pulpit)

Old Testament Men – IV. CALEB: Standing on the Promises

1. WHEN CHALLENGED WITH CHIEF CHOICES

MAJOR DECISIONS OF LIFE

My name is first mentioned in Numbers 13. Moses was our leader, and had been for several years. Moses was a strong, outstanding leader but he wasn't able to enter the land because of sin so he was preparing the next generation to go in without him. He wrote Numbers to be an instruction manual for the new generation, showing them the importance of trusting and obeying God. While the first generation and especially 10 of the spies were bad examples, he used Joshua and me as good examples of trusting God.

We had been delivered out of Egypt after the 10 plagues, through the Red Sea, and went to Mt. Sinai where we stayed for a year while God gave us the law and tabernacle. Then we went to Kadesh Barnea to get ready to enter our land as God had promised. That's where I'm first mentioned.

Numbers 13:1 "The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders." 3 So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. 4 These are their names: 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh;"

As you know, granddaughter, my name, Caleb, means 'dog,' some say it means 'mad dog.' I had spent years in Egypt as a slave with the other Jews.

My father, your great-grandfather, was named Jephunneh. Our ancestors were Edomites, Gentiles, descendants of Esau. However, our clan, the Kenizzites, left the tribe of Edom and joined with the tribe of Judah. We believed in Yahweh and were taken in as one of them.

I was the leader of our clan in Judah and had the privilege of representing Judah when Palestine was investigated. It was a great honor to be chosen.

I had heard that God promised this land to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Now, when we make a promise it expresses our best intention, but we can't totally guarantee anything. What God promises, though, is guaranteed.

Actually, though, the Bible never says God promises anything. There is no Hebrew word for promise used. The words used are the normal words used for saying and speaking. You see, when God says something it is a promise. Everything He says is a promise. Every single statement. ALL God says is 100% true. So, nothing has to be singled out as a promise, because everything He says is. The same is true in your New Testament. God's very character stands behind every statement He makes.

So, when God said the descendants of Abraham would be brought back to the land everyone had a choice to believe what He said or not. I chose to believe and trust what He said He would do.

God said He would give this land to Abraham's descendants forever. (Genesis 12:7) The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." (Genesis 13:14-17) "The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ... 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to

you." (Genesis 15:13-15) Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ... 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here." God repeated the same promises to Jacob and Joseph.

We were a slave nation with slave mentality and no war experience. Here we wanted the very best land anywhere which was controlled by the strongest warriors in any nation. But God had said it would be ours and God's word is always true.

Anyway, I was one of the ones chosen to spend 40 days traveling 250 miles north through the land, then back again.

When we returned we reported that the land was great! It was truly a land of milk and honey. However, the people living there were powerful and lived in large fortified cities. Giants even lived there.

Many of the people were fearful and didn't take God at His word. That's why Moses wrote about Joshua and me. He used us as an example to the next generation of how the first generation should have trusted God.

Moses quoted the very words I said: "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'" (Num 13:30)

I remembered another impossible situation, when we were trapped at the Red Sea, and God said He would bring victory and He did: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again." (Ex. 14:13)

Do YOU remember God's promised protection when you are tempted to fear? He promises you victory when you are afraid: "The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalms. 118:6) "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me." (Psalms. 23:4) "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isa. 41:10)

The people in my day didn't trust God but let their fear guide them. They wanted to kill Moses, Joshua, and me, choose new leaders, and go back to Egyptian bondage!

We tried to convince them to trust God but they wouldn't listen. (Num 14:5) "Then Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. 6 Joshua, son of Nun and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to the entire Israelite assembly, 'The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.' 10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them."

The people knew this in their minds but let their emotions take over. They saw only their own weakness. But it is not our strength, just His, that brings victory. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians. 12:9

The result of their lack of trust was that we couldn't enter the land but had to wander for 38 years, until 40 years after we had left Egypt. Then those under 40 years of age, the 2nd generation, would be able to make their decision.

But God rewarded Joshua and me by telling us we'd be an exception and would go into the land. God rewards belief in Him and what He says. Num 14:23 "Not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. 24 But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. ... 29 In this desert your bodies will fall — every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. 30 Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh and Joshua, son of Nun. ... 37 these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. 38 Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived."

Moses wasn't bragging about me, but using me as an example to be followed. You can be an example to those around you of someone who trusts God.

Notice two things Moses points out about me. First he says I have a "different spirit" than the other 10 spies and the people who didn't trust God. You can have a different spirit, too, if you let the Holy Spirit control you. "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

The second thing Moses says about me is that I "follow God wholeheartedly." In fact, the Bible says this about me six times! It means I fully, completely, passionately, faithfully, loyally follow God. There was nothing between me and Him. Moses defined it this way when he said we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

You see, it's possible to follow God but not completely. The Jews followed God out of Egypt but not into the Promised Land. Maybe you've followed Him out of sin by salvation but aren't following Him faithfully enough to bring you into your place of victory.

Following God completely means there is no gap between you and Him. Are you as close to God as possible? Is there a gap between you and Him?

Several times in Numbers and once in Deuteronomy Moses repeats that the Jews lost entrance into the land because of not believing God while Joshua and I did receive what God promised because we did believe Him.

But that brings up a problem: if what God says is 100% true. Why didn't everyone receive the land? Are God's promises conditional?

Yes, many are conditional upon faith and obedience. This is always clearly stated. God had told the Jews at Mt Sinai, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Ex 19:5). He also said the same about receiving the land promised them (Ex 23:20-33). The land was given to Abraham's descendants forever, unconditionally, but enjoyment of the blessings by this generation was dependent on obedience. You can have victory, blessing, and spiritual growth as God promised but that, too, is conditional on trust and obedience.

Other promises are clearly unconditional, no condition is stated. God said Abraham's descendants would be a nation forever and the land of Palestine would always be theirs. They couldn't lose the land, but they could forfeit their opportunity to enjoy the blessings of the land.

When you accept Jesus as Savior you are His unconditionally. Lack of faith and obedience can keep you from enjoying your privileges and blessings, but you'll still be His child.

Remember that partial obedience brings partial blessing. The Jews left Egypt but didn't enter the land. God's statements are always true, but often the benefits are conditional on obedience. The more completely we trust and obey, the more we are blessed. This applies to little things as well as big things in life. Sometimes we have major decisions to make where we need to trust God as revealed in His Word. I had that when I had to decide if I would trust God to give us the land or not. Other times we trust God for daily life, same thing each day – we still need to trust God in that.

Old Testament Men – IV. CALEB: Standing on the Promises

2. WHEN MET WITH MUNDANE MATTERS

MUNDANE DREARINESS OF LIFE

Soon we left Kadesh Barnea and wandered around for 38 years, just roaming and passing time. We split up and went our separate ways looking for fresh grass and water. It was a dull, boring time, but life isn't always exciting and full of adventure. I had to patiently wait for God to fulfill the promises He had made to me. Maybe you are waiting for something, too.

I was suffering because of the lack of faith of others, which wasn't really fair to me. Maybe you are going through some unfair consequences of others' sins.

I also had disappointment to handle, for Joshua was chosen to replace Moses and I was passed over. I'm sure you have times when things don't work out as you would like. God did say He would be with us during the waiting times as well. God promises to always be with you, in daily routine times as well as other times. When things seem unfair or you feel disappointed, trust Him and keep on obeying.

In those times, remember God is still there keeping His promises to provide. (Num. 14:11) "I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then." God cared for us every day during those years. He gave me manna to eat every day. He made sure our clothing and sandals never wore out. He kept it so we would never get sick or be unhealthy.

Listen to some of the promises He made to us: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Psalms. 23:1-3

"I will never leave you or forsake you. " Hebrews 13:5

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians. 4:19

Matthew 6:25-34 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

The insert in your bulletin lists other promises you can use in your daily life.

So always remember to trust God's promises in the major decisions of life, the mundane dreariness of life and the mega discords of life.

Old Testament Men – IV. CALEB: Standing on the Promises

3. WHEN GREETED WITH GARGANTUAN GIANTS

MEGA DISCORDS OF LIFE

When Moses died Joshua then picked up the story. He wrote about how God did keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph about us being back in our land. What God said did come true, but we had to wait 38 extra years because of unbelief. It could have happened to the first generation out of Egypt but didn't. The next generation did trust and enter the land. However, God's plans for them were different than for their parents.

God keeps His word but does it in different ways. Sometimes He does it all Himself, like destroying the Egyptian army, opening the Jordan river so we can walk through, knocking down the walls of Jericho or keeping the sun from setting so the battle could be completed. Other times He works through us to accomplish what he wants, as when the Amalekites were defeated on the way to Mt. Sinai or when Joshua led the army to victory over the Canaanites.

Joshua wrote all about this in his book. In the first twelve chapters he talks about conquering the land. He tells how we entered at Jericho and split the country so we could conquer the south first, then the north. That took 7 years of constant warfare.

The second half of his book, chapters 13-21, talks about dividing and settling the land. The individual tribes were responsible for the clean-up operations among the Gentiles who remained in their territories. It seems Judah wasn't in a hurry to fight for its land and was putting off claiming what was theirs. Perhaps the giants who were still here, scared them. I wasn't afraid, though. I hadn't been 45 years ago so why should I be now?

I wanted to move ahead so I came to Joshua to claim the land given me. I was anxious and confident. I still believed God's statements about the land being ours. God has repeated these promises to Moses (Deuteronomy. 11:24) and Joshua (1:4). He told each of them He would be with them so they shouldn't be afraid (Deuteronomy 31:6; Josh 1:9). I knew God's word was good!

I was 85 years old now. It has been 45 years since God told me the land would be mine: 38 years of wandering and 7 years of battles in the land. Suppose God gave you a promise in 1959 and didn't fulfill it until this year? Or suppose you received a promise from Him today but it wouldn't be fulfilled until 2049! We must be patient and wait for God's timing to keep His word! I had patiently waited 45 years for God's word to be fulfilled. Now the waiting was up and I was ready to move ahead in faith.

(Joshua 14:6) Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. 7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, 8 but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly. 9 So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.'

(Joshua 21:9, 11-12, 18) From the tribes of Judah and Simeon they allotted the following towns by name.... The fields and villages around the city (Hebron) they had given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his possession.

Hebron (shown on map) it was a priest's city, but the territory about it belonged to Caleb and his family. I also got Debir and the area around it. It was a tough place to capture. Anyway, here I had some of the best land in Palestine, land of my choosing. However, the best warriors had already taken and fortified it.

(Joshua 14:10) "Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 11 I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. 12 Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said." 13 Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. 14 So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly."

The land was mine the last 45 years but I had to move into it by faith and drive out the giants. Now I still have to face the giants, putting it off just put it off! It didn't remove or change anything. Whatever you are putting off facing now will still have to be faced and worked through. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Believing God all that time was great, but then came the time to act on that belief. (Joshua 15:13-15) In accordance with the LORD's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion in Judah-Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) 14 From Hebron Caleb drove out the ... descendants of Anak. 15 From there he marched against the people living in Debir."

At 85 years of age, I tackled the area with the giants, that which had kept the whole nation out for 38 years. God didn't miraculously remove them, although He could have. He wanted me to fight them, in His strength, and see Him remove them that way.

The word used to describe the inhabitants I had to battle, Anakite, is correctly translated 'giant.' However, it refers not just to someone physically large but to someone also large in evil and violence. Egyptian monuments picture them as tall and fat. Og, who lived east of Jordan, had a bed 13' long and 6' wide. Goliath, a descendant of some giants who remained in another part of the land, was 9'-9" tall.

The people had been afraid to fight the giants, saying they felt like grasshoppers compared to them. You face giant situation in life where you are unable in your own strength to win but can only do so in God's strength. Remember another giant-killer, David, and how he had victory by trusting God. 1 Samuel 17:45-47 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Actually, David and I were very similar in many ways. Perhaps my example helped encourage him to defeat Goliath. We each had a different spirit from those around us who feared the giants. We followed God wholeheartedly, trusting God would do what He had said He would do. We each saw a situation needed to be addressed and did so without fear of the

consequences. God gave David and me physical victory over physical enemies. You can have spiritual victory by your spiritual weapons – the Word of God, over your spiritual enemies.

So, Moses and Joshua both used me as an example of trust for others to follow. They even wrote about some who followed my example – my own descendants.

I had given my daughter Acsah to my nephew Othniel as a wife to reward him for driving the giants out of Debir. She was a woman of faith in God's promises to us. She wanted land to settle and also springs of water so they could live there. She, too, believed God's promise that the land was ours forever. She took me at my word, just as I took God at His. That's how children learn to trust God, by trusting their parents.

Not only my daughter trusted God, but so did her husband, my son-in-law, Othniel. He continued the godly heritage I had established. He was the first one to judge Israel after my death. The writer of Judges also speaks of me, continuing the same message Moses and Joshua had started – trust God's Word to have blessing. After Joshua and I had died, there were very few who trusted God. Israel turned from God and was judged for it. God used Othniel to bring deliverance from Mesopotamia, however. Everything was going downhill, though. It would be quite a while until a truly godly leader again arose in Israel, in fact, not until the time of King David.

Not much else about me in this scroll. Some sons named in the genealogical records. An evil man named Nabal, who had an encounter with David, was a descendent of mine but obviously not one who followed my example. If he would have believed and obeyed God's word his whole life would have been better!

(Move down to girl with scroll) "Well, granddaughter, I hope that helps you understand. The story isn't about me, it's about Him (point upward). Remember to always follow Him, for everything He says is a promise that you can count on. Set an example to those around you by your faith and trust Him no matter what. Here, take your scroll. It's time for you to get on home."

(Girl) "Thanks, grandpa! I'll remember and I'll always try to trust what God says, just like you did!" (Leave)

You remember, too, that everything God says in your book is true. You can count on it. Despite what others do and what circumstances are going on in your life, trust Him! His promises are true. You can stand on them!

(PRAYER)

STANDING ON THE PROMISES

Throughout the years many have found, like Caleb did, that the only way to live is by trusting God's promise. Russell Carter was one. He was born in Baltimore in 1849 and was in the first graduating class of the Pennsylvania Military Academy at Chester. He taught there then spent a number of years in the ministry and ended up going to medical school and spent the last years of his life as a physician in Baltimore where he died in 1928 at the age of 79. During his life he wrote many hymns, even compiling a hymnal. In 1886 he wrote "Standing on the Promises." His fruitful life reflects the truth of this hymn. It's only as we stand on God's promises that we are able to live with purpose for God's glory.

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let His praises ring,
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.

*Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.*

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I now can see
Perfect, present cleansing in the blood for me;
Standing in the liberty where Christ makes free,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,
Bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord,
Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I cannot fall,
Listening every moment to the Spirit's call
Resting in my Savior as my all in all,
Standing on the promises of God.

STANDING ON THE PROMISES

Caleb

I. WHEN CHALLENGED WITH CHIEF CHOICES

MAJOR DECISIONS OF LIFE

A. THE CHALLENGE

1. GATHERING THE FACTS – Num 13:1-25; 34:19

2. GARNERING THE FAITH – Num 13:26-33; 14:5-9

B. THE REWARD Num 14:24, 30, 38; 26:65; Num 32:12; Deuteronomy 1:36

II. WHEN MET WITH MUNDANE MATTERS

MUNDANE DREARINESS OF LIFE

A. THE CHALLENGE

B. THE REWARD Joshua 14:10-11

III. WHEN GREETED WITH GARGANTUAN GIANTS

MEGA DISCORDS OF LIFE

A. THE CHALLENGE

1. BELIEVE IN GOD'S PROMISE

2. BE ALIVE IN GOD'S PROVISION Josh 15:14-17; Jud 1:12-13, 20

B. THE REWARD

1. DAUGHTER – Acsah

2. SON-IN-LAW Othniel

3. SONS - Iru, Elah and Naam.

PROMISES

ALL OUR NEEDS MET

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalms. 84:11

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name sake. Psalms. 23:1-3

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew. 6:33

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians. 4:19

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

ANSWERED PRAYER

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew. 7:7

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Matthew. 21:22

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. John 14:13

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it John 14:14

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. John 5:14:15

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24

You will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. Jeremiah 29:12

BLESSING THROUGH TRIALS

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Psalms. 126:5

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem. Isa. 66:13

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

You know the testing of your faith develops perseverance. James 1:3

No temptation/testing has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted/tested beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted/tested, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Cor. 10:13

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield. Psalms. 91:4

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble I will deliver him & honor him. With long life will I satisfy him & show him my salvation. Psalm 91:14-16

FAITHFUL WITNESS

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. Matthew. 10:32

I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever. But now the LORD declares: Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. 1 Samuel 2:30

FEAR

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Psalms. 118:6

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me. Psalms. 23:4

"I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." Genesis. 26:24

Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1

"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. Ex. 14:13

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isa. 41:10

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:6

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Matthew. 14:27

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and fight our battles. 2 Chronicle. 32:7-8a

FORGIVENESS OF SIN

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Matthew. 6:14

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me. Jeremiah 15:19

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

GUIDANCE

For this God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end. Psalms. 48:14

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Psalms. 23:1-3

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs. 3:5-6

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Psalms. 32:8

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. Isa. 42:16

NEVER ALONE

"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Genesis. 28:15

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:38-39

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Exodus 33:14

PEACE

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians. 4:7

REST

Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew. 11:28

My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Exodus 33:14

REWARD FOR PATIENCE, FAITHFULNESS

But those who hope (wait upon) the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isa. 40:31

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Psalms. 40:1-3

SECURITY IN CHRIST

I am the gate: whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. John 10:9

STRENGTH FOR WHATEVER COMES

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians. 4:13

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Cor. 12:9

Your strength will equal your days. Deuteronomy. 33:25

He gives power to the tired and worn out, and strength to the weak. Isaiah 40:29

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Cor. 10:13