



PASTOR JOHN KLESS

A LIFETIME IN THE WORD

VOLUME 1 - OLD TESTAMENT

Dedication:

To my wonderful wife: LuAnn

Without your commitment to share together in ministry with me these 47 years I could not have had a “lifetime in the Word”! Your countless hours of caring for me, our children, our home and the church body gave me the ability to pursue the deep study of God’s Word each week so this book is as much a product of your life as it is mine. I am thankful for you and I love you.

To our five wonderful children: Andrea, Benjamin, Amy, Jennifer and Dan

You have sat under my teaching and preaching literally your entire lives. The greatest fruit of my ministry has been to see each one of you grow up to be mature believers who deeply love Jesus, understand and value His Word and are committed to serving Him, even alongside me. I am blessed to be your father and I love you.

To my church: Glenside Bible Church

You have loved and cared for me as your pastor for 41 years. It has been my great honor and privilege to preach to you and instruct you in the Word of God. Almost all of the sermons in this book were carefully prepared for you and graciously received by you as truth from God. Thank you for being patient with me and giving me the opportunity to serve God among you in this way. I love you all.

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How To Use This Book

From June of 1974 at the age of 19 to the present at age 67 it has been my greatest privilege to preach and teach the Word of God nearly every Sunday. Originally, I made handwritten notes on paper, most of which have been lost, but around 1985 God blessed me with a personal computer (an Apple IIc with 128K of RAM and 5 ¼ floppies if you can imagine that!) and I began to type out messages and save them as digital files. Over the years I have preached hundreds of times and because they have been stored digitally, I now have the ability to edit and format them and share them with you. This book is my collected work from a life of ministry. It literally represents *A Lifetime In The Word*, a lifetime of studying the Word of God for hours each week, endeavoring to understand it as God intended and faithfully communicate it to the people of God.

So, this is obviously a book of sermons, not the kind of book that you sit down and read from beginning to end. It is more like a Bible commentary, a book in which you turn to the portion you wish to know more about at the moment. To keep its size reasonable, I have divided it into three separate volumes:

Volume 1 - Old Testament in which you'll find studies covering *most* of the books of the Old Testament.

Volume 2 - New Testament in which you'll find a study of *every* New Testament book.

Volume 3 - Thematic Studies in which you'll find studies on biographical, doctrinal, missiological and prophetic themes and more.

1. Use it like a Bible commentary - If you are studying a particular passage of Scripture, find the message that covers that text and it will probably help you understand the meaning of the passage. The messages are based on a lot of thorough research including commentaries by many others, as well insights from the original language. It has always been my goal not to teach or say anything that wasn't true and accurate to the best of my knowledge, so you can benefit from the research I've put in by simply reading my explanation of the passage and its context.

2. Use it as an aid in teaching and preaching - These are expositional sermons which means that the points of the message are derived from the text as much as possible. The messages are in outline form rather than paragraph form so that the points of the outline are in **BOLD** type, followed by further explanation and devotional comments. Thus, here you have an outline for many of the books and chapters of the Bible and also for many of its important themes that you can use as they are or reword to suit yourself as you present them to others.

3. Use it for devotional purposes - Because the point of sermons is to motivate people rather than simply giving them information, there is much devotional material and there are many touching illustrations in this work. So, you can read through all or part of a message as part of your regular devotional life, perhaps as you read through the section of Scripture it points to.

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You have my permission to copy, share, edit and use any of the material in this book, with or without giving any credit to me, as long as you are using it to sincerely help yourself or other people grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Freely I have received from God insight into the Word and freely I give it to you. However, it MAY NOT be sold or used to make a profit.

To the glory of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

Rev. John M. Kless, Jr.

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Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Creation Of The Universe - 1:1

The Bible is one united story from beginning to end. It is the story of God and His plan for human race. When we hear the word *story*, we often think of a fictional story, a made-up story, but the Bible is a REAL story, a TRUE story, a story that actually happened historically exactly as recorded. God's story begins by telling us how and why man came to exist, continues by telling us what his history is all about and how God entered it in Jesus Christ and concludes by telling us what will happen to mankind in the distant future. Chapters 1-11 of Genesis form the introduction to the entire Bible; they set the stage for the entire story. In these chapters God tells us 1) how the universe came to be, 2) how our earth and everything in it came to be, 3) how man ruined the nature of both of himself and the whole world, 4) how God destroyed the human race and started it over again through a great Flood and 5) how the human race became the conglomerate of differing peoples and languages that we experience today. These are important, fundamental issues and that's why we're going to spend the next several months looking at these chapters and we begin by looking at the very first verse, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. The Hebrew language has no word for universe; *the heavens and the earth* is its summary term for everything that exists. Vs. 1 is explaining how the entire universe came to exist and the explanation is simple yet profound, *in the beginning God created it*. And right there God addresses two of our most basic questions. One is:

I. The Time Of Creation: When Was The Beginning? We can find that easily. Just google it! Google *age of the universe* and you'll get 13.772 billion years. Google *age of the earth* and you'll get 4.543 billion years. Isn't it amazing how the internet can tell you anything you want to know and with such exactness?! And, of course, if you read it on the internet, it must be true, right? But seriously:

1. current scientific theory says says that the age of the earth is roughly **4.5 billion years** and that is widely taught everywhere, in schools, universities, and the media. Using the theory of evolution as a basis, scientists have developed what is known as **the geologic column** because it lays out the order of the kinds of fossils we find in rocks and here's a picture of it. The history of life on earth is divided into 3 eras and further subdivided into 12 periods, the current one of which is said to have started 2 million years ago with fossils of the earliest and least complicated organisms going as far back as 600 million years and more. In this model, recognizable human beings begin to evolve around 200,000 years ago. In this theory the earth is Old. Now to put it bluntly, even though this is all actually just a theory, it is almost universally taught and believed as being factually true. And if you don't subscribe to it, you are often lumped in with people who used to believe the world was flat or called a religious fanatic and your view is dismissed without consideration. But be that as it may:

2. the Biblical timetable is 4-5 thousand years before Christ or roughly 6,000 to 7,000 years ago. Everyone almost universally agrees that the time of Abraham is roughly 2,000 BC and recorded human history doesn't go back much farther than that. Gen. 5 and 11 contain two genealogies which enumerate the time between the first man, Adam, and Abraham. If you add up the ages of the people, you find that the Bible clearly teaches that Adam was created just before 4,000 BC and even allowing for missing information or textual errors won't make much difference. AND that was just six days from the creation of the universe. So, the Bible teaches that the earth is YOUNG and stands at complete odds with popular theory. Now I am not a scientist but I know enough to know that there is a huge amount of scientific evidence that indicates we do indeed have a young earth and universe and, while I don't profess to know enough to understand all of the more complicated arguments, let me share with you just:

3. a few simple evidences that the earth is young as Scripture says One is:

a. the sun's increasing brightness Put very simply, the sun is getting brighter because of the thermonuclear reactions that power it. Scientists estimate that the sun would have been 25% less bright about 4 billion years ago with a corresponding lower temperature. The average temperature of the earth today is 59° F. At the current rate, back then it would have been 26°, and thus, when life was supposed to be developing, most of the earth would have been frozen. Plus, most scientists believe earth's temperature has always remained relatively constant. That's only possible if it's young! Another evidence is:

b. the moon's rapid rate of recession As it orbits us, the moon is gradually moving away from the earth at a known rate. If the earth is 6,000 years old, the moon would only have been 850 feet closer than it is now. But if we extrapolate back only 1.5 billion years the moon would have been touching the earth. It MUST be young. A third evidence is:

c. the earth's rapidly decaying magnetic field The earth is surrounded by a magnetic field that protects us from solar radiation, but it is decaying extremely rapidly. Since measuring began in 1845 it has been decaying at a half

life of 1465 years. If we extrapolate that backwards, merely 10,000 years ago our shield would have been TOO good and kept out radiation that is necessary for life. It must be young. Fourth is:

d. the oceans' missing sediment and salt Every year, the continents, atmosphere, and sea floor add 458 million tons of salt into the ocean, but only 122 million tons (27%) are removed by natural processes. At this rate, today's level of saltiness should be 9 or 10 times greater if the earth is billions of years old. Not only that, but every year water and wind erode about 20 billion tons of dirt and rock debris from the continents and deposit them on the sea floor. Yet the average thickness of sediments globally is only 1300 feet deep. If the earth were billions of years old, it would be some 60 MILES deep! It MUST be young! Lastly, consider:

e. the size of earth's human population This is simple mathematics. The census bureau tells us that earth's population currently doubles every 40 years or so. Even assuming that it doubled every 150 years down through history, which is VERY conservative, that would mean the earth's population should be 10 to the 99th power in 55,000 years, the normal date for human beginnings. Instead we have only 7.6 billion (7 times 10 to the 9th power) which is consistent with the population beginning about 6,000 years ago. [Sources: <https://answersingenesis.org/evidence-for-creation/the-10-best-evidences-from-science-that-confirm-a-young-earth/> <https://answersingenesis.org/evidence-for-creation/six-evidences-of-young-earth/>]

The list goes on and on, but my reason for sharing these few facts is to point out that science, when used in an unbiased fashion, actually confirms what the Scripture says and we don't need to be ashamed or embarrassed to say that we believe what the Scripture clearly teaches, which is that the beginning of the universe was something over 6,000 years ago. Now what about:

II. The Method Of Creation: *How Did The Universe Come Into Being?* Well, current:

1. scientific theory says it evolved on its own Much of the scientific community and the public at large has placed complete faith in a theory that everything we see in the universe around us evolved by chance and natural selection. To be more specific, it asserts that time, space, and matter originated from nothing in a "big bang", that all elements "evolved" from hydrogen, that stars and planets formed from gas clouds, that life began from inanimate matter, and that animals and plants changed from one type of organism into another into another until human beings were produced. Truthfully, it requires more faith to believe that than it does to believe that there is a God who created it all with all of the infinite variety and tremendous orderliness that we observe in the world. Evolution:

a. it requires believing that life came from non-life, that life somehow spontaneously generated itself which is something that has never, ever been observed anywhere in nature. Rocks and liquids and chemicals cannot produce even one single-celled amoeba. Life is always and only produced by life. Second:

b. it requires believing that organisms can add to their own genetic material to become more complex. In other words, an amoeba can add enough information to its own DNA to become an amphibian which can add and become a reptile which can become a bird which can become a mammal and so on. Nowhere do we observe anything like that happening in nature. Watch this: [<https://answersingenesis.org/kids/videos/series/check-this-out/> Click on Evolution].

2. the Bible says the universe was created by God The first verse of John's Gospel tells us that in that very beginning, God already was! He existed before the universe and, *All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* - **John 1:3 NASB**. And John's point is that the *Him*, the *Word*, was Jesus! Father, Son and Holy Spirit were there in eternity past and at that point called *the beginning* they took action to bring all other things into being. To be more specific:

a. the Bible says the universe was created out of nothing Look with me at **Heb. 11:3** There is a tremendous difference between the word *create* and the word *make*. To *make* means to take something that already exists and form or shape it into something else. We humans can make clothing or make a spaceship. But to *create* means to *to bring into being, to cause something to begin to exist*. In the Bible that word *create* is only ever used of God. We can't *create* anything in the technical sense. God caused everything that exists to begin to exist simply by speaking, by commanding. For instance, *God said, "Let there be light" and there was light!* And that's how everything that exists came into being. The phrase used to describe this is Latin, *ex nihilo*, which means, *out of nothing*. God brought everything in the universe into existence from nothing and:

b. the Bible says it was completed in six literal days Virtually all Hebrew scholars, whether they believe it's true or not, agree that Genesis is saying that God created in six literal 24 hour days. If there is any doubt about that, simply look at with me at **Ex. 20:9-11**. The days in vs. 9-10 are the seven 24 hour days of the week. And the reason the seventh one is to be set aside to rest is because in vs. 11 God made the universe in 6 of the same kind of days and rested on the seventh. *Day* means a normal day. God Himself declared this from Mt. Sinai in a thunderous voice and Deut. 9:10 tells us that those very words which He had spoken that day, He Himself wrote down on tablets of stone with His own finger and gave them to Moses. There can be no question that God Himself declares a 6 day creation. However because of the widespread acceptance of the "millions of years" concept, Christians have felt a need to try to reconcile the two positions. Here are the major:

3. ways that Christians have tried to accomodate the Bible to scientific theory The first one is:

a. Theistic Evolution: This position says that evolution is completely true, but **God caused the geologic ages**. God set it all in motion and left it to work out and maybe even dabbled a bit here and there to help it along, but basically **Genesis is a myth**, a religious story designed by ancient people, a poetic way of picturing the beginning of all things but it has no historical accuracy whatsoever. Another attempt is the:

b. Gap Theory: Some have said that there is a gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2. The earth *BECAME without form and void*. They say **the geologic ages happened BEFORE the days of creation**, that there was an original creation which was somehow destroyed or ruined and what we have in Genesis is a RE-creation of things. This used to be popular but to be honest, not many folks hold this any more. The most popular view is what today is known as:

c. Progressive Creation or the Day-Age theory as it used to be called: These folks say that **the days of creation represent the geologic ages** that science proposes. So one day is thousands or millions of years long. They may even hold that at each of those points God stepped in and created the next order of beings, that they didn't evolve from one another. One major problem with this is that the Genesis order of creation is out of order with the order science proposes. At any rate many people who hold a belief in God hold something generally like this, but the real truth is that it is IMPOSSIBLE to take the Genesis record literally and harmonize it with evolutionary theory but we don't need to! What the Bible teaches is called:

d. Special Creation: This position says that the **6 days of creation were literal**, that God created everything in six days as the Bible says and it is not the Genesis account, but rather the **geologic ages which are a myth!** They are based on a theory that the universe MUST be billions of years old to have come about on its own and that God doesn't exist or at least didn't create it.

Now the question in some of our minds is, "Why make such a big deal about this? Does it really matter?" Well, let me explain:

III. Why What We Believe About Creation Is Important And let me be clear:

1. one can be a genuine Christian and believe wrongly about creation There are plenty of "old earth" creationists who genuinely believe in Jesus and they are true brothers and sisters. You only need to trust in Jesus to be saved; you don't need to believe in a 6 day creation to get to heaven. However, I would dare to say that it is inconsistent for a believer in Jesus Christ who places a high value on the truth of the Scripture to not believe in a 6 day creation, and here's another basic reason why:

2. a wrong view of creation denies God's clear statement on death Look with me at **Rom. 5:12**. The Bible clearly says that Adam brought sin into the world; before Adam there was NO death. Through him death came into the world and passed to all people and to everything else in creation. Before him the world was perfect; after his sin it was cursed and fallen and filled with death. Evolution says creatures died and died repeatedly for millions of years before the first man came about. Now is Romans true or isn't it? And Romans is just summarizing what Genesis 3 records. Is that true or isn't it? It is impossible to hold that death started with Adam and that living creatures evolved. You see, what I'm driving at is that:

3. a wrong view of creation undermines the integrity of the whole Bible If the Genesis record of creation is not accurate and cannot be trusted, then the Bible contains erroneous information. So how do we know that it is true when it records the miracles of the Exodus or the miracles of Jesus or even the fact that Jesus purchased our salvation on the cross and rose again? It makes everything about our faith unsure in some degree. Liberals who identify themselves as Christians pick and choose which parts of the Bible they want to believe, but how can you do that? Either the Bible IS the Word of God or it isn't! Either what it teaches is true or it isn't. Either we can trust it or we can't! To say, "I believe it all EXCEPT this part" is a slippery slope that leads to me not believing anything about it that I don't agree with. It does away with the Bible's authority as the final word that determines our faith and practice!

John Warwick Montgomery wrote years ago in *Christianity Today*, ...*the total trust that Jesus and the apostles displayed toward Scripture entails a precise and controlled hermeneutic. They subordinated the opinions and traditions of their day to Scripture; so must we. They did not regard Scripture as erroneous or self-contradictory; neither can we. They took its miracles and prophecies as literal fact; so must we. They regarded Scripture not as the product of editors and redactors but as stemming from Moses, David, and other immediately inspired writers; we must follow their lead. They believed that the events recorded in the Bible happened as real history; we can do no less.* [7/29/77, pp. 41-42]

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Creation Of The World - 1:2-19

Verse 1 of Genesis stated the fact that *God created the heavens and the earth*, the entire universe. The Bible boldly declares that in six days God made everything that exists. He spoke it all into being by the omnipotent power of His Word. In verses 2-19 we are given a more specific look at exactly what God created on the first 4 days of creation week. Christians often read over these verses quickly and regard them as general statements that don't require much attention, but that is not so. They are a very specific and detailed record of the creation of the world and they deserve careful and thoughtful study. The plan this morning is to try to give you a meaningful overview of each one, but please remember that it is the words of Scripture that are inspired and inerrant, not my attempt at interpreting what they mean. The Scripture is infallible; I am not, and I'll be first to admit that my understanding of some of the things I'll share today has changed over the last 20 years as science has made new discoveries. Let's begin with vs. **(1-2)**:

I. On Day 1 God Created The Earth And Light. The very first thing was that:

1. He created planet earth itself That fact is significant. In the way that God looks at things, the earth is the central focal point of the universe. It is the center of all that God did in creation. **Is. 45:18** says, *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited), "I am the LORD, and there is none else.* Did you hear that? God had a plan in creating earth; He created it specifically to be a habitation for life and primarily as an environment in which human beings would live. Everything else in our universe was created in relation to earth, not vice versa. Let's watch this: <https://answersingenesis.org/kids/days-creation/creation-week-day-two/> What are the odds of that all happening by chance? What an amazing God we have, a master designer! And note that He didn't create the whole universe and then put the earth in exactly the right place within it; He created the earth and built the universe around it in exactly the right way so that it would sustain human life! Now on this first day, the earth:

a. it was unformed as to surface features and empty of any living beings All of the elements it has were present in its core but at this point it had no surface features. It was formless. And it was empty, that is, it contained no distinguishable features and no living beings. It was simply a ball of elements and:

b. it was completely covered with a layer of water In other words, the solid elements were in a ball together and all the water was on the surface layer over the whole planet.

And vs. 2 tells us two more important things. First, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit was hovering over and moving above the waters, having created the earth and in preparation for the creative acts to follow. And second, everything was in complete darkness, so now God:

2. He created light (3-5) Light is perhaps the most mysterious thing in the universe. We know what it does and how it travels and all of that. We use it as a constant and an absolute in our physics formulas. But it's still tough to describe exactly what it is. Cosmos magazine says it's "an electric field tied up with a magnetic field, flying through space". It's a small spectrum electro-magnetic wave, but all that means to us is it is something that enables us to see. Well, the planet itself and all the empty space in the universe around it were completely and utterly dark. Of course, that was not a problem to God because *even the darkness is as light to Him*. But God created the "substance" called light (for lack of a better word) in that darkness. Paul said in **2 Cor. 4:6**, God caused light to shine out of the darkness. Right there in the midst of the darkness, light suddenly appeared at God's command, however:

a. it was not concentrated in a source We always think of light as emanating from a source, from a fire, or a star, or a light bulb and traveling outward. This light that God made was not located in any source originally, but simply free. Yet:

b. it was made distinct from darkness There was a division or a distinction "between the light and between the darkness". Of course, part of the problem here is using human words to describe an incredible galactic process, but the result of what the verse is saying is that:

c. God created a cycle of darkness/light known as night/day From the moment that God created light, He began the night/day cycle. He caused the earth to be dark for a time and to be lighted for a time. And He did this 3 times simply by Divine command before permanently entrenching the responsibility for that cycle in the universe itself through the creation of the sun. So night and day, darkness and light, did not originate with the sun per se; they come from God. Now notice that God began by creating the earth in darkness on Day 1 and then creating light for a portion of that day. Thus we have the order, *evening and morning, the first day*.

And that is the way the Hebrews were still counting their days 4000 years later in the time of Christ. Religious Jews still do it today; the Sabbath begins at sundown Friday and lasts until sundown on Saturday. As weird as it seems to us, the day began at sunset and ran for 24 hrs. so the darkness of night came as the first part of a day, not the last. So here's a thought. How did the Hebrews ever invent that way of counting days? It comes from the very creation! And it was later adopted by other peoples like the Babylonians and much later the Arabs. Still, most of the world feels naturally that a day

begins with light in the morning followed by darkness at night and that's a "day". How would the darkness-first-then-light concept even exist at all except that it was passed down from the very beginning! Well next:

II. On Day 2 God Created Earth's Atmosphere (6-8) God created an *expanse*, an extended surface. We often speak poetically of the "vast expanse of the heavens". God called it in Hebrew *shamayim*, which can mean *heaven* in the spiritual sense of God's spiritual home, but here and many other places it simply means the sky or sometimes what we call space. It's obvious that here He's talking about the atmosphere of the earth, the sky with all its clouds that seems to stretch upward forever. He created that perfect mixture of gases which makes it possible for living things to breathe and to thrive and surrounded the earth with them in a band. Now these verses are difficult to understand because they seem to teach that there is water above the sky which doesn't make sense to us. What it really seems to be saying is that:

1. God lifted and suspended a portion of the waters above the surface But how could that be? Well, consider this statistic: The US Geological survey says, *One estimate of the volume of water in the atmosphere at any one time is about 3,100 cubic miles... If all of the water in the atmosphere rained down at once, it would cover the globe to a depth of ...about 1 inch.* That's a lot of water that is no longer on the surface of the earth but is now up in our atmosphere and if you do the math, that amount of water weighs 1.7 trillion tons! So what keeps it up there? Well, it is not liquid water, of course, but water vapor, and water vapor molecules are lighter than the nitrogen and oxygen molecules that make up most of our air, so water vapor rises! The earth is essentially surrounded with a layer of water vapor that God suspended up in the atmosphere. But why would God do that?

2. this vapor in the atmosphere shapes the earth's climate Water vapor is the major gas that helps control the temperature of earth! It, in combination with a couple of other gases, creates the greenhouse effect that traps the sun's radiation and helps regulate the temperature of earth to make it habitable. God knew that it needed to be up there and in place before He created living things, so He raised it there originally as a wise and mighty Creator and later sustained the process through evaporation and the water cycle! And thus ends Day 2.

OK, remember that the earth is still covered with a layer of water and no land is visible so:

III. On Day 3 God Created Dry Land And Plant Life (9-10) Let's try to picture this in a model we can understand. We can't make a ball that has a layer of water all around it so let's think in two dimensions; imagine a washtub, say 2 feet in diameter, filled with a foot of sand and we pour in 3 inches of water on top of the sand. Now let's try and make a continent rise above the water. So you reach down into the sand with your two hands and pull up a great mound of it so that it sticks out above the water. What happens? That leaves trenches where the sand came out so the water sinks down and the water surrounds the land. Even if you were to do that 2 or 3 times, you'd have 2 or 3 raised areas of "land" and the water would surround them all at a lower level with a number of deeper "holes" in it and the water would all be connected surrounding the "land". That's essentially what God did on Day 3:

1. He raised the land above the waters, dried and shaped it Look with me at **2 Pet. 3:5**. The dry land or what God called "earth" was formed by God's Word. God spoke and the land area of the earth rose up out of the water and as the water ran off into the huge trenches left behind, it shaped the surface of the ground. It was formed out of the water and through the water! The land was raised and its features were shaped all in the same process. Now the text seems to sound like at creation there was one great continent and one great ocean that would have surrounded it. Today, of course, we have 7 continents on earth; how can that be? Well, for years geologists have noticed that the continents seem like they originally fit together like pieces of a puzzle in one immense land mass that broke apart sometime later. They now talk about one original supercontinent called **Rodinia** that existed a billion years ago, followed by **Pangaea**, still a supercontinent that broke apart 175 million years ago. Could it be that the Scripture was right and originally all dry land was one connected mass that God broke apart, not millions of years ago, but either in the process of creation or perhaps even later during the global flood that engulfed the earth? We can only speculate about that, but as God raised the land out of the water:

2. He left the waters connected in one gigantic ocean bed This passage used to be scoffed at because it seemed to teach that there is only one ocean. Well, now we realize that if there was only one immense land mass at creation, there would only have been one ocean surrounding the whole thing! Today, of course, we recognize 5 oceans on earth but listen to what The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says, *There is only one global ocean, the vast body of water that covers 71 percent of the Earth, geographically divided into distinct named regions.*

[\[https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/howmanyoceans.html\]](https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/howmanyoceans.html) All the seas (plural) on earth are connected in one gigantic bed. It is not that there is a land mass surrounding the ocean but a vast ocean that surrounds several land masses which are raised in the middle of it, as it were. Well, once God raised and dried all the land:

3. He created all the varieties of vegetation upon the surface of the land (11-13) God covered the newly-raised continents with a blanket of vegetation, plant life. He created all plant life from small to large, simple to complex, in one fell swoop. He gave a command and all the varieties of plants sprouted from the dry land and grew. Now if you look closely you'll notice that there is actually a 3-fold description here that sums up the varieties. The word *vegetation* in the ESV and NIV is literally:

a. grasses, as in the KJV. The Hebrew word *deshe* means *grass*, that is the varieties of plants which do not bear fruit or usable seed, from moss and ferns to lawn and pasture grasses. He also created:

b. seed-bearing plants The Hebrew word is *eseb* which means *herb* but one that is said to bear seed, that is, plants whose most important feature is the seed they produce like the grains, wheat and oats and barley. And it says He also created:

c. fruit-bearing trees The Hebrew word *peri* means *fruit*. It means plants that produce fruits that have seed inside, like apples and pears and bananas.

Do notice that these varieties are not said to derive from one another as lower or higher forms of plants that evolved, but that all were specially created at the same time. It's interesting that botanists still use a similar (but not identical) classification system for plants according to the number of embryonic leaves (called cotyledons) that appear as they germinate. Acotyledons (no-leafers) are seedless plants, especially ferns and mosses. Monocotyledons (one-leafers) are seed-bearing plants like grains and grasses, and dicotyledons (two-leafers) which include most common garden plants, shrubs and trees.

Now, why did God cover the earth with plants? Let's watch this: <https://answersingenesis.org/kids/days-creation/creation-week-day-three/> Just look at all the amazing design in plant life; could that have come about by random chance? No, it is evidence of a wise, intelligent Designer, our Mighty Creator God! And God made it all because we human beings were going to need the energy that could only be transferred to us by plants. This was all in preparation for what God would do on the next day:

IV. On Day 4 God Created The Sun, Moon And Stars (14-19) On Day 4:

1. He created the sun and moon as light-bearers The Hebrew word *lights* means *luminaries* or *light-bearers*. In other words, the light earth was to receive was now concentrated in the sun and, through reflection from it, the moon so that the earth would be properly illuminated on both sides. Light was also concentrated in the stars. Notice that the purpose for the creation of the sun and moon is 3-fold. First He created them:

a. to continue the night/day cycle It is now the sun and moon and the rotation of the earth that will produce the day/night cycle that He had begun. If it was not so from the first day, then it may have been on this day that He set the earth in its rotation. He also created them as a way:

b. to mark time in days and years By a consistent revolution of the earth time could be marked. And evidently the earth was also set in its revolution around the sun at this time which would create years and it would also:

c. to create seasons By placing the earth in an oval-shaped revolution around the sun and tilting its axis, God planned from the beginning that the climate of earth would have cycles in it, that there would be seasons: winter, spring, summer and fall in areas closer to the poles or simply dry and wet closer to the equator. And whether we like winter or not, all the seasons are needed in order to have life spread all over the planet as it is. But the main purpose of the sun and moon was:

d. to provide the sustained light and energy needed for life on earth God placed them in exactly the right places to make the whole system work so that earth could be inhabited by human beings made in His own image. And finally:

2. He created all the stars in the universe How amazing is that! Billions and billions of stars and planets and God dismisses their creation with a tiny phrase in vs. 16 -*and the stars*! You know, I'm told there are some 50 chapters which discuss the construction and significance of the Tabernacle, but merely 2 Hebrew words to mention the creation of the stars. God dismisses them all as being of little account. Their best use in Scripture is as a visual object lesson for God to show humans the uncountable number of people He was going to create.

You see, God is creating all of this, the whole world as it is, in order to create people who would live in it, fill it, and walk with Him. That's what He was about - and still is! He made it all for YOU! But He made YOU for HIM! What an amazing God we have!

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Creation Of Living Creatures - 1:20-2:3

The Bible tells us that God created the entire universe in six days. Last time we saw that on Day 1 God created our planet earth, its surface covered with water, and He created light. On Day 2 God created earth's atmosphere and lifted a portion of the surface waters up into it to form the layer of water vapor we have above us. Coincidentally (or not) as I was reading Proverbs the other day in devotions, I came upon 3:19-20 which say, *The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens [i.e., its atmosphere]. By His knowledge the deeps were broken up [i.e., divided], And the skies drip with dew. [NASB]* Even Solomon understood what God did on Days 1 and 2! Then on Day 3 He raised a huge mass of dry land out up out of the waters and created plant life which began to sprout on it, before creating the sun and moon and all the stars and concentrating light in them on Day 4. So, at last everything was set for God to create living creatures and:

I. On Day 5 God Created Marine Animals And Birds (1:20-23) God now began to fill every realm of the world that He had created with living beings or what we would call animal life. The water was to swarm or teem with living things as the original pairs of each type of marine animal that He created multiplied abundantly and the sky above was to be filled with bird life as the original pairs of each type of bird He created did the same. Verse 21 says:

1. He created great sea creatures The Hebrew word is *tannin* which simply means a large animal that lives in the sea, which could include whales, large reptiles and any number of creatures including marine dinosaurs which are now extinct. And:

2. He created all the other marine creatures that live in the water, both salt and fresh. He created all kinds of fish, turtles, amphibians and crustaceans and notice that He created them all at the same time; they did not derive from one other. So, the waters of earth were prepared to abound with the tremendous variety and profusion of living creatures that we find in them today. Then also on Day 5:

3. He created winged birds Evolutionists insist that birds evolved from reptiles, but that's a bit hard to believe when you watch this: <https://answersingenesis.org/kids/days-creation/creation-week-day-five/> All of those features are necessary for birds to fly; what are the chances of all of them happening randomly? It's just so obvious that the hand of an Intelligent Designer created birds so that they could do such an amazing thing, routinely fly through the very air that surrounds us! What a brilliant God we have! Then next:

II. On Day 6 God Created Land Animals (1:24-25) First, I want you to notice a simple three-fold classification system here for animals, just as there was for plants in vs. 11-12. It says:

1. He created livestock, that is, **domestic animals that would be associated with man**, like cattle and sheep and goats and dogs and horses and so on, animals that would be associated and live with man to provide his needs. Notice once again that everything that God created, He sees in relationship to human beings. This world, and even its animals, is created to be a home for US. Second, it says:

2. He created beasts of the earth, or what we would call **wildlife**, animals **not destined to be associated with man**, like deer and antelope and lions and monkeys and elephants and on and on and on. And finally, it says:

3. He created creeping things, which would include **reptiles, insects, small mammals like rodents** and everything else that is on or near the ground and not large enough to fall into the first two categories. But what's really important to notice here is what is repeated 7 times and that is the phrase *according to their kinds*.

4. He created all the animals in specific "kinds" Now that is not a general use of the word *kind*, as we might say, "What *kind* of animal is that?" You would understand it better if it were translated *according to their species*. Each animal "species" was created as a distinct entity from one another. Now you know that modern biologists have a system of classifying every living thing. The classification tree is kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus and species. For example, a fox is of the class *mammals*, the order *carnivora* (carnivores or meat eaters), the family *canidae* (canines, the dog family), the genus *vulpes* (foxes) and then there are a ton of species of foxes like the red fox, grey fox, arctic fox, fennec fox, and 8 more. Now specifically, the Bible's use of the word:

a. "kind" equates roughly to "family" in terms of modern biological classification In other words, God didn't initially create 12 species of foxes, let alone the 340 recognized breeds of domestic dogs. He probably created an original ancestral pair of the canine or dog *kind* or family with enough genetic information in their DNA structure that from them through genetic combination in breeding and adaptation to their habitat, could descend wolves, foxes, domestic dogs, jackals and so on. By the way, that means that Noah didn't have to take nearly as many animals on the ark as we often think! But the distinguishing thing being said here is that:

b. each "kind" only reproduces its own "kind" Members of the canine family can interbreed and produce offspring. Wolves and dogs, coyotes and dogs all commonly mate. Members of the cat family can interbreed and produce offspring. A lion and a tiger can produce a liger! But a dog and a cat can't produce a "dat" or a "cog". A horse and a dog can't mate and produce a "hog". Each *kind* or family of animals is completely distinct and separate and only reproduces offspring of its own *kind*; **none derives from another**. That's what the text is saying and that's exactly what we observe in nature today. And that means that the variety of animals we have was not produced by evolution, one from the other, but by direct creation.

Now I'd like to take a minute to address a question that I know some of you are pondering, "What about the dinosaurs? Where do they fit into creation?" Well, there is no question that dinosaurs existed; we have their bones. And therefore obviously:

5. God's creating on Days 5 and 6 included dinosaurs, both marine dinosaurs and land dinosaurs. Part of the problem is that we have been so preconditioned by our culture to think of dinosaurs as having lived millions of years ago and before mankind, so it's hard for us to look at the existing facts we have in an objective fashion. Marine dinosaurs

were created along with marine life, bird-like dinosaurs were no doubt created with the birds on day 5 and land dinosaurs with all other land creatures on day 6. Everything God made, He made in these 6 days and nothing died until man sinned so all the kinds of creatures ever created were created at the same time. Therefore, dinosaurs existed concurrently with mammals, birds, fish, and other modern creatures we see today and not only that:

a. dinosaurs existed at the same time as pre-flood man We have this image that almost all dinosaurs were huge and weighed tons. We've watched too much television from the Flintstones to Jurassic Park. That's just not what the fossil record shows. A few were huge, of course, but there were many dinosaurs that were small, some as small as a cat, and I just read a research paper that says the median size of a dinosaur was around that of an American buffalo, which is smaller than an adult cow and only half the weight of an adult bull.

<https://answersingenesis.org/dinosaurs/determining-average-dinosaur-size-body-mass/> So the majority of dinosaurs were not the imposing creatures that we imagine and there is a ton of evidence that they did indeed live alongside human beings. In fact, Job describes one of those that remained in his day that he calls *behemoth* in 40:15-24; it sounds much like a large brontosaurus or brachiosaurus that was still remaining in his day which was likely before Abraham's time. But for the most part:

b. the flood destroyed the dinosaurs and created the fossil record Except for the relatively few that would have been safe in the ark (and we'll talk about that later on), the whole world full of land dinosaurs was destroyed at one time. Many of the marine dinosaurs also died in the turbulent flood waters. Now think about how a fossil is produced. When an animal dies and falls on land or into water what happens to its body? Does it become a fossil? No, it rots! A fossil is created when a living being is buried suddenly and trapped without air so that normal aerobic decay does not take place. The silt acts like a sort of mold formed around the body. The organic body material inside the mold is then gradually replaced by minerals which fill the exact mold and become hardened into stone. That's how you get a fossil. So why is there such a vast record of dinosaur fossils? Because they were buried rapidly in the upheaval of the flood! That's where the dinosaurs went and where the fossils came from and it wasn't millions of years ago; we still find red blood cells and soft tissue in dinosaur bones that wouldn't be there if it was!

Anyway, off that rabbit trail and back to the text. After creating land animals, we read that:

III. On Day 6 God Also Created Mankind (26-27) Evolution teaches that man not only came from an animal but that he is now nothing more than the highest animal. The Bible says that human beings are specially created, distinct from everything else that He made. Man is the very crown of God's creation, the thing that He created everything else for, one who had a special purpose:

1. man was made in the image of God to fellowship with God Watch: <https://answersingenesis.org/kids/days-creation/creation-week-day-six/> God created a being that is like Himself, one that could know Him and have fellowship with Him. No animal has even a complete self-consciousness, much less a god-consciousness. Man, on the other hand, is aware of himself and aware of God. Every human culture has developed a religion, has at least shown evidence of the awareness of God. That's because man started out knowing God, though gradually through the years this knowledge was lost and corrupted. And part of being created like God means being created with knowledge, wisdom and intelligence. Man was not originally a primitive savage who acted like an animal. From the very first day man had a language and communicated and had a high degree of knowledge. And notice in the summary given here that God created an original pair, a male and a female, and BOTH of them were the very image of God. Then God said that:

2. man was to multiply and fill the environment God had created (28a) God expected, indeed He commanded, Adam and Eve to populate the earth, to become a huge race of human beings that would inhabit the entire planet that He had made for them. The planet was created as a home for man and:

3. man was to rule and manage the earth and all its creatures (28b) To *subdue it*, means to literally bring it into slavery to yourself, to make it serve you. The earth itself was put here to provide man's needs. How it ever came to be regarded as "Mother Earth" I don't know, but that idea is completely backward. Man is to harness the earth in the wisdom God has given him and to use it for his needs. God's goal was not a pristine world untouched by human hands but a world filled with immense resources used wisely to support billions of human beings, generation after generation. And man is to *rule over*, to control or dominate all earth's creatures; they were put here for the benefit of and to provide the needs of man. Man was to control them in the wisdom God had given him. Evolution naturally leads to the whole "animal rights" movement we have today, since we are just another animal. But animals are animals; they do not have "rights". God made them to serve us and later on, after the flood, even to serve as food for us. Speaking of which, in the beginning:

4. both man and the animals were vegetarian (29-30) Animals did not eat animals. People did not eat animals. There was no death until Adam sinned and then all of that changed under the curse of sin. Death came to the animal kingdom, just like it did to human beings. Carnivorous animals began to eat other animals. God Himself killed animals to make coats of skins for Adam and Eve. Man killed animals to offer as sacrifices. Death came to the animal world, but in the beginning every creature including man ate only plants. And then when the creation of all the living creatures was completed on Day 6:

5. God declared His finished work of creation "very good" (31) God Himself declared that *Everything He had made*, the entire universe, was perfect, exactly the way that He had intended for it to be. It was ONLY good; there was nothing wrong in it anywhere. There was no death, no decay and evil did not exist in it anywhere. By the way, that means to me that the fall of Satan and his "angels" had not yet occurred, but we'll talk more about that in chapter 3. So at last:

IV. On Day 7 God Rested (2:1-3) The word rest is *shabat, sabbath* in English, and it means to cease or to stop. Vs. 2 is not saying that there was some last final portion of creating that God finished on Day 7; rather, it means that:

1. He completed all His work BY ceasing and resting In the Hebrew mind, ceasing and resting is the sign that the work is all done. It is not finished until you stop all working and rest without doing any more. Resting is God's testimony that His work was complete. Now, does an omnipotent God get tired and need to rest? Obviously not! And yet it is interesting that **Ex. 31:17** says that:

2. He rested and was refreshed *It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.* Barnes comments, *Literally, "he took breath"... The application of the word to the Creator, which occurs nowhere else, is remarkable.* And Clarke comments, *God, in condescension to human weakness, applies to himself here what belongs to man.* In other words, God "took a breather" so that we would know to do the same! That's why in vs. 3 it says God made the seventh day holy; He sanctified it:

3. He set this day apart as a pattern for humans to follow Work 6 days and rest 1 to refresh yourself. It is a pattern that God built in from the very creation itself to bless and benefit finite man who needs a day of refreshing. Here it is a principle; later God made it a law for Israel to follow, but mankind did not follow it. Working every single day without a rest day has been the more common norm in the world because human beings always want to "get ahead", but God knows that we need at least 1 day in 7 to be refreshed and He showed us so from creation.

Now in closing, let me just point out this fact. Literally every culture on earth counts time in a 7 day week and always has, with only a couple of minor, temporary exceptions where governments deliberately tried to change it. Why is that the case? It didn't come from astronomy; a solar or even a lunar year does not divide evenly into sevens. Why do we not find cultures with 6 or 8 or 12 day cycles of time? If you google it, people try to credit the ancient Babylonians with inventing the 7 day week, but the ancestors of the Hebrews had it long before they did. And where did they get it? They got it from creation. They got it from God Himself. They got it from the first human beings who rested every seventh day like God did and therefore counted time in *weeks*, which literally means *sevens*. Isn't it amazing that God has left this proof of His own existence in every culture on earth?

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Creation Of Human Beings - 2:4-25

Since the creation of mankind was mentioned at the end of chapter 1 and now appears again in chapter 2, critics have tried to say that they are two different stories of creation written by two different authors. That's not true at all. Having summarized the creation of man in chapter 1 as part of the creation of all things, the Holy Spirit, through Moses, now in chapter 2 goes back to tell the detailed story of HOW God made man on Day 6. But before we get to that, let me explain something important about the book of Genesis itself. Look at vs. **(4)** Do you see that phrase at the beginning of the verse, *these are the generations of...*?

I. Genesis Is Divided Into Sections By The Hebrew Word *Toledoth* which technically means *generations* but is here obviously used as a historical term and is often translated, **this is the account of...** You'll find it again at 5:1 concerning Adam, 6:9 concerning Noah, 11:27 concerning Terah, Abraham's father, and so on. It means, "this is the record of" or "this is the story of" or "this is the history of" and the Scripture then always goes on to tell what happened afterward to the person who is named. In verse 4 we don't have a person, but the principle is the same. In chapter 1 we're told WHAT God created:

1. Chapters 2-4 are the history of what happened to God's creation and if you summarize it, you find that:

a. man was created perfectly (Ch. 2) and then:

b. man fell by sinning and brought a curse upon all creation (Ch. 3) and then, sadly:

c. the effects of man's fall spread throughout the human race (Ch. 4)

So look for this important phrase to indicate divisions of the story as we go along. And the second important thing to notice in verse 4 is that:

2. God's personal Name is now introduced The word *God* is a title like *King* or *Prince*. The phrase *Queen Elizabeth* tells us that the ruler of England is a woman whose name is Elizabeth. The phrase *LORD God* tells us that the ruler of the universe is a being whose name is... what? By convention, in most English Bible translations whenever you see the word **LORD** in all caps, that is God's proper name. In Hebrew it is 4 consonants since the language was not written

with vowels, YHWH. It was probably pronounced **YahWeH** but the Hebrews felt it was too sacred, too holy to pronounce. Even today when they come to it, they reverently say, *HaShem [The Name]*. When the Jews finally introduced vowels into their written language 600 years after Christ, they deliberately wanted to make God's name unpronounceable so they gave it the vowel pointings from the word *Adonai* which means *Lord*, and it reminded them to say "Lord" instead. When we transliterate that unpronounceable Hebrew word into English, we get the pronounceable word **Jehovah**, which is the name used for God in the early English Bible translations and hymns and is still known and used all over the world. When we go to India, I can't speak a word of Telugu, but I can always recognize God's Name, *Yehovah*, when it is read or sung or prayed! The Apostle Paul wrote, *For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist...* [1 Cor. 8:5-6]. God is not a force or an energy. He created all things to serve His purpose and He is a personal being who can be known and experienced as a Father. And His Name is Yahweh, Jehovah, the LORD our God! Now we go on the see:

II. The Environment In Which God Created Man (5-6) You see:

1. on Day 6 the earth still did not have fully developed vegetation In Ch. 1 we learned that on the previous day God had created all the varieties of vegetation. But here we learn that they were not created full-blown. Evidently God created them in seed form and caused them to begin to sprout from the ground but the land was still barren and not yet a fit place for human habitation. And that's why:

2. God created a fully developed garden as man's initial home Skip ahead to vs. (8-9a) He called the garden **Eden**, which means *pleasure* and that was truly His aim. It was intended to be a place where man could live in pleasure. It was a beautiful garden where man could walk with Him in joy and He caused all kinds of full-grown fruit-bearing trees to grow in it so life would be easy and all man had to do was to reach out and take what he needed to eat. It was a lovely, wonderful home designed for man's enjoyment. But, in addition, (9b) tells us that:

a. He placed two specific trees in it, the Tree of Life right in the very center of the garden and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The tree of life is sort of a mystery, but we see it again in Revelation 2 and 22, so suffice it to say it must have been a real tree that had special properties. The other tree we'll see again in a moment. People have always wanted to know where Eden was and its location is actually given in (10-14). Now from those verses it would seem to have been somewhere in the highlands of eastern Turkey where the Tigris and Euphrates originate, but the real truth is:

b. we can't know its location; it was destroyed in the flood, if not before. The flood altered the geography of the whole world, including the flow of rivers, and if it was indeed the force that separated the continents as many propose, there is simply no way to know what precise location these verses are talking about. And, indeed, what matters is not WHERE Eden was, but what happened in Eden!

So now let's go back to vs. 7 where we have:

III. The Details Of How God Created Man (7) Ch. 1 tells us THAT God created man; here we learn HOW:

1. God created the first man who became known as **Adam**. Now the word *adam* means *man*. It's kind of like the confusion of naming your dog *Dog*. If you say, "Let the dog in!" then *dog* is referring to a type of animal called *dog*. But if you say, "Let Dog in!" then *Dog* is the proper name of your pet. So in vs. 7 God formed the man, but in vs. 20 *for Adam a suitable helper was not found*. Same word, different usage. At any rate, Adam's creation was special in that:

a. God personally formed him Everything else God had created by His word. He spoke and said "Let there be..." and it happened. But when God made man, He personally "formed" or "fashioned" him. The word means to squeeze into shape the way that a potter fashions a vessel from clay. It implies planning and artistry. Man was God's masterpiece, the crown jewel of His creation, and the amazing thing is that God is still doing it! Look with me at **Ps. 139:13-14**. God personally formed and fashioned you in your mother's womb! He made everything about you exactly the way He wanted it to be. YOU are His masterpiece and when we look at the way God has created us in all its intricacy of design, we cry out with the Psalmist, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" Now in Adam's case:

b. God formed his body of the materials found in the soil This is more than some ancient myth saying God made man out of dirt. Your body is composed of the very materials found in the earth. 65% of your body weight is oxygen and another 10% is hydrogen and the reason you're not a gas floating away is that most of that is combined into H₂O, water! If you weigh 100 pounds, probably some 60 pounds of you is water! Another 19 pounds is carbon, another 2 is calcium and the rest is small amounts of phosphorus, potassium, sodium, magnesium and sulfur.

[<https://askabiologist.asu.edu/content/atoms-life>] Ladies, you can buy the chemicals to make a man at the drug store and add lots of water! However, just try to make a man out of that goopy mess! Some assembly is required! The human body has 11 different organ systems that enable it to function: circulatory, digestive, endocrine, muscular, skeletal, nervous, respiratory, reproductive and so on. I read somewhere that a piece of skin the size of a postage stamp contains 3 million cells, a yard of blood vessels, four yards of nerves; one hundred sweat glands, fifteen oil glands, and 25 nerve endings! Watch this: https://youtu.be/cM51_6lipq0 God took ordinary materials and fashioned this incredibly complex organism we call a human body! Could that all happen by chance? Only God could

create something as complex as a human body! The point of the verse, though, is that man's body was real and fashioned out of earthly raw materials, just like all other created things, and yet He is completely different because:

c. God infused His own life into him, He *breathed into him the breath of life*, the very spirit of life which was His own. God imparted to man something He never gave to any of the animals. To them He gave natural or physical life, but to man He gave a whole other component. Every human being is an immortal, undying spirit like God, that lives inside a body made of clay, a unique combination of material and spiritual in one whole person. And Job's friend Elihu says, *it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand [i.e., that gives him understanding, the ability to know and commune with God]* - **Job 32:8**.

We are unique creations of God and somehow we know it. Even Jean-Paul Sartre, a militantly atheistic philosopher who died in 1980, near the end of his life told Pierre Victor: "I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God." [HIS Magazine, April, 1983.] Amen! Now after creating the man, God put him in the garden of Eden and as He must have explained to him, "This is where you're going to live":

2. God gave Adam one clear command (15-17) Even in Eden, Adam was not meant to live a life of laziness and idleness. God planted the garden yet Adam was to care for it and maintain it, but overall:

a. he was given tremendous provision and freedom All the fruitbearing trees were available to him and he could eat whatever he wanted whenever he wanted. Work a little, eat a little and walk with God, what a wonderful life! However:

b. he was given one limitation and warned of its consequence God gave one clear rule: don't eat from that one tree! Now I don't think the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a particular type of tree. I think God simply picked one of the fruit-bearing trees and said "Don't eat of this one tree" and by virtue of His command it would cause Adam to experience the meaning of good and evil immediately if he ate of it! The point was not that the tree was poisonous or possessed mystical properties. The point was that God required one thing of Adam: obedience. Adam needed to know that in all of his blessing and freedom he was under the authority of God and to acknowledge that by obeying. And God warned, "If you eat of it, you WILL certainly and immediately die." Now I'm not sure how Adam knew what death was; it was still day six and nothing had yet died. Perhaps God explained it to him but either way this warning is important because it paves the way for chapter 3. Well, after creating Adam and putting him in the garden:

3. God created the first woman, Eve The record begins with vs. (18). This is the first time in 6 days that God said something was *not good*! And what was not good was that Adam was not complete or finished in himself. At the very least, there could never be more than one of him; he couldn't fill the earth. You see:

a. God created Adam with the need for an indispensable companion, in Hebrew an *ezer*, not a mere helper in the sense we would think of it, but more like a complement, one who would complete everything that was lacking about him so that in unity together they would be pronounced "very good". She would be indispensable to Adam fulfilling the purpose for which God created him. But before creating her:

b. God demonstrated to Adam that no animal could fill his need (19-20) Remember this all happened on the 6th day. God brought each animal he'd created earlier that day to Adam and let Adam name them so that he could recognize a simple fact: not one of them was like him. Not one of them was "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh". Not one could be the indispensable companion he needed. Only another human being like himself could fill that need. He was not just another species of animal, but totally set apart from all the animals God had made. God wanted Adam to know that from the very beginning and down through history human beings have always known that. How sad that with all the intelligence we have gained in the last century and a half, we have reverted to the foolishness of thinking that we are just a higher form of animal! So now God is ready to create this companion and how does He do it? **(21-23)**:

c. God made Eve out of material from Adam He put him under Divine anesthesia, removed a portion literally from the side of his body, closed and healed the wound and from that fashioned a woman. The point of that is to mean **she is fully like him**, that she shares his nature in every way. And Adam realizes it; when he sees her, he exclaims, "AT LAST! Someone who is *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*! We are the same! She's what I need!" However, she is also different here. A new word is introduced. Now the word *man* is *ish* which means a *male human* or *husband* and she is called *ishah* which means a *female human* or *wife*. Eve is the female version of Adam, exactly like him in nature and being but created with a set of physical and emotional features that complete and fill up all that was lacking in him by himself, so that together they would form one complete whole, one flesh, one body. And then in one fell swoop as He brought her to Adam:

4. God created the institution of marriage (24-25) These are Moses' words, not Adam's. They are his comment that:

a. Adam and Eve now modeled the roles of husband and wife for all generations to follow. Adam, of course, didn't have parents to leave but every in every generation thereafter human beings were to pair as husband and wife and vs. 24 is quoted repeatedly throughout the Scriptures to confirm various facts about marriage. We obviously don't have time for a long study about marriage but just notice a few things:

b. their union was primary. A man is to leave the authority of his parents to cling to his wife and form a new family. That is to be their primary relationship in life. Second it is **exclusive**. The words are singular; a man is not to cling to his "wives". A marriage relationship is to be one man and one woman for life. Third, it is obviously **heterosexual**, male with female, man with woman. Paul says clearly that the practice of men being with men and women with women is against nature (Rom. 1:26-27); it is not the way God created things to be. Jesus Himself quoted this passage and commented that *in the beginning God made them male and female* and He went on say in **Mt. 19:4-8** that it means marriage is **indissoluble**. The two are joined by God to be one flesh and what God has joined, man shouldn't take apart. Malachi refers to this text to say that the marriage union is **spiritual**, *Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?... - Mal. 2:15*. God Himself unites the husband and wife by His Spirit. Paul uses this passage to show that the marriage union is **real**, that when a husband is loving his wife, he is actually and truly loving himself because they are one - **Eph. 5:28, 31**. And finally, according to vs. 25, here in marriage they were naked **without shame**. They ended the day a perfect couple in a perfect union thoroughly enjoying the love of God Himself, the beauty and bounty of the garden around them and the perfect companionship of each other in every way.

Now here's a final thought. Wikipedia says that *When defined broadly, marriage is considered a cultural universal*, that is, *an element, pattern, trait, or institution that is common to all human cultures worldwide*. Every culture on earth recognizes marriage as an institution in some form! They all have a way of recognizing that this man and this woman now officially belong to one another and not anybody else, even if people often violate the idea. On the other hand, nearly all animals have multiple partners; only a few mate for life. Most exist in herds and flocks and procreate whenever and wherever they can to produce as many offspring as possible. One would think that if human beings are evolved animals, we would find that same pattern to be the norm. But what we find instead is that every culture on earth has developed this same concept of an exclusive marriage union between a man and a woman and has some way of creating and recognizing it. Where did they all get it? The answer is obvious, from God! It has been there since the very beginning of the race and its very existence is another piece of evidence that He created us.

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Entrance Of Sin Into The World - Ch. 3

In Genesis 3 we have the story of Adam and Eve; who among us does not know the story? Everybody's heard it. The issue is whether or not we believe the story is real, that it is historical. *In Compass Magazine one author describes an incident in his first week of class in a Christian university: "The professor was an old man with a heavy accent, denoting his Belgian origin. During his first class, he stated a belief that I had already heard rumors of but never witnessed personally: 'Adam and Eve never existed! The first three chapters of the book of Genesis are a myth! It never happened that way.'"* [<https://thecompassmagazine.com/blog/9-truths-the-creation-account-teaches-us>] That's what we're told; this story was never meant to be taken literally, but only to teach truths in symbolic fashion. I have a simple way to show you that this WAS written to be taken as real history: genealogies! And you thought they were boring and pointless! Genesis 5 says Adam lived X number of years, had a son named Seth and died. Seth lived X number of years, had a son named Enosh and died, then Kenan and Mahalel and on and on until you come to Noah. The genealogy in Gen. 11 picks up with Noah living X years, having 3 sons and dying and goes on and on until you get to the life of Abraham. The genealogy in Matthew 1 picks up the line at Abraham and traces it all the way to Jesus, however, the genealogy in Luke 3 starts in reverse with Jesus and traces it one ancestor at a time the entire way back until it ends with Adam! Genealogies do not contain symbolism! The Bible clearly teaches that Adam is just as real a person as Noah, Abraham, David and Jesus Himself! Adam was a real human being who lived a real life and died a real death, just like you and I! And the story in Genesis 3 we're about to look at is a true story that really happened. In fact, Paul believed it was literally true - as did Luke, Jesus, Moses and the other biblical writers! Look with me at:

I. The New Testament Summary Of Genesis 3 It's found in one verse: **Rom. 5:12**. And that one man's name is mentioned in vs. 14, Adam. Here is Paul's clear explanation of how the world got the way it is. It's outlined in your notes...

- 1. the world and the human race were created without sin**
- 2. sin entered the world through Adam's act of disobedience**
- 3. the consequence of sin was death, both physical and spiritual**
- 4. death passed to all human beings and became part of the world**

But you'd probably rather watch this: [<https://answersingenesis.org/kids/videos/series/check-this-out/> Click on Pain and Suffering]. Unfortunately, I feel the need to say some more! Let's go to Gen. 3 and look more closely at:

II. The Sin Of Adam And Eve in vs. (1-6). The first thing we read is that:

1. the serpent tempted Eve to sin (1) Wait a minute, I'm supposed to believe in a talking snake? Not really. Between the last day of creation week and whatever later day this scene happened, another incident occurred that we only learn about elsewhere in Scripture. God's chief angel tried to overthrow Him and take His place; he led a rebellion of some of the angels against God and was cast out of heaven to become Satan, God's eternal adversary. That's a story for another day, of course, but the first place Satan headed was to the Garden of Eden. Why? To take God's greatest treasure away from Him; to turn human beings away from God by getting them to obey him instead.

a. the serpent was not a talking animal; it was Satan himself inhabiting the body of a snake and speaking out of its mouth. How do I know that? *Rev. 12:9* says, *...the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world...* *20:2* calls him that exact same thing, *...that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan*. That word *ancient* is *archaios* which means the primeval or original one. Satan was that original serpent. Of Satan, *Ez. 28:13* says, *...you were in Eden, the garden of God...* Satan indwelt a snake the same way that demons indwelt the demoniac who lived among the tombs at Gadara and spoke through his mouth, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" And in this serpentine guise, Satan approached Eve, spoke to her when she was alone and:

b. he deceived Eve by his cunning Look with me at **2 Cor. 11:3**. Evidently Paul believed this story was true! But he says that Satan *deceived* Eve. That is, she was not aware that he was lying to her and she acted trusting in the false information that he gave her. He used his cunning, his intentionally evil trickery, and she unwittingly swallowed the bait, like a fish that is deceived into swallowing a worm not knowing it contains a deadly hook. Satan is a wise being when it comes to evil. He knows how to tempt us and in this story we see spelled out for us:

2. the process of temptation to sin (1b-5) Notice what Satan did:

a. Satan introduced doubt about God's word and character His very first words implied doubt, "Did God actually say that?" and then he deliberately misquoted the rule God had given, making Him appear stingy. "You can't eat of ANY of these trees?" Eve actually tries to defend God by straightening him out, "Oh yes, we can eat of them all except that one over there. If we eat of or even touch that one, we'll die!" Notice that she had already added her own rule about not touching. Then:

b. he convinced her to believe a lie He goes for it and declares, "No, you won't die! God's just trying to keep you from being like Him. He's being selfish!" And, not having any experience with lying, she believes him. That's how Satan always works. He introduces doubt about God's Word. "Is that really true? How could God mean that?" Then he implies that God is selfish and just wants to keep us from enjoying all the good things we deserve by keeping them off limits. And finally, he whispers, "Go ahead, do it. It won't hurt you! You won't die! See, everybody else does it and look how happy they are!" Satan is a liar! And your best defense against him is knowing the Word well, trusting it completely and walking closely with God. Those things are your shield against Satan's lies. Then in vs. 6 look at:

3. the choice they made to sin against God (6) Notice that Satan's temptation:

a. it was fed by inner desire in her It appealed to her hunger, to her sense of beauty and to her desire to be more than she already was. That's how it works. James says, *...each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* - **James 1:14-15**. A fish is deceived by the bait because he's hungry inside. When he's not hungry, he doesn't bite! Satan lures us with things he knows that we have a desire for, counting on the fact that when we look at the tree long enough and that desire grows strong enough, we'll believe his lie and take his offer and sin - and die! That's what happened to Eve, but in Adam's case:

b. it was a knowing choice of the will made by him He was with her, not when the serpent first talked to her, but sometime later when she actually ate the fruit and she gave it to him and he chose to eat it. **1 Tim. 2:14** says, *...Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor*. Eve didn't realize what she was doing; she was completely fooled, deceived. But Adam DID know. He deliberately chose to violate the direct order that God had given him. It was a willful sin!

But before we throw too many stones at them, let's admit that we sin in the same ways. Sometimes we're deceived like Eve; we believe Satan's lie that we'll be happier if we do the wrong thing. We become convinced that the wrong thing is the right thing. Sometimes that burning desire that we have inside to do the wrong thing overwhelms us and we yield to the pressure, like David did with Bathsheba. But sometimes, like Adam, we just stubbornly and deliberately say, "I want to do this and I'm gonna do this, no matter what! I'm gonna run my own life!" Presumptuous, willful sin, deliberately rebelling against God is the worst type and yet we still choose to do it! But when we do, it has disastrous consequences. In vs. (7-24) we see:

III. The Consequences Of Their Sin Immediately:

1. they experienced shame and separation from God (7-10) Before they were not ashamed; they ran to the LORD God when He approached them in the garden. Now they were ashamed. They covered themselves and tried to hide

from Him when they heard Him coming. Immediately they knew and understood that they had done evil and were ashamed of what they'd done. When we sin, especially now that we as believers have the Holy Spirit living in us, that's the first thing that happens. Instead of the elation of having gotten what we wanted, we feel shame and guilt. We want to run from God and hide from Him, but we know we can't. Second:

2. they were made to confess what they had done (11-13) Yes, they both tried to blame someone else as the root cause, but still they both admitted the truth, "I ate". And that's what we must do. *1 John 1:9* says, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. When we come to God like the Prodigal Son and say, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you....*, He forgives us, and not only that, He cleanses us! He purifies us. He takes away that desire to disobey and makes the thought abhorrent to us! That's the personal lesson for us, but there are much bigger consequences in this case. First:

3. the serpent was cursed (14-15) Notice that in vs. 14 God is speaking to the animal, the snake Satan used, but in vs. 15 God is speaking to Satan himself.

a. the animal was made to crawl on its belly and ultimately to die Evidently snakes didn't crawl initially; perhaps they had legs like lizards. At any rate now the snake and its descendants would crawl in the dust all its life and the phrase *all the days of your life* indicates that ultimately death would come. So, death entered the animal kingdom. But the greater pronouncement was directed at Satan. God says that:

b. there would be perpetual conflict between Satan and human beings Life would now be a war; history itself would be one long battle of Satan struggling to bring all the descendants of Adam and Eve under his dominion and them warring against him. But here in vs. 15, God gives the "first Gospel", the first pronouncement of the Good News:

c. Satan was doomed to be crushed by the Offspring of the woman and notice that the term is singular, *HE*, Jesus, would one day come and though He would be nailed to a cross to rescue us from our sins, He would ultimately crush Satan and destroy him in His resurrection power! Then God turned to Eve:

4. the woman and her female descendants were cursed (16) God says:

a. they would have increased pain in childbearing Evidently childbirth originally would have been an easy and painless process, but I'm sure you mothers out there can testify that God meant what He said! Childbirth is now an incredibly painful and even dangerous process. The UN says that in the world still today a woman dies every 2 minutes in childbirth and for every one who dies, 20 or 30 more have serious or long-term complications. But beyond that, God says that:

b. there would now be conflict in the marriage relationship He is not placing the husband in charge here as it might appear. Rather the New English Translation of vs. 16 conveys the sense more accurately: *...You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you*. Instead of perfect symbiotic harmony, completing and complementing each other, from now on you will try to get him to do what you want and he will try to make you do what he wants. And thus it has been down through the ages in culture after culture; only when both are in Christ can this tension be healed in the relationship. But the biggest consequence of sin came as God now turned to Adam:

5. the man and all his descendants were cursed (17-19) Human beings:

a. they would now have to survive by difficult labor instead of enjoying the easy life of pleasure Adam had known in the garden. They would have to work hard and sweat to eke out a living from the ground. And now:

b. their bodies would all be subject to physical death Adam could have lived forever. His body was immortal just like his spirit, but now it was made subject to decay and injury and growing old and eventually his spirit would have to leave it and it would return to the dust from which it was made. **Heb. 9:27** says plainly, *...it is appointed for man to die once...* and this is when that happened. From that moment on, all human beings die without exception. But what's even worse is what the text here does not say, but the New Testament does:

c. sin entered the nature of all human beings - Rom. 5:12, *...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*. The spiritual power called sin, the nature, the drive, the bent to sin, came to live in Adam and in Eve and they passed it on to every one of their descendants. Look with me at **Eph. 2:1-3**. All mankind are now by nature children of wrath, born with sin in our very nature, spiritually dead, and living like what we are inside - until Jesus saves us and makes us spiritually alive. That's what Adam did, acting as the head of the human race! He brought us all into slavery and bondage to sin from which Jesus must set us free. But, looking back again, there's one more thing:

6. the creation itself was cursed in vs. (17b-19) God says:

a. the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles Agriculture would now become a hardship because the very earth was changed. But the fuller explanation is found in **Rom. 8:20-22**:

b. the entire creation was placed in bondage to corruption *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* The very creation itself was changed from its perfection; it was corrupted. Everything dies. Everything wears out. It fades away. The animal kingdom struggles and fights. Drought and famine and hurricanes and earthquakes become part of life on earth until Jesus returns and God makes it all new.

Oh, the terrible consequences of one simple act by Adam and Eve; it corrupted the world, it corrupted the human race, and it corrupted ME. Philip Yancey tells about a World War II soldier who was part of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau, Germany, where thousands of Jews had been exterminated. The man told this story: "A buddy and I were assigned to a boxcar. Inside were human corpses stacked in neat rows, exactly like firewood. Our job was like moving furniture. We would pick up each body--so light--and carry it to a designated area. I couldn't believe it the first time we came across a person in the pile still alive! But it was true. Incredibly, some of the corpses weren't corpses. They were human beings. We yelled for doctors and they went to work on these survivors right away. I spent two hours in that boxcar; two hours that for me included every known emotion: rage, shame, pity, revulsion. They came in waves...all but the rage...it stayed, fueling our work. After we had taken the few survivors to a makeshift clinic, we turned our attention to the Nazis: the SS officers in charge of Dachau. Our captain asked for a volunteer to escort a group of a dozen SS officers to the interrogation center, and a guy named Chuck...his hand shot right up. Chuck grabbed his machine gun and prodded the group of SS prisoners down the trail. They walked ahead of him with their hands locked behind their heads, their elbows sticking out on either side. A few minutes after they disappeared into the trees, we heard the rattling burp of a machine gun and three long bursts of fire. Soon Chuck came strolling out, smoke still curling from the tip of his weapon. 'They all tried to run away,' he said with a kind of leer... I could not absorb such a scene. I did not even know that such absolute evil existed! But when I saw it, I knew beyond a doubt that I'd spend my life serving whatever opposed such evil...serving God. Then came the Chuck incident. I had a nauseating fear that the captain might call upon me to escort the next group of SS guards; and even a more dreadful fear that if he did, I might do the same thing that Chuck had done! The beast that was in those guards was also in me. The beast within those guards, the beast within Chuck, the beast was also in me." [Descending Into Greatness by Bill Hybels, Zondervan, 1993. Pages 144-145.] That beast is called sin and sin is in me; it is in every one of us descendants of Adam. There is NONE righteous, not even one. I am capable of the most grievous evil and rebellion against God, but thank God for His grace which has done something about it. Look at:

III. God's Graciousness Toward Adam And Eve Right away:

1. He made provision to cover their sin (20-21) Where did God get the skins? He killed animals and in doing so He graciously taught them the principle of sacrifice, that blood must be shed, that something must die to cover their sin. And so, humans learned to offer sacrifice to God and it is all to picture that one day Jesus would provide the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, shedding His blood to purchase forgiveness for our sins and remove them once for all, forever. Hallelujah! And secondly:

2. He prevented them from living forever in their fallen state (22-24) God didn't want Adam and Eve to continue living forever in their now corrupted bodies. So, He cast them out of the garden, barred the way to the tree of life and ultimately removed the garden itself. It seems like an act of punishment, but it was really an act of grace. Now they would leave their bodies at death, join Him in heaven and eventually be given new and perfect bodies in which to live forever with Him.

Friends our hope does not lie in this fallen world filled with pain and suffering. It lies in a spending a glorious eternity with Jesus.

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Degradation Of The Human Race - 4:1-6:8

It was L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of the Scientology cult that said, "Man is basically good, but man can act badly..." That is basically the humanistic philosophy that pervades our culture. However, the first millennium and a half of human history following creation are positive historical proof that that is just not so, as is the whole rest of human history! Adam and Eve's original descendants had no organized government to obey and no system of laws to follow. They did what came naturally to them, with the result that instead of human society getting better and better and becoming a wonderful thing, it degenerated further and further into lawlessness and anarchy and immorality until the whole race became so degraded that God could no longer tolerate it. It begins with:

I. The Account Of Cain And Abel in (4:1-15), and I say *account* rather than *story*, because in English a *story* may or may not be true; this is a historical account of what actually happened **(1-4a)** After leaving the Garden, Adam and Eve had two sons. Cain grew up to become a farmer, helping his father till the soil and raise crops to feed the family. Abel grew up to

become a shepherd, helping his father care for a flock of sheep and goats that provided clothing and milk for the family. In the process of time, at some point:

1. Cain and Abel offered the first sacrifices to God that we read of. Each brought to God a portion of the results of their personal labor. Cain brought some grain or perhaps some vegetables that he had grown as an offering; Abel brought the fattest of the firstborn lambs of his flock to God. However:

2. Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain (4b-5a) God accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's. Why? Turn with me to **Heb. 11:4**. People often teach that only animals are acceptable as sacrifices and Cain brought the wrong offering, but these are evidently thanksgiving offerings and even later under the law grain offerings were accepted and a tithe of all the produce of the fields was brought to God. The problem was not with what Cain brought, but with the attitude of his heart. Abel brought his gift in *faith*, trusting in God, loving God, realizing that the increase of his flock was a gift from God and anxious to bring him the very best he had to say, "Thank You!". Cain brought some of his produce as a duty, because he felt he had to, perhaps reluctant to part with the hard-earned fruits of his labor; his heart wasn't in it. Hey, do you think there's a lesson there about how WE ought to give to God and about how God looks upon our act of giving? What's the attitude of YOUR heart when you give to God? Are you Abel-hearted, truly thankful to God for all you have and giving to Him the first and best parts of it? Or are you Cain-hearted, tight-fistedly giving some of your leftovers to God because you know you should? Now notice that even though He didn't accept Cain's offering, God showed Cain grace (**5b-7**). In this first family God was evidently still speaking personally and directly to them all. Cain was angry that he was rejected and:

3. God warned Cain that anger leads to sin. He said, "Think about why you're so angry! Look, I'm not rejecting you; I would be glad to receive your offering if you bring it the right way, if your heart is right! But this anger is not good. I see that sin is like a lion crouching at your door, ready to spring. You're ready to do something very wrong because of it. Master it; don't give in; don't let it control you!" Aren't you glad God is a God of second chances? And third and fourth chances? **But instead of listening he killed his brother Abel (8)** Now why did he do that? The apostle John warns us, *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.* - **1 Jn. 3:12**. Think about this. Two boys raised in the same home, growing up together in the same family. And there were NO other families, no other people in the world, just them! They ate together and played together and slept together and worked together, just the four of them until other children were born. There was no "world system" to lure them astray, no other evil people to lead them into sin. No human being had ever died and, obviously, there had never been a murder; they didn't even kill and eat animals at this point in history! Yet despite all of this, when they grew up, Cain attacked his own brother Abel in a field and, the Hebrew says, *slaughtered* him, butchered him the way Abel had the lambs from his flock for sacrifice. Where did that come from? It came from inside Cain, from the powerful force of sin trying to control him and he yielded to it, despite God's personal warning. In the first place, John says Cain *was of the evil one*, that is he was influenced by and listening to Satan, living in his way instead of God's way. And secondly, he hated Abel because Abel was good, because he was constantly living a life of good works, living God's way. Cain didn't live that way and didn't want to live that way. He lived a self-centered, self-serving life. But every time he looked at Abel, Abel's life pointed out his sin and made him feel guilty. So instead of repenting, he blamed Abel and grew to resent him and the resentment turned to hatred and ultimately led to enough fury to murder him! What a warning God has given us! Don't be like Cain! *Alexander the Great conquered every nation in the entire known world of his day by the age of 33 and then lamented, "There are no more worlds to conquer!" He was an amazing general, however, several times in his life he was tragically defeated by one weakness--anger. On one occasion, a childhood friend of his who was a general in his army became intoxicated and ridiculed the emperor in front of his men. Blinded by anger, Alexander snatched a spear and hurled it at Cletus. Although he had intended only to scare the drunken general, the spear took his friend's life. Alexander conquered many cities and countries, but he had failed to conquer his own spirit.* [Moody, Mar 1993. Page 74.] Don't let anger and resentment fester and grow until it takes control of you and you do something awful! Master the power of sin that so desperately wants to control you by yielding to the control of the Holy Spirit and let His power rule your heart and mind! Well, afterward:

4. God punished Cain but extended grace to him (9-15) God still spoke to him! Now remember that Cain was a farmer, that he got his living from the ground. But God said, "That will never work for you any more. The ground will not produce for you any longer. You'll be driven away from your family and be a vagabond and a wanderer getting food any way you can." God didn't put him to death as he deserved but he was worried about dying. He realized he would no longer have access to the presence of God and he thought that if any of his family members found him (Adam and Eve evidently already had other children and possibly grandchildren by this point) that they would take vengeance on him and slaughter him as he had Abel. So, God graciously put some sort of identifiable mark on Cain so that everyone would recognize that he was under God's immediate protection and that his death would be avenged 7 times over. Why? I believe God was trying right from the beginning to prevent the cycle of vengeance - you killed my brother, so I kill you - from starting. It seems that wherever human societies are isolated, like in the jungles of Brazil or Indonesia, they somehow always degenerate into a horrible cycle of perpetual revenge killings. God made of Cain an example that He didn't want that to become the way of life for the human race right in the beginning. However:

II. Two Different Lines Of Adam's Descendants Developed As A Result Of This Incident (4:16) Adam and his family must have stayed near to Eden because at its edge somehow, they continued to meet with God. But Cain now migrated away from there to the east, to a land that became known as Nod, the land of wandering, but the sad thing is not that he moved, but that he moved away from the presence of the Lord. Therefore, sadly:

1. Cain's descendants multiplied without the knowledge of God (17) We're told in Ch. 5 that Adam had many other sons and daughters. Cain had married one of his sisters and they had children who had children, but instead of wandering aimlessly, he had a different idea. God had said Cain was to be a fugitive and a wanderer but:

a. he built a city in determination NOT to be a wanderer As his descendants increased, they stayed in one place until it became a town and then a city. Remember these folks were living hundreds of years, so they had many children through multiple generations. Not surprisingly:

b. his descendants introduced polygamy (18-19) Lamech took two wives and he's probably not the only man who did it and that made the population increase even faster. Our missionary Yallah in Liberia has 50 brothers and sisters! His father was the headman of a village and had 7 wives. So, from one man came 50 descendants in one generation and think how many grandchildren that produced! Cain's descendants multiplied rapidly and:

c. they focused on developing earthly, material pursuits One of Lamech's sons became a shepherd like Abel and developed the practice of livestock breeding! Another developed the art of music and invented instruments. Another figured out how to cast and work bronze and iron to make weapons. Notice how fast human knowledge developed and it was evidently passed on widely. And that wasn't bad, but notice that nothing spiritual at all is said about any of these folks. They learned all these things but they didn't learn to know God and so:

d. they endorsed societal values of pride and vengeance (23-24) Lamech boasts about killing someone who hit him and vows that his vengeance would be 10 times greater than that which God promised Cain on anyone who opposed him. Pride and power increasingly became the values endorsed by the society of Cain's descendants apart from God. On the other hand:

2. Seth's descendants retained the knowledge of God (4:25-26) Eve continually acknowledges that her children are a gift from God and Adam and Eve evidently successfully passed their faith and their relationship with God on to Seth who passed it on to his son Enosh and that last phrase of vs. 26 seems to be indicating that now that there were a significant number of people in the developing family, they began to meet and worship together corporately and not merely individually. Now in **(Ch. 5)** we hit the next division of the book; we have the *toledoth*, the history:

III. The Account Of Adam's Descendants through the line of Seth [Read 1-5]. And the chapter goes on to spell out the names and ages of 10 generations in Adam's line until you arrive at Noah. Of course, we don't have time to read the whole chapter, but let me just make 3 observations about it. First:

1. God multiplied the race rapidly through long life spans Adam lived 930 years, Seth 807, and Methuselah was the longest at 969 years! These long life spans were God's way of multiplying the human race quickly. To illustrate: LuAnn's grandmother had 12 children. One of those twelve, her mother Shirley, had 5 children. From those 5 children there are 31 grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Most of the other 11 siblings also had kids and grandkids so there are probably well over 100 in 3-4 generations from one couple who didn't live all that long! How many children could a couple have whose bodies lived healthily for hundreds of years? World population increased quickly! Secondly, if you add up the ages at which each of these men had the next-named son, you discover that:

2. it took only 1656 years for the human race to completely degenerate In one sense a thousand years is an extremely long time but in terms of history, it is a fairly short space. While the knowledge of God must have been passed along by each of these 10 men to their sons, overall, it was gradually forgotten so that by the time of Noah, despite the greatly increased population, 1656 years later, Noah was the ONLY one remaining on earth who knew the Lord. It took a comparatively SHORT time for the human race to forget God and be ruled by sin. The third thing worth mentioning is that during that millennium and a half, it is said that:

3. two men, Enoch (and later on, Noah in 6:9), walked with God (22-24) About 1000 years into this period, Enoch walked so closely with God that he was granted a special privilege. **Heb. 11:5** says, *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.* He never died! In the midst of life, he was translated directly to heaven to be with God! So, at this point at least SOME folks still loved God dearly, but by the end of the next 600 years, we arrive at:

IV. The Total Corruption Of The Human Race in (6:1-8). Let's start in vs. (5):

1. the entire race became evil in their actions and thoughts Without the knowledge of God and with no external factors to restrain their behavior, sin came to dominate the lives of everyone. They thought it about evil things all the time and they did them. Instead of a world full of righteousness as God intended, it became a world full of evil and cor-

ruption. But if Seth's descendants retained the knowledge of God for a long time, how could that be? That's what vs. (1-2) are explaining:

a. Seth's godly line became corrupted through multiplied indiscriminate marriages Now these verses, along with vs. 4 have been the subject of endless debate forever, it seems. There have been many interpreters who contend that the *sons of God* were angels who married human women and produced a race of half-human giants. There are a number of reasons why that makes no sense, not the least of which is Jesus' plain statement that angels neither marry nor are given in marriage. Rather, the majority of interpreters feel that the *sons of God* are the descendants of Seth's line who retained the knowledge of God. But instead of marrying only wives who shared their faith, they married *any they chose*, including those from the godless descendants of Cain. And instead of bringing them to faith, the godly were drawn into their wickedness and gave up their faith. The Holy Spirit is here explaining that this indiscriminate unequal yoking generation after generation is what led to the eradication of faith from the earth and that should be a strong warning to us! Young people, commit yourself before God NOW to only ever marry someone who loves Jesus with all their heart! Don't consent to being unequally yoked with someone who doesn't believe! The consequences can be utterly disastrous for generations to come! Now look at vs. (4):

b. the race became dominated by powerful, oppressive men The word *Nephilim* is a Hebrew word that is often translated *giants* but Mickelson says it means *bullies or tyrants*, properly, those who fell or slay others. Later we read in Ch. 10 about Nimrod who was a *mighty man* in the earth, a *mighty hunter*, that is, a hunter of men, not animals, who built his own kingdom. In this lawless world, those who were the strongest, most powerful and most violent pushed themselves to the top through fear and dominated the others. They made terrible reputations for themselves and this, no doubt, became the source of all the pagan legends about superhuman men like Hercules and Achilles. It became a world of fear and injustice, filled with immorality and the blood of the innocent, an awful place, so at last:

2. God decided to exterminate the human race and cleanse the earth (6-7) God was sad, saddened to the very core of His being. He made mankind in His image to know and be with Him but He saw that if He was ever to have a world of human beings who would love and fellowship with Him, there was no remedy but to wipe out all He had made and start over again. But still:

a. He set a grace period of 120 years before judgment (3) God set a limit as to how much longer His Spirit would strive with the human race to patiently try to win them back. He gave them an additional 120 years until the Great Flood came. Look with me at **1 Pet. 3:20**. God was patient. Noah was building a huge ark but while doing it he was preaching righteousness to the people according to 2 Pet. 2:5. They had one last whole century of opportunity but they universally shunned it and every one of them perished. But God:

b. He extended grace to Noah because he alone walked with God (8-9) Those who had passed the faith to him, his father Lamech, who died 5 years before the flood, and his grandfather Methuselah, who died the very year of the flood, were gone and he was the only one left who knew God so God determined to start the human race all over with Noah and his 3 sons and their wives who would all know Him by graciously and miraculously saving their lives from the great catastrophe which would wipe the world clean.

But as we close, I don't want you to just think of this as so much factual information. I want you to ponder that phrase, *it grieved God to His heart*. Think how God must have felt. Human beings, made in His own image, the crown of His creation, His greatest treasure and instead of seeking Him and becoming all He hoped they would be, they turn on Him and, despite His gracious love, become everything He hates. So much so that He has to destroy them. It broke His heart to do it. *Do any of you remember watching the ancient Disney film, Old Yeller? It's about this frontier family in the 1860's in Texas and they take in this big old mangy yellow dog. The father's away on a cattle drive and the young teen son, Travis, is left to be the man in charge. At first Yeller is a bother but over time the whole family, even Travis, comes to love him as he rescues one and then another from bears and wild hogs and wolves. He becomes their treasured possession. But then one day, in protecting the family, Yeller is bitten by wolf that has rabies. They have to pen him up in a cage because they know there's a good chance he might get rabies. And sure enough, in a few days he begins to show signs of anger and aggression, frothing at the mouth and lunging at the very ones who love him against the walls of the cage. The family is heartbroken, torn apart. The dog they loved and who loved them is now raging against them and would hurt them if he could and there's nothing they can do about it. And Travis knows what he has to do. With tears in his eyes, he takes his rifle and goes to the cage and shoots Old Yeller, the dog he loved who has now turned into the very thing he hates. Maybe that's a tiny human-sized picture of some of the feelings of God's heart. Mankind, His most-prized treasure, has been bitten by sin and become thoroughly infected beyond all hope of recovery. He knows what He has to do and with a broken heart, He makes the decision to do it. He will wipe off the planet the race of people He lovingly created. The Great Flood will come. It has to. But please understand that God took no pleasure in it.*

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Great Flood: Noah and the Ark - 6:9-7:24

If you happen to go downstairs and visit our GBC nursery what will you see? Noah's ark and pairs of cute animals all around the room drawn by Ken Sleep and a team of young people years ago. We tell our children the story of Noah and the ark; we teach them songs about it and let them color pictures of it. But so much of the world is content to stop there and regard it as exactly that, nothing more than an ancient children's story to be regarded as a myth. I can assure you it was anything but! It was a real event, an apocalypse that engulfed the entire world in a doomsday scenario unlike anything the world has ever seen since! And the signs of it are everywhere. Now as we pick up our study in chapter 6 at vs. 9, we have once again Moses' dividing phrase, *These are the generations of Noah*, meaning "this is the *toledoth*, the account of, the history of Noah and what happened to him". It is a statement indicating that this is a historical record, not parable nor a story, and it begins with:

I. The Building Of The Ark - 6:9-22 Now I'm sure you've seen various artist's renderings of the Ark. Most of them try to make it include features that we now include on boats that move through the water like a curved prow or rounded corners, but it is more likely that the Ark was simply a huge rectangular flat-bottomed structure. It was never designed to navigate, simply to float. And even if there was shipbuilding knowledge in Noah's day, Noah was nowhere near an ocean when he built it. It probably would have looked more like a long rectangular building with an attached floor. The first thing to notice in vs. (15-16) is:

1. its immense size It was 450 feet long, a football field and a half. And 75 feet wide, as wide as our sanctuary is long. It was 45 feet high inside, about twice our ceiling height. It was roughly the dimensions of a modern ocean liner. The best thing I can do is recommend that you plan to visit the Ark Encounter in Williamstown KY in person or online at <https://arkencounter.com>. This is a real life-sized model of the ark, inside and out and look how huge it is! So please understand we are talking about a huge vessel, the likes of which was not built again for thousands of years! It also had a window or more accurately a vent in its roof which no doubt ran the length of the boat and was itself a cubit high. Through it light and air and perhaps rain water for drinking came into the boat. We are not given details, but from the dimensions we can understand:

2. its wonderful stability It had a length-to-width ration of 6:1, similar to that of modern vessels which usually are closer to 8:1, though they are designed for propulsion. The low height compared to the wide base made it extremely stable. Experiments with models show that the only way to tip such a shape and capsize it is to stand it up on one end. The extreme length meant that the action of any given wave could affect only a small portion of the vessel's length at one time so it was not constantly weaving and pitching like a smaller craft. Also, the rectangular shape would tend to turn perpendicular to the direction of the waves constantly so as to meet them in the most stable direction. It was a very stable ship and it's not hard to grasp:

3. its incredible spaciousness The floor space of the ark was about 34,000 sq. ft., but it had 3 decks, 3 floors inside or over 100,000 sq. ft. feet of floor space total. Its total inner volume was 1.4 million cubic ft. It had room for thousands of compartments and storage areas. I'm told that is enough floor space to carry 2 of every species of animal alive in the world today, in half of its floor space! And, I might add, with plenty of room for birds to fly on the inside! Now, from vs. (3) that we mentioned last time, we learn of:

4. its tedious construction It took 4 men a tremendously long time to build and equip such a vessel; it took them 120 years, more than an entire lifetime to you and I. They had to find and cut lumber by hand, transport it, cut it into boards, then actually construct the ark using braces and probably pegs for nails and finally seal the entire exterior with pitch to make it waterproof. Such a feat was an immense undertaking and required extreme perseverance, actually extreme FAITH to complete. Who would ever do such a thing if they didn't believe the word of the Lord that a flood was coming?! Now why did God command it to be built? Of course, it was meant to preserve a seed stock of the human race so God could start to build it all over again, but vs. (19-20) also mention:

5. its preservation of animals God also planned to wipe out all the land dwelling, air breathing animals along with the human race, so He planned to preserve a seed-stock of every family or *kind* of animal so that they could repopulate as well. Now how many animals are we talking about? Notice that it doesn't say two of every *species*. The Hebrew word *min* equates to the level of *family* in our modern classification system. Noah only needed to take two of the dog or canine family, two of the cat or feline family, two of the horse or equine family and so on. And from those two originals of each family, through the natural processes of genetic variation, and survival of the fittest many species of animals developed within each family. Researchers estimate that, including now extinct *kinds* or *families*, there are only about 1,400 different pairs of animals that Noah would have needed to take with him. And despite all the cute animals in cartoons and baby mobiles that have formed our impressions, the original ancestral animals of Noah's day may have looked much different from the animal species we see today. <https://answersingenesis.org/media/audio/answers-with-ken-ham/volume-127/how-many-animals-were-on-ark/> The best example of this process is the human race itself. We ALL come from one original couple, but look what a huge variety of races and peoples exist in the world today. People

come in all shapes, sizes and varieties yet all the varieties of humans can marry and have children and are constantly producing new varieties in the process. That's exactly how we got all the variety of animal species we have today. But somebody will say, "What about the dinosaurs?" Yes, those 1400 animal *kinds* or *families* on the ark must have included dinosaurs too! And, there are only about 50 *families* (not species) of dinosaurs so that would mean that only about 100 dinosaurs would have been on the ark. I shared with you in chapter 1 that most dinosaurs were small and the median size of a dinosaur was about the size of an American buffalo, smaller than an adult cow. So, the smaller families of dinosaurs were easily housed and of the truly giant ones, pairs of juveniles were obviously brought aboard the ark, while all the rest of the dinosaurs perished in the flood. Finally, notice in vs. (21):

6. its planned provisioning Noah took aboard the ark a year's worth of food for his family and also for all of the animals. What a huge task that must have been, once the ark was built! But once all was in readiness, God sent:

II. The Great Flood upon the earth in **Ch. 7** Of course, in the eyes of the world around us, that's just a fairy tale. It's enough for me that the Bible records it, but you have to be blind not to recognize the:

1. scientific evidences of the flood that abound in the world. Watch this:

<https://answersingenesis.org/media/video/science/fossils-and-the-flood/>

Let me expand upon just 4 evidences that there was a global flood. First of all, archaeologists tell us that:

a. sea creatures are buried on mountaintops worldwide For example, fossilized shellfish are found buried high in the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in today's world. How in the world did they get there without being submerged in water? Second, as the video said, around the world:

b. billions of dead things are buried in rock layers and fossilized. As you saw, fossils aren't created by normal or slow burial; they only happen with "rapid burial". In the Grand Canyon we find a "fossil graveyard" where billions of squid-like nautiloids were buried. It would take a lot of water to bury that many creatures! We also find land animals buried with sea creatures. In northern Tasmania we find a toothed whale and a possum buried together. Whales and possums do not live in the same place! The only answer is that a powerful Flood must have buried them together. We also find fossils that were buried very quickly. For example, a six-foot-long ichthyosaur was fossilized while she was giving birth! The existence of billions of fossils points to the global Flood as recorded in the Bible. Third, geologists tell us that:

c. rock layers can be traced across continents Two rock layers in the Grand Canyon, the Tapeats Sandstone and the Redwall Limestone, can be traced across the whole United States and into Canada. Both layers can even be traced across the Atlantic Ocean, the Tapeats Sandstone right across northern Africa into Israel, and the Redwall Limestone into England and beyond! What could possibly have laid down so much sediment across such a huge distance to harden into rocks? Only a global Flood! The sand that makes up the Coconino Sandstone layer of the spectacular Grand Canyon in Arizona came all the way from the northern US, the far eastern US, and Canada! What could pick up such a huge amount of sand and dump it so far away? A really big Flood, just like the one in Genesis! In addition, if the rock layers we see were really laid down slowly with millions of years between each layer, as many people think, the wind and water should have worn hills and valleys into the rocks. This process is called "erosion" and happens to rocks all over the world today. However, most rock layers show no evidence of such erosion between them! The layers fit together perfectly without any hills or valleys between them, so they were not laid down slowly over millions of years. They were laid down quickly by the global Flood! Then think of this: If you take soft playdough and try to bend it, what happens? It bends, of course! What if you let that playdough dry out? When you try to bend it again what happens? It breaks! This same thing happens to rocks. Before they harden into solid rock, they are bendable, like soft playdough. When they get hard you can't bend them anymore because they just crack and break. Yet in many places around the world, we observe rock layers that are folded, or bent, without having been broken. This means the rocks had to be "wet" (like soft playdough) when they were bent. If the rock layers were slowly laid down millions of years before they were bent, they would have already dried out and thus cracked instead of folding like they did. So, these rock layers cannot be millions of years old. They were quickly laid down and then bent, all during the year of the Flood of Noah!

<https://answersingenesis.org/kids/geology/evidence-flood/> Then fourth, anthropologists tell us that:

d. over 270 cultures worldwide retain flood stories in their history They retain distant memories of that "life-changing event." The details have been lost, but most of the legends share common themes: Man became corrupt; the Flood was worldwide; eight people survived; representatives of all land animals were saved; a dove was released to seek dry land; the survivors came down from a mountain to repopulate the whole world, and so on. Noah-like names such as Nu-u, Nu-Wah, Noh, Nos, and Nuh are preserved in so many of the Flood legends.

<https://answersingenesis.org/the-flood/flood-legends/legends-of-the-flood/> The Hualapai Indians live in the western Grand Canyon. At the foot of Spirit Mountain in southernmost Nevada, are ancient pictographs that contain a flood story that contains these elements. Rains fell on the earth for 45 days. The rising waters wiped out all peoples with the lone exception of an old man atop Spirit Mountain. The Creator eventually sent a bird to the man with instructions to dig with a ram's horn into the foot of the mountain to enable the waters to drain. The man obeyed and soon

the bird returned a second time with grass in its beak to inform the man that the waters had receded. Sound familiar? A second pictograph depicts a vessel carrying eight passengers “across the waters,” from whom all the peoples of the earth were descended. <https://answersingenesis.org/the-flood/flood-legends/flood-tales-canyon/> Hawaiians have a flood story that tells of a time when, long after the death of the first man, the world became a wicked, terrible place. Only one good man was left, and his name was Nu-u. He made a great canoe with a house on it and filled it with animals. In this story, the waters came up over all the earth and killed all the people; only Nu-u and his family were saved. Another flood story is from China. It records that Fuhí, his wife, three sons, and three daughters escaped a great flood and were the only people alive on earth. After the great flood, they repopulated the world. Watch: <https://answersingenesis.org/the-flood/flood-legends/flood-legends/> Yes, the stories vary greatly, but how is it that all these cultures believe there was once a global flood? Maybe because there WAS one and their distant ancestors passed their flawed memory of it down! Thank God we have the original, the true account of the flood in the Bible! I’ve noted the sources of the information I’ve just shared in your outline, but now let’s return to Gen. 7 which begins with:

2. the loading of the ark (1-10, 13-16) It took 7 days to load the ark, for Noah and his family to get their belongings and food on board and to load all the animals and get them situated in their enclosures. By the way, how did Noah get them all? V. 9 in the Hebrew says that they *went unto Noah unto the ark* or, as the NIV puts it, they *came to Noah and entered the ark*. In other words, God caused the animal pairs to come to Noah at the ark to be loaded aboard. And then God shut the door of the ark to make sure it was sealed and the rain began. Now where did all that water come from?

3. the sources of the flood (11-12) It came from 2 sources. It was more than simply rain produced by condensation of water vapor in the atmosphere. It rained for 40 days and covered the earth to great depth. How? The answer is that God had vast reserves of water stored up from the time of creation. A great deal of moisture was stored in the earth’s outer atmosphere in the form of a vapor canopy of some sort as we mentioned on Day 2 of creation. At the time of the flood, God allowed that vapor to condense and fall as intense rain. The fact that it took 40 days to stop raining intensely shows just how much water was up there. Secondly it states that subterranean springs were broken open so that vast reservoirs of water stored beneath the earth’s crust were released as well. This would explain why it seems as though the waters continued to rise even after the rains stopped. The waters did not begin to recede until 150 days. It is not likely that maximum depth was reached at 40 days and everything was stable for 110. These springs held vast quantities of water which kept gushing out full-force for months until they were exhausted. Then notice:

4. the depth and universality of the flood (17-20) It covered the highest mountains then existing to a depth of more than 20 feet. As we’ll see, the mountains then existing were not nearly as high as the ones we have today, nevertheless there was a lot of water. 20 feet is the approximate draught of the ark (the part under water) so that it would clear the highest mountains during the deluge without being smashed. And notice it clearly indicates the flood covered the entire earth; it was not just a local phenomenon as some critics say. And, of course, evidences of it are found all over the earth today. It’s effect?

5. the universal death wrought by the flood (21-23) Everything died; all human and animal life, everything was blotted out, except for those who were saved in the ark. And finally notice.

6. the duration of the flood (24) In round terms the flood lasted a few days longer than a year from the moment it began to rain until the waters were completely dried. Here’s a chart from the Bible Knowledge Commentary *[SLIDE]*. In rough terms it took about 5 months for the waters to crest and begin to recede. It took roughly about the same time (5 months) for the waters to recede to their current level. And then it took over 2 months for the surface of the earth to completely dry out. Altogether Noah and his family spent 377 days in the ark. But let’s not miss:

III. The Point: Noah, the Ark and the Flood are **A Grave Warning** God judges sin! Peter warned us that, *...by the word of God... the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.* - **2 Pet. 3:5-7**. One day Jesus is coming and the whole world will face God’s judgment all over again. Jesus Himself warned us, *Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.* - **Luke 17:26-27**. God said there would be a flood and it came. The world thinks it can party on and pursue anything it likes, but God’s judgment is coming and His Word on that is just as sure as that which brought the great Flood. You all know the tragic story of the Titanic which sank after hitting an iceberg in the North Atlantic in 1912. What you may not know is that day the ship received 6 separate warnings from other ships that had seen dangerous icebergs, at 9 AM, 1:42 PM, 1:45 PM, 7:30 PM, 9:40 PM and finally at 11 PM, the wireless operator, replied, “Shut up, I’m busy”. 1500 people died that night because no one would heed the warning. The Great Flood is an immense warning to the world; God means what He says and judgment is coming. Get in the ark! Give your life to Jesus and be saved. Don’t ignore the warning!

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Great Flood: Its Effects - Chs. 8-9

One of the aspects of the flood we seldom think about is the tremendous effect it had upon the world. Water is a tremendously powerful force as floods demonstrate even today. I lived through one when I was 16. Twelve inches of rain in 2 days caused the small stream that ran beside our house to rise 17 feet and become a raging river. It engulfed our 3-story house on its edge halfway up but entirely destroyed the ranch house on the other side of it, going over its roof. It is a very naive view of Noah's flood to think that God just quietly rained the earth full of water and quietly dried it up again. Tremendous quantities of water unleashed in a brief time would create huge currents and waves and erosion. Add to that the presence of strong winds, volcanic action, subterranean shifts and you begin to realize that the entire world was subjected to tremendous hydrologic and geologic forces that changed it forever. Peter says, *...the world existing at that time was destroyed when it was deluged with water.* - **2 Pet. 3:6** NET. The Greek word means *completely or fully destroyed*. That means more than just the people and the animals on it. Let's look briefly at:

I. The Effects Of The Flood On The Earth Itself The vast quantity of water:

1. it radically altered the earth's surface Look with me at **Ps. 104:6-9**. That's a poetic description of the effects of Noah's flood:

a. it reshaped the continents into their present position, rapidly uplifting mountain ranges and creating deep ocean beds As I mentioned to you earlier, scientists believe that there was originally only one huge continent of land on the earth surrounded by water and Genesis 1 seems to confirm that idea. The releasing of tremendous amounts of underground water under pressure triggered vast movements in the tectonic plates which cover earth's surface, spreading the continents apart. Some areas where plates collided were rather suddenly raised up into high mountains like the Himalayas and others where they spread apart were just as rapidly depressed into deep ocean beds like the Atlantic. Scientists looking at continental shift think in terms of millions of years, yet tremendous catastrophic events can happen in just a short time. Many of you remember the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in Washington state in 1980. This is what it looked like before. This is what it looked like afterward. That happened in a couple days' time from one eruption. Can you imagine the force of hundreds, maybe thousands of underwater eruptions like this as *...the fountains of the great deep burst forth* and lava and water and steam burst forth into the oceans? The flood is what gave the earth its present form. Second:

b. it formed worldwide sedimentary layers of rock strata That 3-day flood in 1972 left a full inch and more of mud over the entire inside of our house. Water, especially violently moving water, erodes soil and rock and picks it up and carries it until eventually the water is stilled and it settles out. The flood carried huge quantities of eroded surface materials which eventually settled out and formed sedimentary rock layers on the surface. Scientists tell us that: *About three fourths, perhaps more, of the land area of the earth, 55 million square miles, has sedimentary rock as the bedrock at the surface or directly under the cover of mantle rock... The thickness ...ranges from a few feet to 40,000 ft. at any one place... The vast bulk of the stratified rocks is composed of shallow water deposits.* (Genesis Flood, p. 270). Layer upon layer of sediment was laid down over the entire earth and formed into rock. You can see this clearly in places like the Grand Canyon where you have a cut-away view, but I shared last week, but the layers you see there extend all over the world. At the same time, the flood:

c. it formed water-created features on land Huge volumes of water receded from the land and were moved and reconcentrated in the deepened ocean beds. This created huge temporary inland lakes. For instance, at one time there was a huge lake that once covered most of the entire state of Utah, known as Lake Bonneville. It still shows at least four distinct strand or shore lines, the highest being 1000 ft. above the level of Great Salt Lake, but it's gone today, drained into the ocean. The same is true for every major inland lake known today. And the draining of the waters in such a short time created huge land features such as the Grand Canyon, which was not cut by the Colorado River over millions of years, but was cut by receding flood waters in a matter of weeks or months, leaving a little stream at its bottom today! The Flood also:

d. it formed layers of fossils and coal deposits Many of the living creatures that were trapped in the waters were buried in the sediment which became rock and over time turned into the fossils we unearth today. Huge masses of vegetation from the earth's surface were swept underwater and buried under tons and tons of mud and silt and then carbonized through the heat generated by vast amounts of thrust and weight pressure. We've discovered that coal can be made from organic material in a lab in a matter of days. Earth's coal deposits were formed suddenly, not gradually over millions of years and they are the remains of the plant material of Noah's ancient world. And finally, the great Flood:

2. it radically altered earth's climate creating polar ice caps and an ice age of several hundred years in the upper northern and southern hemispheres This video will explain it briefly much better than I can:

<https://answersingenesis.org/environmental-science/ice-age/> Yes, as science say, there WAS an ice age, but if you noticed in the video, the ice sheath never got very far south. It covered Canada and touched the northern US and north-

ern Europe but Asia was relatively exempt. Where the ark landed and civilization redeveloped in the Middle East was many thousands of miles south and east of where the temporary ice-cap grew and then receded to its present dimensions.

Do you understand why I'm sharing all these kinds of things with you? I want you to realize that Christians are not stupid for believing the Bible. Scientific observation does not contradict the Bible, but rather affirms it. It is the unjustifiable, almost universal, assumption of billions of years that we deny. God's Word holds the answers to the very facts that we observe in nature. You CAN trust it. So, let's go to the Scripture and look at:

II. The Effects Of The Flood On The Human Race in Gen. 8. We left Noah and his family busily feeding, watering and cleaning up after animals inside the ark, but eventually:

1. the Flood ended (1-5) God stopped the rain and also the underwater volcanic activity and release of water and:

a. the waters receded gradually over a period of 5 months until the ark bottomed out and came to rest somewhere on the mountains that came to be known as Ararat, which lie in the eastern portion of modern Turkey today. Of course, it took months after the waters receded before:

b. the ground dried out We won't read vs. (6-14) but there we have the whole story of Noah sending out a raven and then a dove which came back with a leaf the first time and didn't come back the second time so Noah figured the water was gone and he finally opened the upper covering of the ark and saw with his eyes that the ground was fully visible. But still they remained in the ark almost another 2 months until it was dried enough to walk and live on and then, at God's command:

c. Noah's family and the animals went forth to repopulate the earth (15-19) The purpose of the whole story is in v. 17 and it was not only meant for the animals; it was repeated to Noah's family in 9:1. They were all to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God had preserved them all as a seed stock, to repopulate His world with living creatures and with human beings. Now after they left the ark:

2. God made a covenant with Noah and all living things Bible scholars call it the Noahic Covenant. A covenant is an unbreakable sacred vow between two parties and in this case God Himself made an unbreakable vow that still stands today.

a. He vowed never again to destroy all living things as long as earth remains (20-22) Notice that His determination arose as Noah worshipped Him and that God was so pleased with Noah's love and worship that He made this vow. Also notice in v. 21 that it began in God's heart first. It was a vow that He made in His own heart to Himself first. He said, "Never again will I do what I have done again!" But then He revealed His decision to Noah and his family as a covenant vow in **9:8-11**. He says, "Count on it. I will never send another flood like this and destroy all living things! You don't have to live in fear that this will happen again, that man will grow so evil that I will wipe you all out again. I, who cannot lie, promise, I vow, that I will not do it - at least until I am ready to melt the earth itself and make a new heaven and earth!" But if you go back to **8:21** you have:

b. His explanation of WHY: The evil that man does is not mere external acts. He's born that way! **Sin is in the human heart!** It cannot be gotten rid of by removing all the evil people and starting over with new ones. It **can only be remedied by sacrifice**, as Noah is offering. And that points to **the ultimate Sacrifice** of His own Son, the Lord Jesus, on the cross! You see, in one sense the whole history of man degenerating into continual evil and then being judged by a flood and the race starting over is one huge object lesson for us. God killed off the evil ones and started over but the evil was in their hearts and humans were soon doing evil all over again! Man is NOT basically good! He ALWAYS sins! The only remedy for that is forgiveness and the transformation of his heart and that only comes through Jesus! Even God can't achieve a world full of human beings that love Him by outward improvements; He has to transform people's hearts one at a time and make them righteous. Well, in this covenant God gave some new provisions for man. For instance:

c. He now allowed man to eat animals as well as plants (9:1-4) Though before the flood humans were at least supposed to be vegetarian, now we are allowed to hunt or raise animals and kill them for food. I can be a hunter and kill and eat animals. I can go to McDonalds and eat a hamburger. I can go to a restaurant and eat a steak dinner. God Himself says it's all OK. Animals are not human. God gave them to us as a food source. However, God says to respect the life that was taken by not eating the blood which is His designated symbol of that life. Next:

d. He now instituted the concept of human government (5-6) Before the Flood, everyone did what they wanted, whatever they had power to get away with. Now God says, "Police your ranks! If someone kills another person intentionally, you, collectively, are responsible to administer justice and kill him!" Scofield says this is *...the institution, for the first time, of human government--the government of man by man. The highest function of government is the judicial taking of life. All other governmental powers are implied in that.* And so, begins the foundation of all human government as it has been practiced in various ways down through history. Now why did God do this? He says *God*

made man in His own image. So, when you murder a human being, you're in essence "killing" the image of God, directly rebelling against Him. This law is to keep human beings mindful of His existence and of His judgment on sin. But beyond that, I believe it was a Divine check that God put in place to prevent the human race from degenerating all the way into the deplorable level of sin that it was in before the flood all over again. Paul says in Romans 13 that rulers and governing authorities are God's servants; they serve His purpose of punishing evil and rewarding good. And it is that fear of earthly punishment that makes humans living together in a society possible. At any rate, God now repeats Himself. Again:

e. He commanded Noah and his sons to multiply and fill the earth (7) God wants a world filled with people. He always has, from the very beginning. Earth does not have a population problem. God put plenty of space and plenty of resources here to support many billions of people. Earth has a sin problem! It is human oppression and hatred and greed that causes whole populations to suffer! But some day, when Jesus returns, God will have His wish at last. Habakkuk said, *...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.* - 2:14. In any event, after He makes His promise to Noah and all generations to follow in vs. 8-11:

f. He gave Noah a perpetual sign of the covenant: the rainbow (12-17) So when it is raining and the sun begins to come out and this beautiful arc of a giant rainbow appears briefly in the sky, it is a natural phenomenon God Himself has put in place for us. It is not that He might forget His promise and needs a reminder to remember. It is that WE need a reminder that He will not forget and every time we see one, we can be thankful that instead of being punished for our sins as the world was long ago, that God promised not to destroy us, but instead to give us eternal life through Jesus. Hallelujah! Well, in the remaining verses of Ch. 9 we have a brief record of:

3. Noah's life after the Flood First we read that:

a. his three sons repopulated the entire earth (18-19) Now that's a powerful statement. Everyone knows what DNA is, the genetic information contained in our human cells, and today everyone is busy getting their DNA tested to find out where their ancestors were from. But there is another kind of DNA those ordinary tests don't show called mitochondrial DNA; it is found in the mitochondria in the nucleus of our cells and, unlike regular DNA, it is passed down ONLY by the mother, not the father. So, from studying mitochondrial DNA scientists are most recently positing the concept that all human beings seem to descend from some ancestral common mother whom they have dubbed "mitochondrial Eve". What a concept! But even more interesting than that is that it appears from worldwide sampling that underneath that common mother, all human beings belong to one of 3 basic mitochondrial DNA groupings. That is, all human beings in the entire world, no matter their appearance or race or gender, appear to have descended from one of 3 long-ago ancient mothers. I wonder who they might be? How about the three wives of Noah's sons from whom the Bible says the whole of the human race descended? <http://www.icr.org/article/new-dna-study-confirms-noah/> Read about it online. Now alas, even poor Noah who was a righteous man and walked with God:

b. he fell into drunkenness on one occasion (20-21) The Bible never says "Don't drink alcohol" but everywhere from Genesis to Revelation it warns against getting drunk and often shows the awful trouble people get into when they do. Even Noah fell victim to this temptation and here's what happened **(22-27)**. His son Ham saw him lying naked in his tent and dishonored him by talking to his two brothers about it disrespectfully instead of covering him. So, when he was sober:

c. he uttered a prophetic curse and blessing on his descendants It's extremely difficult to make sense of why or how this relates to the incident, but remember this is Moses writing many years afterward and the significance of the words is that Noah through the Spirit was acting as a prophet and telling what would happen to his descendants. The godly line of Noah would be continued through Shem and Japheth's descendants would be blessed through him. But Ham's son Canaan would be the ancestor of the Canaanites who would descend into great evil and be partially destroyed and enslaved by Israel hundreds of years later in Moses' day. Noah's words came true and eventually:

d. he died at 950 years old (28-29) In those remaining 350 years Noah is never mentioned but he lived through the Tower of Babel incident and the dividing of the nations mentioned in chs. 10-11 and only died about the time Abraham was born!

Now let me close by sharing this. Have you ever wondered how Moses could write the account of creation, the Fall and the Flood in such detail? Well think about this. **[CHART]** Adam lived 930 years which means he lived to know Methuselah, Noah's grandfather and Lamech, Noah's father. Adam only died 56 years before Noah was born, so the knowledge of creation and the fall and the whole first millennium of human history was directly passed by Adam to Noah's father, and so almost directly to Noah. Noah lived until the time of Abraham's birth so firsthand knowledge of the events of Gen. 1-11 was not merely a distant memory retold from generation to generation; it was carefully passed down directly through only 3 lives in the first 2000 years of human history and that is only about 500 years before Moses wrote it down. So, the events we're studying, creation, fall, flood and Babel are real! They're not myths; they're not legends. They happened!

Knowledge of them was passed down from firsthand sources and we hold an accurate record of them preserved by the Holy Spirit in our very hands!

Beginnings - Genesis 1-11

The Creation Of The Nations - Chs. 10-11

Genesis 1-11 is the introduction to the entire Bible. It sets the stage for the age-long story of God's redemption of the human race that begins with His calling of Abraham in Genesis 12 and continues all the way through Revelation 22. But before Moses can begin the story, he has to explain how the barren world of Noah's later life was transformed into the world that Abraham was born into and, by extension, the world as we know it. Chapters 10-11 of Genesis explain how the human race after the flood went from being one small family of eight people to being 7.6 billion individuals in some 16,000 people groups, speaking some 6500 different languages and living in every habitable place on the planet. Or to put it in a simple phrase, they explain how God created the nations. But before we look there, I want you to turn with me to **Acts 17:26-27** where Paul gives us a two verse:

I. The Summary Of The Creation Of The Nations From one man, Adam and over again later from Noah, from one family and one line, God made the infinite variety of peoples that we find today. So, first of all:

1. God multiplied the human race exponentially. The population of living things does not grow in an even linear fashion. It is affected greatly by how long people live and how many children each family has. If each couple on earth had only 2 children, there would be no population growth. But since the population of the world in the last 2000 years has increased by more than 7 billion and has increased by 1.5 billion in the last 18 years it is obvious that the families of earth have and are averaging far more than 2 children. Population grows exponentially. For example, 2 people having 2 children repeated for 10 generations does not result in 20 people ($2+2+2\dots$); it results in 1024 people ($2 \times 2 \times 2 \dots$ or 2^{10}). This graph [SLIDE] shows the growth of world population in the last 2000 years. See how rapidly the growth increases as the number grows! The Bible tells us that there were 1656 years from Adam to the flood, but people lived 800-900 years, had children beginning at 100 years and had lots of them! Assuming a life span of only 500 years and an average of 6 children, by the time of the flood, there could easily have been over 200 million people on earth to die in the flood and that figure may be low. There is no problem at all with Cain, Adam's son taking a wife, building a city, or being afraid of avengers! But God started the process all over again with Noah. At the tower of Babel about a hundred years or so after the Flood there must have been at least 70 families because there are 70 nations mentioned in Gen. 10 as having descended from Noah. In 3 or 4 generations after the Flood the population probably grew from 8 to at least 800-1000 people total. By Abraham's time about 300 years later still, earth's population at the same rate could easily have grown to over 3 million people, plenty enough to have nations and civilizations established as they seem to have been from the Biblical record. However, rather than leaving the human race to multiply as one homogeneous unit, God **divided it into** a plethora of **nations**, and by that I don't mean political nations, but rather **peoples**, extended families of human beings that share the same ancestors, language and culture, but are distinct from other groups. From one family God made thousands of separate smaller families who were very different from one another and then:

2. God dispersed those peoples to specific places over the whole earth God had a plan for each of those groups, where they were to live and the time frame of their history. Some of them died out or were exterminated and became extinct; there are no more Hittites and no more Philistines. Yet others not only continued but branched and divided further over time. And they migrated away from one another until they covered the earth. Now why did God do this? V. 27 tells us that:

3. God did this in order to draw those peoples to know and worship Him It was His plan to keep the human race from becoming one united wicked mass, even worse than it was before the flood. It was a divide and conquer strategy. He would create a people of His own, first Israel and now the Church, and use His one people to take the knowledge of Him to all the peoples of the earth, one by one, until He has worshippers in all of them. Jesus made that clear in the Great Commission and we are still carrying it out today. The events of Gen. 10-11 are the first step in God's plan to save a remnant of the human race from the evil that lies within them. So now let's begin in Gen. 11 and look at how:

II. God Divided The Human Race in 11:1-9. After they got off the Ark:

1. Noah's family multiplied for 4 generations and about 100 years Look at **10:25**. It was in the lifetime of Peleg, Noah's great-great-great grandson, that God divided the peoples of the earth and if you add up the ages at which each generation had their first child in **11:10-16**, you can calculate that Peleg was born about 100 years after the Flood. Now during that first hundred years:

2. they remained a united group and journeyed eastward (1-2) As Shem, Ham and Japheth had children and grandchildren, they remained one extended family and they stayed together as a group. Naturally they only spoke one

language, the language that Noah and the whole world before him back to Adam had always spoken. From the mountains of Ararat in eastern Turkey they began to migrate south to a warmer climate and eastward until eventually:

3. they built a city and tower on the plain of Shinar which is another name for **Babylonia (3-4)** 1000 people would make a good-sized town or small city and, not understanding that the world would very soon have millions of people as they kept multiplying, they wanted their situation to remain the same permanently. So, they decided to build a lasting city with bricks and mortar and to build a tower that reached far up into the sky. Now we learn in Ch. 10 that:

a. this was the work of a tyrant called Nimrod (10:8-12) *Mighty one* means a powerful man, a warrior. He was not only a *mighty hunter* of animals, but a mighty warrior in battle. Vs. 10 says that he was building himself a *kingdom*, that is, he was powerfully ruling over the people. This whole idea of staying in one place and having a permanent city was his idea, so that he could rule as king. And in the midst of it he led them to build a tower, the highest structure ever built at that time. It was likely not just a plain tower, but what we now call a ziggurat, a massive stone or brick structure that became common in Mesopotamia. [SLIDE] This is the Great Ziggurat of Ur which was close by and dates back to shortly after this time. It was 210 feet long, 148 ft. wide and over 98 feet high (that's about twice as high as our steeple). Saddam Hussein had the lower portions of it rebuilt but the top is missing [SLIDE] as you can see in this drawing. Ziggurats often had a shrine on the top for the worship of the gods. Wikipedia says, *The Mesopotamian ziggurats were not places for public worship or ceremonies. They were believed to be dwelling places for the gods and each city had its own patron god.* So, it is likely that this tower was the beginning of idolatrous worship, but in any event, we know from the text that:

b. this was an act of rebellion against God God had commanded Noah and his sons to fill the earth, but Nimrod and his people didn't want to be "scattered". They wanted to make a central monument so that all the race as it grew would stay centered in this location and under his dominion. Well:

4. God was not pleased (5-6) He realized that they would only become more powerful and rebel further and commit more and more acts of rebellion as their combined strength grew. So, **He determined to disperse them**, but He did it in a very ingenious fashion:

5. He did it by miraculously imposing differing languages on them (7-8) They were all one big extended family. But suddenly no individual family could understand the other's speech and this became so frustrating to them that they began to separate from one another. So, contrary to evolutionary thinking:

a. major language groups did not evolve from each other While there are families of languages which appear to have evolved from common roots over time, the major language groups on earth bear no phonetic resemblance to one another. If languages evolved over a million years you would expect to be able to find traceable roots among all languages, but that is not the case. Just look at the difference between English and Hebrew or Arabic or Chinese. How did it happen that people in different parts of the world adopted entirely different sounds for the very same things which were familiar to them and their ancestors from time immemorial? It doesn't make sense unless languages were forcibly and suddenly changed as the Bible says they were. And that sudden change was unbelievably effective:

b. the division of language caused groups to migrate to other areas (9) God scattered the people from the area of Babylon over the face of the earth. These families migrated and, as they reproduced, migrated some more, each keeping their little family/language group fairly intact. Some went south, some east, some north. If you look at a map, you'll notice that the major continents of the world all connect right there in the Middle East! But how did man and the animals get to the Western Hemisphere? How were there Indians here before the Vikings and Columbus? Almost everyone now feels that at one time there was a major land bridge across the Bering Strait from Siberia to Alaska and with the lowered ocean levels after the flood this may very well have been the time as the glacial period was ending in northern reaches that men and animals crossed that land bridge before it was submerged beneath the rising oceans. This migration need not have taken long centuries; consider the fact that it was only 500 years ago that Columbus set foot in the Americas and look at the European descended population in them and the extent to which it spread. It actually took only a couple hundred years for white men to explore and colonize and fill two entire continents separated from them by a vast ocean! Now backing up to **Ch. 10** we have the record of how:

III. God Dispersed The Human Race This marvelous chapter is known as the Table of Nations (**1**). These two chapters are the *toledoth*, the account of what happened to Noah's sons. We won't take time to read it but

1. God multiplied and divided Noah's descendants into 70 nations, 70 extended families or people groups descended from the 3 sons of Noah. The names in this chapter are not names of individuals, but names of peoples and they correspond to early place names that are recognizable. [SLIDE] First you have:

a. the Japhetic peoples in vs. (2-5) *[in green]* which include **Europeans, the West and the islands** The names on this list correspond to modern place names like Germany, Spain, Italy, Thrace, Greece, Russia, and Media. Japheth and the families descended from him seem to have traveled north and broken off from each other along the way. These peoples eventually colonized the Western Hemisphere and many of the islands of the world. Second, you have:

b. the Hamitic peoples in vs. (6-20) *[in orange]* which include **Canaanites, Africans and Asians** The names on this list correspond to names like Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, the Philistines, Canaanites, Assyrians, Babylonians. This family seems to have dispersed west, south and east and become the basis for populating Africa and Asia as well as portions who remained close to their origin in the Middle East. Of particular notice is the origin of the 7 nations of Canaan whom the Israelites eventually conquered. Lastly you have:

c. the Semitic peoples in vs. (21-31) *[in purple]* which include **Jews, Arabs, Persians and Syrians**. They are all related, all descended from Shem. These peoples stayed very near the place of their dispersion, in Mesopotamia. All the peoples on earth can be traced back to one of these family groupings found mentioned here.

OK, that accounts for language and geographic location but how did human beings come to actually look so different from one group to another? The answer is that as the groups were separated, over time:

2. God diversified people physically into different racial groups and He did it in two ways. First of all, He did it:

a. through genetic combination Rather than explain it verbally, let's watch this:

<https://answersingenesis.org/kids/videos/evolution/origin-races/>

So, the entire range of physical characteristics, including skin color, which humans display all comes from different combinations of genes from their parents. Now when a small group of people continually marry within themselves and exclude others who are different, the same characteristics will tend to occur much, much more frequently than in the general population. For example, we have developed and preserved hundreds of breeds of domestic dogs through selective breeding which are vastly different from each other. Yet if they are allowed to mix freely in the wild with other dogs, within a few generations their offspring end up being the same kind of generic mongrel! The same happens when people groups intermarry freely. Two Japanese may marry and have a Japanese-looking child but if that child marries a Caucasian, their child will probably be a combination and then if that child marries an Arab - you get the idea. The so-called races are preserved by isolating genetic material in a particular group of people. After the languages were confounded at Babel and families could no longer understand each other, they began to marry only within their family line/language group. Then God enhanced that genetic isolation:

b. through geographic isolation As they became more and more isolated from each other geographically and found no one outside their own family to intermarry with, each group tended to repeat its own characteristics more and more until over a few generations whole groups of human beings developed which looked vastly different from each other. Groups that eventually began to intermarry soon began to amalgamate into one group and become physically indistinguishable but groups that chose to stay apart tended to keep the genes of their ancestors dominant. So, distance and geography played a great role in keeping certain gene combinations from intermingling and thus the appearance of entire races of people was preserved and, considering the rapid rate at which the human race reproduces, it did not take many generations for this process to happen.

Now in the remainder of Chapter 11, we're told how:

IV. God Prepared To Create His Own Nation (Israel) Through Abraham Let me just briefly mention that in **11:10-26** we have:

1. the genealogy of Abraham and if you add up the ages at which each son had their first child, you'll find that Abraham was born about **350 years after the Flood** roughly about 2000 BC. **[SLIDE]** This chart actually shows that Shem and the next 3 generations after him all lived during Abraham's life, so were probably there in Ur in Mesopotamia with him, well known as elders and probably were the source of his faith! Then in **11:27-32** we're told of:

2. Abraham's migration from Ur to the land of **Canaan** and of his **childlessness**, which introduces and sets the stage for the story of the life of Abraham that occupies the next 14 chapters.

And the first thing God says to Abraham in Ch. 12 is, "I'll make of you a great nation of My own and cause all peoples to be blessed or cursed as they interact with your people and eventually through you, I will bless all the peoples on earth!" And thus begins the story of Redemption, the story of the salvation of the world through faith in the One True God and eventually through faith in His Son Jesus, the story that IS the remainder of our Bible. You see, God did all this for Redemption: Creation, Fall, Flood, Babel and the Creation of Nations were all His plan so that millions from every people

would be redeemed and transformed and eventually occupy new heavens and a new earth filled with righteousness together with Him forever!

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OUTLINES – GEN. 12-50

Genesis: How It All Began

Ch. 12 - The Call Of Abram

I. Abram Is Called To A New Land (1-4)

1. God's call to Abram (1)
 - a. it came when Abram was in Ur and his family in idolatry - Josh. 24:2-3
 - b. his initial response was only partial - 11:27-32
 - c. it was an act of faith - he was not told where he was going - Heb. 11:8
2. God's covenant with Abram (2-3) - THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT
 - a. God vowed unconditionally to bless him
 - (1) to make him into a great nation (people) = Israel
 - (2) to make for him a great name
 - b. God vowed to use Abram to bless the world
 - (1) interaction with Abram (and his descendants) would spread the knowledge of God
 - (2) ultimately Abram would bless every people on earth through Christ - Gal. 3:16

II. Abram Arrives In The New Land (4-9)

1. God confirmed the identity and the promise of the land (7)
2. Abram passed through the land from north to south
3. Abram was called to the lifestyle of a sojourner - Heb. 11:9-10

III. Abram Leaves The New Land (10-20)

1. he left and he lied out of fear of circumstances
2. God protected him even in his disobedience
3. his disobedience created a pattern that both he (20:1-2) and his son (26:6-7) repeated

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 13-14 Abram And Lot

I. Abram Separates From Lot (Ch. 13)

1. Abram returns to the land and to depending on God (1-4)
2. Abram and Lot's problem (5-7)
3. Abram's selfless offer (8-9)
4. Lot's selfish choice (10-13)
 - a. he chose the well-watered plain of Jordan
 - b. he was drawn to the cities on the plain
 - c. he pitched his tent near wicked Sodom though he was righteous - 2 Pet. 2:7-8
 - d. eventually he left his way of life and moved into Sodom (14:12) and it cost him all

5. God's blessing on Abram (14-18)
 - a. He now adds to the Covenant the perpetual promise of the land
 - b. He amplifies the promise of multiplied offspring
- II. Abram Rescues Lot (Ch. 14)
1. Lot is caught up in a battle and carried off (1-12)
 2. Abram risks his life to rescue Lot (13-16)
 3. Abram makes a godly choice as he returns (17-18) - compare the principle in Heb. 11:24-26
 - a. he meets Melchizedek, a priest of God - compare Heb. 7:1-3
 - (1) he receives a Divine blessing: God delivered his enemies (19-20a)
 - (2) he gives a tithe (20b)
 - b. he meets the King of Sodom
 - (1) he is offered an earthly reward (21)
 - (2) he refuses to accept it (22-24)
 - (3) God affirms his godly choice saying that HE is Abram's true reward - 15:1-2

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 15-16 A Promise And A Mistake

- I. The Promise Of God To Abram - Ch. 15
1. God required Abram to wait long (85 now) and he grew impatient (1-3)
 2. God's specific promise of a SON (4)
 - a. He reiterated the promise of numberless offspring (5)
 - b. Abram believed him and God counted Him righteous (6) - Rom. 4:18-24
 3. God's specific promise to possess the LAND (7-8)
 - a. the custom of making a covenant (9-12, 17)
 - b. the prediction of the slavery and redemption of Israel 400 years later (13-16)

- Ex. 12:40-41, Gal. 3:16-17
 - c. the confirmation that the land of Canaan would belong to Israel (18-20)
- II. Abram and Sarai's Failed Attempt To Make The Promise Come True - Ch. 16
1. they developed a wrong view of the situation (1-2)
 2. they made a wrong choice (3-4)
 3. they reaped a painful result (4b-16)
 - a. it brought dissatisfaction (4b-5)
 - b. it led to another wrong choice (6)
 - c. God still displayed grace and faithfulness (7-16)
 - d. it led to permanent problems
 - (1) family tension and division - 21:8-21
 - (2) the creation of a new race conditioned by its origin (10-12)
 - (3) the current Arab/Israel conflict

Genesis: How It All Began

Ch. 17 The Covenant Of Circumcision

I. God's Reiteration Of His Covenant (1-8)

1. God gave it after 13 more long years (1a)
2. God revealed a new Name for Himself: God Almighty = *El Shaddai* (1-2)
 - a. He is all-powerful: nothing is too hard for Him
 - b. He is sufficient: we need nothing besides Him
 - c. He is in control: He does what He wants to do
3. God gave to Abram a new name: Abraham (*father of a multitude*) (3-4)
 - a. He renewed His promise of a multitude of descendants (6-7)
 - b. He renewed His promise of the land of Canaan (8)

II. The Sign Of The Covenant: Circumcision (9-14)

1. it was a God-given visible reminder of God's acceptance of his faith - Rom. 4:11
2. it was to be universally practiced by all Israel, a sign of inclusion in God's people
3. neglect of it was to be punished as disregard for God's covenant

III. The Promise Of A Child And Nations By Sarai, now Sarah (15-16)

IV. Abraham's Reaction To The Promise (17-22)

1. Abraham's reticent laughter and mistaken view of Ishmael (17-18)
2. God's reiterated promise and the naming of Isaac (19)
3. God's promise to bless Ishmael also (20-21)

V. Abraham's Action In Response (23-27)

1. it was immediate
2. it was universal

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 18-19 Sodom and Gomorrah

I. The Lord Visits Abraham To Confirm His Promise (18:1-15)

1. Abraham's hospitality - he refreshes God! (1-8)
2. the Lord's specific reaffirmation of the promise, now specifying the time (9-10)
3. Sarah's laughter (11-15)

II. Abraham Intercedes With The Lord (18:16-33)

1. God chooses to tell Abraham His plan, because he is obedient and communing (16-21)
2. Abraham's boldness in interceding with God (22-25)
3. God's willingness to hear Abraham and answer what's really on his heart (26-32)

III. Two Angels Rescue Lot (19:1-22)

1. Lot's hospitality toward the two strangers (1-3)
2. the deplorable level to which Sodom had fallen (4-9) - Rom. 1:21 ff.

3. God's deliverance of Lot and his family (10-17) - 2 Pet. 2:7-8
 4. Lot's reluctance to leave (18-22)
- IV. The Lord Destroys Sodom and Gomorrah (19:23-29) - Jer. 18:7-10
1. the destruction of the cities of the plain and the beginning of the "Dead" Sea (23-25)
- a picture of Christ's return - Lk. 17:28-30
 2. Lot's wife looks back and dies (26) - Luke 17:32
 3. Abraham's intercession saved Lot (27-29)
- V. Lot's Sin With His Daughters (19:30-38)
1. the moral values of Sodom had infected Lot's family (30-36)
 2. he became the ancestor of the Moabites and Ammonites, later enemies of Israel

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 20-21 The Birth Of Isaac

- I. The Failure Of Abraham - Ch. 20
1. the repeated lie about Sarah (1-2)
 2. God's protection of Sarah (3-7) [this was a Satanic attempt to discredit God's promise]
 3. Abraham's poor witness to Abimelech (8-15)
 4. Abimelech's vindication of Sarah (16-18)
- II. The Birth Of Isaac - 21:1-7
1. God was faithful to all the promises He had made (1-2)
 2. Abraham was faithful to name and circumcise his son (3-4)
 3. it was a true miracle and a joy to all (5-7)
- III. The Sending Away Of Ishmael - 21:8-21
1. the jealousy of Sarah (8-10)
 2. the hesitation of Abraham (11)
 3. the reassurance of God (12-13)
 4. God's care for Ishmael (14-21)
- IV. The Treaty At Beersheba - 21:22-34
1. the covenant with Abimelech (22-24)
 2. the establishing of Beersheba (25-34)

Genesis: How It All Began

Ch. 22 Abraham's Greatest Moment

- I. God Gave Abraham A Test That Would Prove His Faith (1-2)
1. God has never been in favor of human sacrifice and, in fact, abhors it
 2. God had prepared him for this experience by 25 years of showing His promises trustworthy
 3. He told Abraham to do something which appeared to be totally contrary

- a. to his own heart
- b. to God's clear promise

II. Abraham Demonstrated His Faith By His Response (3-10)

1. notice how he obeyed
 - a. without question
 - b. without hesitation
 - c. without reservation
2. his faith was demonstrated to the whole world by his obedience - James 2:21-23
 - he believed God (Gen. 15:6) but now proved it by his actions
3. his obedience was made possible by his absolute faith in God's word - Heb. 11:17-19
 - he believed that God was going to raise Isaac from the dead to keep His promise

III. God Planned This Event To Display For Us The Meaning Of Christ's Death (11-18)

Moriah is the very spot where the Temple was later built and nearby is Calvary

1. He graphically pictured His own act of sacrificing His Son (10-12)
2. He clearly demonstrated for us the principle of substitution (13-14)
3. He revealed His plan to bless all the peoples of the earth through Christ (15-18)

Genesis: How It All Began

Ch. 23 The Death Of Sarah

I. Lessons From The Death Of Sarah (1-3)

1. our lives have a set duration - Ps. 90:12
2. it is right to mourn and grieve when a loved one dies
3. our mourning also has a duration
 - a. our grieving is different from the world's because we grieve in hope - 1 Thes. 4:13
 - b. we are convinced of life beyond the grave - compare 25:8

II. Lessons About Life From The Burial Of Sarah (4-20)

1. we are "strangers" who don't belong to this world = non-residents (4)
 - a. Heb. 11:9 - Abraham was living in a strange land
 - b. Heb. 11:13 - we are strangers living on earth - Phil. 3:20
2. we are "sojourners" who dwell in this world = resident aliens
 - a. Heb. 11:9 - Abraham made his home in the land of promise
 - b. Heb. 11:13 - we live as aliens (pilgrims) on earth
3. we live as princes of God among children of terror (5-6) compare Heb. 2:14-15
 - a. we must deal honestly and uprightly with them (7-9, 16)
 - b. we must be careful not to become entangled with them (10-16) - 2 Cor. 6:14

III. A Lesson About God From The Burial Of Sarah (17-20)

- the cave became to them the guarantee of God's promise of the land - 49:29-32, 50:24-26

Genesis: How It All Began

Ch. 24 A Bride For Isaac

- I. Abraham "arranged" a marriage for his son - it is still this way among many peoples
 - don't dismiss it lightly: the choice of a mate involved the families of the couple
 - we must be careful not to idolize the modern Western concept of dating --> marriage
- II. Abraham's principles for choosing a mate (1-9)
 - 1. Isaac was NOT to marry an idol-worshipping Canaanite (3b)
 - 2. Isaac WAS to marry from among his believing kindred (4)
 - 3. Isaac was NOT to marry someone who wouldn't join him in following the Lord (5-6)
 - a. Abraham's extended family had mingled their faith with idolatry (24) - compare 31:19, 30
 - b. Isaac was NOT to leave God's call to take up their way of life in order to get married
 - c. his bride would have to leave everything to follow him in following the Lord
 - 4. God would be the one to provide the right mate for Isaac (7)
 - 5. it is better to have no mate than the wrong mate (8)
 - 6. see how serious a matter this is (3, 9)
- III. The Servant's Principles For Finding A Mate For Isaac
 - 1. it is important to go where believers are (10)
 - 2. it is important to pray earnestly for guidance (11-16)
 - * don't do the fleece thing!
 - 3. it is important to observe a prospective mate carefully (17-21)
 - 4. it is important to put biblical truth before emotions or circumstances (22-25)
 - 5. be sure to give thanks when God provides HIS person - Prov. 18:22
- IV. The Happy Ending Of The Story
 - 1. the certainty that comes from knowing a marriage is God-orchestrated (50-51)
 - 2. the love that God will grow if the process is done His way (61-67)

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 25-26 The Life Of Isaac

- I. A Lesson About Favoritism (25:1-18)
 - 1. Abraham had 7 other children besides Isaac (1-4, 12)
 - 2. Abraham treated Isaac differently from all the rest (5-6)
 - 3. the fruit it eventually produced after his death (7-8)
 - a. the Arabian peoples remain hostile to Israel to this day (18)
 - b. the behavior was reproduced for 2 generations and ultimately sent Joseph to Egypt!
- II. A Lesson About Godlessness (25:19-34)
 - 1. the birth of Jacob and Esau (20-21, 24-26)
 - 2. God designated Jacob as the heir to His promise before they were born (22-23)

3. the boys developed differently and the parents had opposite favorites (27-28)
4. Esau sold his birthright as the oldest son to Jacob (29-34)
 - a. Jacob was actually a man of integrity thinking about spiritual things (27)
 - b. this story is told to illustrate the crass non-spirituality of Esau - Heb. 12:16-17

III. Assorted Lessons From Isaac's Life (Ch. 26)

1. Isaac moves to Gerar and God reaffirms His blessing (1-6)
2. Isaac lies about his wife and gets caught (7-11)
3. Isaac grows rich and is driven away (12-16)
4. Isaac digs wells and loses some in dispute (17-22)
5. Isaac settles in Beersheba and makes a treaty with Abimelech (23-33)

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 27-28 Jacob The Deceiver

I. Jacob's Strong Lesson About Deception (27:1-40)

1. Isaac plans to pass the blessing of Abraham on to the "wrong son" (1-4)
2. Rebekah plots to get Isaac to bless the "right" son (5-10)
3. Jacob's proper reluctance to practice deception (11-13)
4. Jacob cooperates in the deception and lies to his father (14-25)
5. Jacob reaps the inevitable results of his choice
 - a. he receives the blessing of his father (26-29) [33]
 - b. he incurs the hatred of his brother (30-41) [41]
 - c. God teaches him a hard lesson: he is forced to leave his family (never sees his mother again), is the victim of deception by his uncle and in turn suffers deceit from his own sons

II. Jacob Meets God At Bethel (27:42-28:22)

1. Jacob is sent to get a wife (27:42-28:9)
 - a. Rebekah's plan to rescue him (27:42-45)
 - b. Rebekah falsely gets Isaac to implement her plan (27:46-28:2) - compare 26:34-35
 - c. Isaac's deliberate yielding to the plan of God (28:3-5)
 - d. Esau's attempt at conciliating his parents [marrying Isaac's niece] (28:6-9)
2. God meets Jacob at Bethel and makes a covenant with him (28:10-22)
 - a. God appears in a dream and gives His unconditional promise to Jacob (10-15)
Presence - protection - property - posterity
 - b. Jacob responds in worship and makes a vow to God (16-22)
Singular devotion - sincere worship - substantial giving

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 29-30 Jacob's Increase

I. Jacob Acquires Two Wives - Through Deception (29:1-30)

1. God arranged Jacob's arrival in Paddan Aram to the right place and people (1-13)

2. Jacob's love for Rachel and commitment to serve 7 years for her (14-20)
 3. Laban's secret wedding-night swap for Leah (21-25)
 - a. Jacob experienced how it feels to be deceived and paid a steep price for carelessness
 - b. God accomplished His will through it (Leah seems to have been God's choice: a godly character and her son Judah begins the line of the Kings and of Christ)
 - c. Jacob chose his wife based largely on appearance and feelings, not prayer
 4. Laban gained another 7 years of free service through this ruse (25-29)
 5. Jacob ended up with 2 wives and displayed favoritism (neither did God approve)
- II. Jacob Acquires 11 Children - Through Strife (29:31-30:24)
1. God blesses the first union with children on purpose (29:31)
 2. the sad notion that having a child will make a spouse love you (29:32-35)
 3. the lengths to which jealousy will go (also why polygamy is NOT God's plan!)
 - a. both ladies end up giving their husband to yet another woman (30:1-12)
 - b. one ends up controlling the husband and the other bribing her to sleep with him (14-16)
 4. God's grace operates even in very ungodly situations (22-24)
- III. Jacob Acquires Numerous Flocks - Through Tension (30:25-43)
1. Laban's shrewd deal to keep Jacob in his service (25-36) [*he kept changing terms - 31:7-8*]
 2. Jacob's self-invented scheme to trick Laban (37-42) [*God made it work - 31:10-12*]
 3. Jacob grows rich (43) [*but it produces enmity - 31:1-2*]

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 31-33 Jacob's Enemies

- I. Jacob's Reckoning With Laban (Ch. 31)
1. God commanded Jacob to return to Canaan (1-3)
 2. Jacob convinced his wives (4-16) and fled Paddan Aram while Laban was away (17-21)
 3. Laban was angry and pursued Jacob meaning to do him harm (22-23)
 4. God changed Laban's intentions by appearing in a dream (24-29)
 5. Rachel stole and hid her father's household idols (30-35) but Jacob told him off (36-42)
 6. Laban made a covenant with Jacob so their clans would not harm one another (43-55)
- II. Jacob's Reckoning With Esau (Chs. 32-33)
1. God's reassurance of protection to Jacob (32:1-2)
 2. Esau's continued enmity toward Jacob (32:3-6)
 3. Jacob reacted in fear (32:7)
 4. he also reacted in faith (32:8-12)
 5. he sent a gift to Esau (32:13-21)
 6. he wrestled all night with God (32:22-32) [*it was Jesus!*]

- a. God "disabled" him to show him the futility of his own strength
 - b. through this experience he learned to live depending on God rather than self
 - c. through this experience he was transformed from a "usurper" to a "prince of God"
7. God changed Esau's heart (33:1-4)
8. Esau received Jacob with favor and returned home (33:5-16)
9. Jacob settled near Shechem and built an altar named: God, the God of Israel (33:17-20)

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 34-35 Jacob Comes Home

I. He Paused To Rest At Succoth (33:16-17)

II. He Settled Near Shechem (33:18-34:31)

- 1. he bought a plot of land and set up an altar declaring his God (33:18-20) - Josh. 24:32
- 2. his family had a serious problem with the inhabitants of Shechem
 - a. his daughter Dinah (15?) took part in a feast in the town and its prince, Shechem, slept with her (34:1-4)
 - b. his whole family was grieved and angry over this (5-7)
 - c. Shechem's father pled for a marriage and for general intermarriage (8-12) - note his intentions in (20-23) and how this would have ruined God's plan to build a nation
 - d. his sons devised a deceitful plan that sounded religious (13-17)
 - e. the men of Shechem agreed (unbelievably!) and were circumcised (18-19, 24)
 - f. Simeon and Levi killed them all and looted the town (25-31) compare 49:5-6

III. He Returned To Bethel (35:1-15) **about 10 years after his return*

- 1. God told Jacob to go back to Bethel and honor the vow he made there (1)
- 2. Jacob purified his household of all trappings of foreign gods and protected him (2-5)
- 3. Jacob built an altar at Bethel to honor his vow (6-7)
- 4. God brought Jacob into the Abrahamic covenant (9-15) - a nation and the land

IV. He Moved On By Bethlehem (35:16-21)

- 1. Rachel died giving birth to his twelfth son, Benjamin, and was buried there (16-20)
- 2. his oldest son, Reuben, slept with his concubine Bilhah and lost his birthright (21) - 1 Chron. 5:1

V. He Came Home To Isaac At Hebron (35:27-29)

- his father Isaac dies 12 years later at 180, having lived to see Joseph's disappearance
- his peace with Esau lasted throughout their lives

Note: 35:23-26 records the descendants of Jacob; Ch. 36 records the descendants of his brother Esau

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 38-39 Two Lessons In Purity

I. The Unbelievable Sin of Judah and Tamar (Ch. 38)

- 1. this story begins earlier, during the era of Jacob's return to Hebron in chs. 33-35 (1-5)
 - a. Judah moved away from his family, married an unbelieving Canaanite and had 3 sons

- b. he evidently still joined his brothers in pasturing Jacob's flocks and helped sell Joseph
- 2. the sin and death of his sons and the duty of marrying a brother's widow (6-11) - Deut. 25:5-6
- 3. Tamar's incestuous bid for the "birthright" by posing as a shrine prostitute (12-23)
- 4. Judah's hypocrisy concerning her pregnancy and subsequent "repentance" (24-26)
- 5. God graciously preserved the line of His promise (27-29) Perez became progenitor of David (Ruth 4:18), a proverb (4:1), of all the kings of "Judah" and ultimately of Christ - Mt. 1:3
- II. The Unbelievable Purity of Joseph (Ch. 39)
 - 1. God's blessing of Joseph in Egypt in Potiphar's house (1-6a)
 - 2. the powerful temptation which Joseph repeatedly refused (6b-7, 10)
 - a. because he would not violate his master's trust (8-9a)
 - b. because he would not sin against his God (9b) - Ps. 51:4
 - 3. the false accusation which got him imprisoned (11-20)
 - a. a lesson about fleeing from temptation - 1 Cor. 10:13-14
 - b. a lesson about the fickleness of lust
 - c. a lesson about the wisdom of caution
 - 4. God graciously blessed Joseph in the prison (21-23) This became his route to the throne of Egypt that eventually saved his whole family! - Gen. 50:20

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 40-41 From A Prison To A Throne

- I. God Graciously Blessed Joseph In The Suffering Of Prison
 - 1. his faithfulness was recognized (39:21-23)
 - 2. opportunity to serve was provided: God brought 2 officials of Pharaoh into his care (40:1-4)
 - * note his old master entrusted them to him!
- II. Joseph Demonstrated His Faith In The Suffering Of Prison
 - 1. God sent the two officials troubling dreams to give Joseph an opportunity to testify (40:5-8)
 - a. the cupbearer's dream and Joseph's interpretation (9-13)
 - b. the chief baker's dream and Joseph's interpretation (16-19)
 - 2. Joseph appealed personally to the cupbearer (14-15)
 - 3. God confirmed His Presence with Joseph for all to see (20-22)
 - 4. Joseph had to wait two full years to see the impact of God's work (23)
- III. God Used Joseph's Faithfulness In Suffering To Elevate Him To The Throne (Ch. 41)
 - 1. God brought Joseph to Pharaoh's attention
 - a. Pharaoh also dreamed a troubling dream (1-8)
 - b. the baker remembered Joseph and he was called to interpret (9-14)
 - c. God enabled Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dream (15-36)
 - (1) he gave all the credit to God (15-16)
 - (2) he bore no ill will toward the Egyptians (33-36)
 - 2. Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the whole nation (37-40)

- a. the greatness of his authority (41-45) - *a ring, robe, chain, chariot, name, bride!*
- b. how Joseph used his authority (46-57) - *he saved the land of Egypt!*

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 42-45:15 Joseph Forgives His Brothers

- I. Jacob sends his sons (minus Benjamin) to Egypt to buy food - 42:1-5
- II. Joseph encounters his brothers (clandestinely) and decides to test them - 42:6-38
 - 1. Joseph remembered his dream (6, 10) - God is faithful even if the timing seems slow!
 - 2. he allowed them to experience a taste of what he had experienced (being seized, falsely accused, imprisoned, having their pleading ignored)
 - 3. he wanted to see if they had changed; tested their love for their father by demanding Benjamin (18-20)
 - 4. they remembered their guilt (21-23) - You can only escape guilt by forgiveness!
 - 5. Jacob will not consent to the demand (35-38)
- III. Jacob sends his sons (with Benjamin) back to Egypt - Ch. 43
 - 1. Jacob finally releases control and decides to trust God (11-14) - a good thing to do!
 - 2. the brothers display their honesty by bringing back the silver Joseph put in their sacks
 - 3. they eat with Joseph (26-34) and he nearly gives himself away in seeing Benjamin
- IV. Joseph tests his brothers a second time - Ch. 44
 - 1. he planted his cup in Benjamin's sack to create a situation where the brothers would "lose" Benjamin (to see if they were willing to hurt their father like this again?)
 - 2. they were willing to admit their "obvious" guilt without excuse (14-16)
 - 3. Judah was willing to trade his own life to save Benjamin (27-34) [*a true change of heart - he is the one who suggested they SELL Joseph!*]
- V. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and is reunited - 45:1-15
 - 1. he assured them of his forgiveness (3-5a, 14-15) - a lesson for us!
 - 2. he now fully realized God's purpose in his suffering (5b-8) - another lesson for us!
 - 3. he proposed to bring them all to Egypt and care for them there (9-11)

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 45:16-47:31 Israel Moves To Egypt

- I. Jacob Moves To Egypt
 - 1. Pharaoh's gracious invitation to Jacob - 45:16-24
 - 2. Jacob's stunned response to the news - 45:25-28
 - 3. God reiterates His promise to Jacob - 46:1-4 (Gen. 12:2, 15:13)
 - 4. Jacob's family moves to Egypt - 46:5-7, 26-27
 - 5. Jacob and Joseph are reunited at last - 46:28-30
- II. Jacob Settles In Egypt
 - 1. their identity as a people preserved by their occupation - 46:31-34

- 2. Jacob meets and blesses Pharaoh - 47:1-10
- 3. Jacob's family settles in Goshen in the district of Rameses (Ex. 1:11)
- III. Joseph Saves Egypt - 47:13-19
 - 1. he sold the stored grain in exchange for money - livestock - land - lives
 - 2. he essentially changed the Egyptian system, reduced them to servants of Pharaoh - 47:20-26
- IV. Jacob's Seventeen Years In Egypt
 - 1. his children became the free ones, multiplied and acquired land - 47:27
 - 2. he displayed faith in God's promise by demanding burial in Canaan - 47:28-31, Heb. 11:21

Genesis: How It All Began

Chs. 48-50 The End Of The Patriarchs

- I. Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons - Ch. 48
 - 1. Joseph sought the spiritual blessing of God for his sons rather than Egyptian success (1-2)
 - 2. Jacob adopted Joseph's sons as his own, effectively giving him the birthright of a double portion of the land they would inherit (3-6)
 - 3. Jacob called on God to do for Joseph's children what He did for him (13-16)
shepherd = provision; *delivered* = redemption, protection
 - 4. Jacob prophetically recognized God's purpose for the boys rather than Joseph's (17-20)
 - 5. Jacob reassured Joseph and the boys that Israel would go back to Canaan (21)
- II. Jacob Blesses His Own Sons - Ch. 49 i.e. he prophesies their future (1-2)
 - 1. Reuben's sin would catch up with him (3-4)
 - 2. Simeon and Levi's character would cause their descendants to be dispersed (5-7)
 - 3. Judah would produce the line of kings and ultimately the Christ (8-12)
 - 4. Joseph would be extremely fruitful (22-26)
 - 5. Jacob's last act was to instruct that his burial would be in Canaan, not Egypt, in recognition of God's promise (29-33)
- III. The End Of Joseph's Life (Ch. 50)
 - 1. he buried his father in the land of Canaan (1-14)
 - 2. his brothers reacted in fear (15-18)
 - a. the fear that Joseph's forgiveness wasn't real continually haunted them
 - b. Joseph reassured them and expressed his understanding of God's plan (19-21)
 - 3. he died after 80 years in Egypt, refusing burial there, identifying with God's people and promise (22-26)

One Man's Story: The Life Of Jacob – Genesis 25-49

His Programming In Childhood Gen. 25-28

We're going to take a look at one man's story, a very ordinary man who became extraordinary: Jacob, the supplanter, who became Israel, the prince of God. It's the story of a life that was changed or more properly exchanged for a different kind of life. Though it is one man's story, the key components of it are every man's story and that is especially true of the portion we'll talk about today: His Childhood. Every one of us is programmed in childhood. We're programmed to think in certain ways, to believe certain truths about life, truth, ourselves, and God. And that programming affects our whole lives, whether it's good or bad, much of the time without us even realizing it. Programming in childhood can produce a Hitler or a Mother Theresa and everything in between the two. You too, were programmed. How was it done? It was done in the daily experiences you had as a child. Some was done by key, life-affecting experiences like a death or a tragedy of some sort. But much of it was simply the accumulated effect of the repetition of hundreds of daily smaller occurrences: mistreatment, being the tallest kid in the class, the way you got attention and so on. And together all of them programmed you to live a certain way. Now, of course, God could not record all the daily experiences of Jacob's childhood for us but through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit we do have:

I. The Key Experiences Recorded For Us And I'm going to summarize them for you briefly:

1. his birth and naming (25:19-24) Jacob's mother couldn't have children so his father Isaac prayed about it and got a two-for-one deal: twins. Esau was delivered first and Jacob came out with his hand clutching the heel of Esau's foot which is how he got his name **Jacob = "heel-grabber"** It is often translated to mean "supplanter" i.e., somebody who tries to pull the other person back and take their place, who tries to get ahead of others. The name itself became prophetic for the way he learned to live. Next, we have:

2. a summary of his youth (25:27-28) - These verses are very profound. As they grew up Esau's focus was a particular skill: hunting wild game and he spent much of his time away from home, living out in the field, camping from place to place. Jacob on the other hand stayed at home, he lived in the tents with his family and took care of the flocks, tended crops, etc. It says he was a **quiet man = "blameless"** That Heb. word occurs 13 times in the Old Testament, 9 of them it is translated in the KJV "perfect" or NIV blameless, once "upright" and twice "undefiled". This is the only place anybody wants to translate it "quiet"! It's the word God used over and over to describe Job, blameless and upright! He was the perfect son, the good boy, the one who never got in trouble, who stayed home and helped out and all that! He was "Mr. Perfect" in his behavior but as we soon see, what was inside him was not so perfect. The first key event we're told of is:

3. the purchase of Esau's birthright (25:29-34) You see, even though they were born at the same time, you can't have two firstborns so the one delivered first got that honor. It meant that upon the death of his father he would become the family or clan leader and he would receive a double portion of his father's property. This never mattered much to Esau but it must have really bothered Jacob. So, one day Esau came in from an evidently unsuccessful hunting trip exhausted and starving and begging for a bowl of stew Jacob was cooking. Jacob saw his opportunity struck a legal "deal" to exchange the birthright which Esau could have cared less about for a bowl of stew! He grabbed that heel and pulled himself up in line! Then we read of:

4. the family's sojourn in Gerar (Ch. 26) There was one period when for a long time there was a famine. The crops wouldn't grow and the stock had nothing to eat and the family had to move. They moved their tents west down out of the hill country onto the coastal plain near Gerar, Philistine territory. And Jacob's father Isaac was scared the Philistines would want his wife so he lied and said she was his sister and for a long time Jacob watched him play out this lie until one day he got caught and the situation actually worked out very well. Finally, they moved back to the hill country near Beersheba and in the last days of his father's life we have the story of:

5. the stealing of his father's blessing (Ch. 27) As the time of his death drew near, the father of the family would place a special blessing on the head of his firstborn son invoking the blessing of God upon him and his future. Well, you know the story of how Rebekah and Jacob tricked Isaac into blessing Jacob instead by dressing him up in Esau's clothes and making him stew while Esau was out hunting. Again, he grabbed the heel and pulled himself ahead. And that was the straw that broke the camel's back. Esau was so angry he switched to wanting to hunt Jacob. Mother Rebekah knew she had to get them apart so she got Isaac to send him off to her home in Syria to procure a wife and stay awhile. And it was on this journey that we read of:

6. his meeting with God at Bethel (Ch. 28) which we'll talk about last. But having summarized them, let's talk about:

II. The Profound Life Lessons He Absorbed From These Experiences Let me start off by telling you that every human being has the same 2 basic core needs: security and significance and the bottom line is that he or she will find a way to get them met. Let's look at Jacob as an example:

1. he never experienced true security = awareness of unconditional love and acceptance i.e. *I am safe* Jacob never got that from his parents. Instead:

a. he experienced rejection through favoritism (25:28) All his life he learned: Daddy loves brother, Mommy loves me. And look at the reason why. The Heb. says Isaac loved Esau "because game was in his mouth!" He loved what Esau became and what Esau did for him or maybe to turn it around Esau learned well what Dad liked and did it to gain his favor. It became a bond between them. And so, Jacob:

b. he learned he could never please his father He couldn't be what Esau was. It was just not him. He didn't have Esau's skill or personality. To Dad he would always be second rate; he could never measure up to the standard no matter how hard he tried. He would never be completely secure with dad and feel accepted and totally safe because Esau stood in between. Maybe you know what I'm talking about! Maybe you've been the neglected child. But on the other hand:

c. he learned he could always take refuge in his mother She loved him and he stuck around. He stayed near the tents and became everything she wanted him to be, such a good well-behaved little boy. He could always go to her because she liked him best. When Esau gave him a problem he could win if he could get to Mom first. And he found that she would side with him against dad too. Maybe you've been there too! What did he really learn?

d. he learned to gain acceptance by performance i.e., people accept you based on how well you perform, what you do! And you make security by finding someone you can please and pleasing them! PBA - performance-based acceptance. Mom and Dad accept me if I stay out of trouble, if I don't bother them, if I get good grades, if...if...if... So, I've got to watch myself and perform right or I'll lose my acceptance! They won't want me if I don't do good so I keep on doing good so they want me! And, friend, most of the human race is on that treadmill right there whether their parents played favorites or not. The experiences of life programmed them that people like you if you do what they want. You're good if you behave and you're bad if you don't behave. Let me tell you: that will shape your life in a hurry! You'll live with insecurity!

But there is a second basic need every human being has and will find a way to get met and that is significance. Look at Jacob:

2. he never experienced true significance = awareness of intrinsic worth and value i.e. *I matter*, I'm important, I'm valuable just because I'm here and I'm me. I'm worth something. In Jacob's eyes Esau was the one with significance. It was being the firstborn that seemed to matter. He was the one who got everything who became the leader, who everybody looked to and so:

a. he sought to acquire Esau's position For a long time, I'm sure, Jacob coveted that birthright. He saw what it meant. Esau could have cared less. But Jacob wanted to be what Esau was, to matter like he did and one day he saw his chance. You see:

b. he learned to take advantage of Esau's weaknesses That's what weaker people learn to do, to look for weaknesses that they can exploit in other people! And Esau was rather shallow. You can tell that from the story. He comes in from the field famished but he's still walking! But in front of him is that red stew Jacob's cooking that he likes so well and he says "Gimme some". My kids would have put out a hand and said "Gimme five bucks!" Then the other one would have said "No way, I'll make my own and gone to the fridge and got out the stuff and made his own bowl of soup. But Jacob was different. He said "Sell me your birthright" When dad dies, I get to be chief and I get 2/3 and you get 1/3. And Esau thinks "Big deal, dad's not going to die for a long time and besides, I'm gonna die if I have to wait and make my own and then what good will it do me?" Now that's not true, is it? It's just how he feels! The truth is in v. 34 "Esau despised his birthright" i.e., he didn't see any value or worth in it; it was only worth a bowl of stew to him. Heb. 12:16 holds a good warning *See that no one is ... godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son*. I tell you what, there are a lot of God's children who have never seen the true value of who they are in Christ and have instead settled for some earthly bowl of stew like how much money they can make or how nice a house they can get or what car they drive or what kind of job they have. But the point is that Jacob found a way to make himself significant by taking advantage of weakness in others! Then add to that this:

c. he learned from his father to practice deceit for protection For long months he watched his father lie and pretend that he wasn't married to his mother while he was in Gerar just to save his neck. Never mind that that placed Rebekah in danger and jeopardy. The lesson: it's OK to lie if you have to for protect yourself and save your neck. Look out for #1; that keeps you significant! And he got the same message another way:

d. he learned from his mother to practice deceit for acquisition She wanted him to have Isaac's blessing so she told him to deceive his father, to lie and pretend. He objected, but I'll get caught and he'll curse me instead! But she pushed him into deceit. Lesson: it's OK to lie and cheat to get what you want, to get ahead of somebody else! And then when he was found out:

e. he learned to cover problems by deceit instead of dealing in truth Instead of confessing his sin to his father and begging forgiveness of him and Esau, Mother came up with another route of protection. Just cover up the problem. Send him away to Syria for a noble purpose, to get a wife who isn't one of these local pagan girls but who's a believer in God like us, one of our family! Lesson: don't tell the truth; cover up your problems. You see the real lesson is:

f. he learned to gain significance by power The guy who matters is the guy at the top, the guy in charge, the guy who controls the situation and sometimes you have to do whatever it takes to be that guy if you really want to be significant. Oh my friend, how many people are living like that right now because they were programmed that way when they were kids. They learned to make it, to succeed in life, to be something in life by grabbing a heel whenever they could get one!

The Point: He Learned To Get His Needs Met By His Own Resources! That's what happens. If you don't find your security and significance first communicated by your parents in the way they accept and value you just because they love you and cause you're their child, then as you grow up, you're going to find it somehow and your life is going to show it. Now let's look at how this programming affected:

II. The Kind Of Faith Jacob Developed - 28:10-22 After all, Jacob did not come from an unbelieving home. His father and mother worshipped God and he was taught that too. However, since Mom and Dad were busy getting their needs met out of their own resources instead of by God and he was learning that if you're ever going to make it in life you've got to get your own needs met, it colored his own faith in God. On the way to Syria, he stopped for the night to camp and laid his head on a rock (why, who knows) and had a dream where he saw the ladder or staircase going up to heaven and the Lord standing there and God spoke to him and what He gave Him was:

1. God's unconditional promise of grace (12-15) Notice that God promised or guaranteed him 2 things and there were no if's and's or but's. There was no, "if you, then I will..." These were things God appeared to promise him out of grace, no matter how he performed:

a. he was guaranteed a future i.e., significance (14) Jacob, your life is going to count. I am going to use it. I am going to build a whole nation out of you, just like I promised your grandfather. That nation will spread out far and wide and through them and thus through you, Jacob, I will touch every family on the earth with blessing! You have eternal value, infinite worth, tremendous significance, not because you can beat Esau, but because I will do it through you! And not only that:

b. he was guaranteed a present i.e., security (15) Jacob, right now I will be with you. You can't see what's out there on that road but I can and it doesn't matter where you go or what happens to you or how well you perform, I will be with you. I will never leave you. You are secure and safe not because you can get people to accept you or you are good enough at protecting yourself but through Me!

My friend in Jesus Christ we have been given both significance and security. He has made us of infinite worth and value and significance by adopting us fully as His children and guaranteed our future with Him and the eternal value of every day of our lives which will count for Him. And He has made us absolutely secure by placing Himself in us and joining Himself to us so that that promise "I will never leave you nor forsake you" is also true for us according to Heb. 13:5. We are so secure that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ and His father is greater than all so that no man can take us out of His hand! And best of all, we don't have to do anything to get it! Here Jacob, take it! Rest in it! But Jacob wasn't programmed to get it that way and so you have:

2. Jacob's conditional response of faith (16-22) The word if here actually means if! It is a conjunction of condition. Jacob doesn't know how to respond to anybody unconditionally so he responds to God like most of us do: God, if you will....I will.... You see:

a. he expected God to prove Himself faithful by giving him the circumstances he wanted. If God would give him food and clothing and shelter and protection from robbers then he could trust Him! So many of us have that problem in coming to God. We have learned that we can't trust anybody completely without performing so we expect God to perform for us. It is **security by performance** and when it looks like He's taking care of us, we believe and when it doesn't, we doubt and blame Him! Why, because we were programmed to! And notice this:

b. he expected God to approve his plans He didn't ask God where he should go and to direct his paths. He knew where he was going and where he wanted to end up, safely back home with Mom and Dad. If God would control and bend the circumstances to suit his plan then he would trust him. Isn't that how so many of us come to God?

This is **significance by power** and when it looks like God isn't powerful enough to do what we want we doubt.

Why? Because we were programmed to. We get significance our own way and if He helps us, we like Him.

And then notice the rest: Then You will be My God and I'll worship you on this spot and I'll tithe when I get back! If You give me significance and security in my terms, the way I want it, the way I've been programmed to see it, then I'll believe in You Lord! And maybe I'll do something for you and even give something to you. Do you know, God did His part

and He's still waiting for Jacob to pay up! He never did! He couldn't accept grace. He couldn't throw himself unconditionally upon the Lord to be everything for him. Why not?

Let me tell you a story. At a 1994 Promise Keepers' conference in Denton, Texas, pastor James Ryle told his own story: When he was 2 years old, his father was sent to prison. When he was 7, authorities placed him in an orphanage. At 19, he had a car wreck that killed a friend. He sold drugs to raise money for his legal fee, and the law caught up to him. He was arrested, charged with a felony, and sent to prison. While in prison James accepted Christ, and after he had served his time, he eventually went into the ministry. Years later he sought out his father to reconcile with him, and when they got together, the conversation turned to prison life. James's father asked, "Which prison were you in?" James told him, and his father was taken aback. "I helped build that prison," he said. He had been a welder who went from place to place building penitentiaries. Pastor Ryle concluded, "I was in the prison my father built." My friends, Jacob was in the prison his father built! His father and mother and the experiences of his childhood programmed him to believe that he must meet his own needs; that God was not enough to do it. Some of us today are still in the prison that our father built or our mother built or the experiences of our growing up built for us. And now Jesus has come to us and given us freely both security and significance which are found in him, but we can't see it. We're still looking for it the way we were taught through more performance and more power. Dear friend, let me just tell you, if you're in that prison today, Jesus will set you free. He's got the keys! Just ask Him!

One Man's Story: The Life Of Jacob

His Experience With God Gen. 31-33

When we pick up the story of Jacob in Gen. 31, he has spent 20 years in the land of Syria living according to his flesh, i.e., handling life in the patterns he had learned apart from God. His family is large and complete and he has amassed a great deal of wealth for himself in the last 6 years of working for Laban. But he's growing older now and he wants to go home. Let's quickly summarize:

I. The Key Experiences Recorded For Us

1. Jacob's flight from Syria (31:1-21) Laban's attitude toward Jacob has changed and there is jealousy there. Jacob is actually somewhat afraid of him because he knows the kind of man he is down underneath and he decides to steal away secretly before Laban can find out and stop him by force. But it doesn't work and we have:

2. Jacob's encounter with Laban (31:22-55) Laban finds out Jacob has fled and sets out to catch him with all his men and he does. But the night before God warns him in a dream not to harm Jacob so they part instead with an uneasy truce at Mizpah and Jacob approaches Canaan. He sends word ahead to his brother Esau who lives down south in Edom to prepare the way. Esau sets out to meet him with 400 men and he is scared. But as he is still on the far side of Jordan by the River Jabbok, God meets him.

3. Jacob's encounter with God (Ch. 32) This is the famous wrestling match where Jesus himself meets Jacob in human form and wrestles him all night. Jacob loses but receives a blessing. His name is changed from Jacob the supplanter to Israel, the prince of God and the next day we have.

4. Jacob's encounter with Esau (Ch. 33) Jacob had sent all kinds of presents ahead to appease Esau but when he sees him, a miracle has occurred and Esau hugs him and the two are reunited.

This is a crucial period in Jacob's life. He's been living in the flesh for years but he's been paying the price of it and now it is time for God to do a work in his life and teach him to live a brand new way. That's what God wants to do in all of us. Let's go to the New Testament for a moment and look at:

II. God's Design: To Change Us From Trust In Self To Trust In Him - Phil. 3:3-11 You see, as I've said in previous messages, we all come into the world without God and have no choice but to rely on whatever tools we have to get our needs met. We learn very early to find ways to milk significance and security out of those around us and our environment programs us with a whole bunch more so we develop what the Bible calls our flesh, our old way of life. Ways of getting our needs met apart from Christ. And as we go on through life:

1. we develop confidence in our flesh and its abilities Look at what happened in Paul's life. He found his significance and security in his Jewishness. He was a real Hebrew born to Hebrew parents, circumcised properly on the eighth day with a genealogy and everything. When he grew up, he became, of course, a Pharisee, the epitome of Jewishness, zealously fulfilling the law in every minute point, the envy of all his Jewish peers, the hero of the Jews persecuting the church! All that stuff was part of Paul's flesh and he lived out of it in absolute confidence that it would continue to keep him secure and significant and that it would enable him to face anything that would come in life. That is until Jesus met him on the Damascus Road! Jacob was confident that either by performing or by deceiving he could face whatever life handed him. That was his flesh and he lived in it and had confidence in it. We are all like that and even after we are saved, we most of the time continue in it even if we Christianize our behavior a bit. But what God needs to do in our lives is this:

2. God needs to completely break us of confidence in the flesh Look where Paul was now in vs. 7. Everything he had thought was so great and so good about his life he now learned to count as loss. In fact, he says, I consider all those things rubbish, garbage, lit. sewage! Why? Those were the things that kept him from knowing Christ and experiencing the power of Christ in his life. So, God's design is that:

3. He needs to bring us to completely trust Him for everything What Paul is saying here doesn't just apply to salvation. Surely we've all learned that our salvation is all of Christ and there is nothing we can do to procure it. But the same is true of our Christian life. The righteous behavior that God wants to produce in my life comes not by keeping a set of rules and doing but by intimately knowing Christ and trusting Him moment by moment to produce His character and His behavior in our lives.

The term we use is brokenness. God needs to break us of living out of the flesh, of trusting in self to meet our needs in life so that we learn that He is the Source for everything. Now how does He break us? Usually by putting us in a situation we can't cope with on our own. For Paul it meant being knocked off his horse on the road and blinded and spoken to by a voice from heaven. For Jacob it was a wrestling match.

III. The Process God Used In Jacob's Life: Symbolized In A Wrestling Match You see, this wrestling match God had with Jacob was very real. It actually happened. Christ took the form of a human being and wrestled all night with Jacob and when Jacob was done, he knew that he had seen the face of God! However, the whole event is at the same time symbolic of everything that God was doing in Jacob's life. You see, for years:

1. God was wrestling him via circumstances to teach him to trust (32:24) All night he wrestled and all his life God had been wrestling him, struggling with him, trying to show him what a failure his own abilities, his own flesh was and how much he needed to trust in God. He does the same with us! He wrestles us in the circumstances of our lives to bring us to that same realization. How did He wrestle Jacob? In 2 ways:

a. by allowing his flesh to fail and consequences to catch up (31:23) Jacob was afraid of Laban and thought Laban would hurt him and take away his family and wealth so in his self-confidence he tried to sneak away and put distance between them. But God let it fail. Laban caught up to him and probably would have harmed him anyway. That's just one thing: God let his "get a wife" scheme fail and let him be deceived and end up with 2 wives. He let him get snookered and end up working for simple room and board for 14 years He let him fail to please his father-in-law and have his wages changed 10 times in 6 years. All those things were God saying, "Look up, boy, you need Me. You can't do it. Your flesh isn't going to make it!" But Jacob never got the lesson. And how many times has God let us fail, let our dream, our plan fall apart, let our way lead nowhere just to show us that we need Him! Then God wrestled him in a positive sense:

b. by giving glimpses of Himself and His all-sufficient power at the same time. God gave him continual reminders of His presence and power. Reminders:

a. like the stopping of Laban through a dream (31:24, 29) When Laban caught up, he told Jacob "It is in my power to harm you; I was thinking about harming you! But last night Almighty God told me in a dream that I better not so I won't!" God stepped in and rescued him when his scheme failed and he knew it. God was pointing to Himself, "Look up, boy, I'm here. It's me you need!" How many gracious things does God do in our lives to remind us of His power, that He is there and He can help. How many of our prayers does He graciously answer? How many provisions come to our doorstep just when we need them. All reminders that He is what we need! Reminders:

b. like the appearance of angels (32:1-2) Jacob had already seen angels in a vision at Bethel 20 years earlier when he left the land. Now he saw them again as he entered it. We don't know what they looked like but their appearance was a reassurance to him that the very forces of Almighty God were all about and he could depend on God's troops which far outnumbered his own measly band. But Jacob still didn't get it!

And so often we don't either. God may wrestle with us for years in our Christian life, through failures and blessings, just trying to break us of confidence in our flesh, of trusting in ourselves to live life. But look at this:

2. God finally crippled Jacob so he could not win (32:25) The Lord reached over and supernaturally touched Jacob's thigh as he wrestled to put it out of joint so he would be disabled, so there was no human way for him to win. And that's symbolizes the place God had brought him to in his life at that very moment. God had crippled him, had put him in a place from which he had no escape and with which he could not cope. How?

a. through placing his life in danger (32:6) Esau was coming out to meet him. That might have been OK but he was bringing 400 men! Why would you bring 400 men? Was it a welcoming committee? No, it was an army! Jacob sent a message seeking Esau's favor, telling him that he didn't want anything, didn't have need of anything but essentially his brother's forgiveness. But Esau didn't send one back saying "Welcome home brother!" When Lot was captured, Abraham gathered every servant he had, 318 of them, and went to rescue him in battle. Esau gathered every servant and friend he could find. Why? I believe he intended to make good his murderous threat toward Ja-

cob. Jacob's life was in danger. He couldn't fight such an army. He couldn't stay alive by his wits. 20 years hadn't made Esau forget! And so, God:

b. through filling his heart with fear (32:7a, 11) He admits it. He was mortally afraid for his own life and afraid for his family, that Esau would destroy them all and he would not be able to protect them. And God dealt with him:

c. through removing his control over circumstances (32:7b-8) There was nothing he could do about it. That word distress means pressure, it means to be closed in, hemmed about, to have no place to go. Jacob couldn't escape. There was no way and no time to run. Nothing he could do mattered. His fate and his family and his life was completely out of his control.

And sometimes, my friend, if the regular wrestling God does with us doesn't work, that's where God have to put you and I in order to break our confidence in our flesh. In a place where we're in danger, where we're afraid and where we have no control, no power to change things. It could be a foxhole; it could be a hospital bed; it could be a divorce, a death, a bankruptcy. If God can't get your attention in the smaller things, He loves you too much to just let you go on in the flesh and sooner or later there'll be a big thing. God will send something into your life that your flesh can't handle, where your flesh is crippled and powerless to help you. But note this:

3. God crippled Jacob so he could only cling (32:26-30) By this time Jacob had an idea who he was wrestling with. All he had left that he could do since his leg couldn't help him was to wrap his arms around the man and cling and beg for the man to bless him! And Jesus said to him "Here's the greatest blessing I can give you. I'm changing your name. From here on out you're not going to be called Jacob, the "heel-grabber", the one who always gets ahead. You're going to be Israel, the "prince of God", the one that knows that God does the fighting! You're going to live a new way; you're going to learn to let Me fight your battles, to trust in Me and not yourself. Jacob is a failure in his flesh but Israel will succeed because he is My prince and I do his fighting for him!" And that symbolized what had happened in his life that very day:

a. he was finally reduced to prayer and trusting God (32:9-12) At long last, after 20 years of coping with life alone, Jacob had prayed and placed his trust in God when he saw there was no other way. At last, he says "I am unworthy, I am unable to rescue myself; You have given me everything I have, not me; You have a plan and promises for my life; I will not trust in me to save me from Esau; I will humbly ask You to save me!" And so:

b. he learned the lesson that the way to victory is clinging to God O that's where God wants to bring us, to a place, to an experience, where there is nothing left to do but cling to Him, where all human hope is gone, where all my ability and all my confidence is washed away and I know that in Jesus alone is all my hope and my strength and my victory. I need to learn with Paul that in my flesh dwells no good thing, that all the things about me that mean so much to me are but rubbish, worthless. Jesus is all that matters and to know Him and the power of His resurrection in my life is the only real way there is to live! That's why God wrestled Jacob. That's the lesson God was teaching Him and:

c. the lesson was reinforced by God's changing Esau (33:4, 10) When he finally turned from self and cast his all upon God, Esau instead of killing him ran up and kissed him! The anger was gone, drained away. Instead, there were favor and a welcome. I tell you, when God does things, He does them right! You can just hear the lesson: "Look, see what happens when you trust Me instead of yourself? Learn to live this way!" Now I wish I could report to you that Jacob did that, that from that moment on he always trusted God, always made his problems a matter of prayer, always looked to God for the answer instead of himself. I wish I could say that once God breaks us good, from that point on we will always trust Him. But I can't. Here's:

d. the catch: it was hard to give up the old ways (33:12-20) Jacob still didn't trust Esau and wanted to get away from him before he changed his mind. So, he went back to the flesh. He made up excuses. And he made a promise: you go ahead on home to Mt. Seir which was 90 or 100 miles due south and I'll come to you eventually. Then when Esau pulled out, he turned west and built pens for his livestock and a house in a place named Succoth. And eventually moved west across the Jordan into Canaan to Shechem and bought property there. He had no intentions of getting near Esau again. He planned to keep 100 miles between them. Back to the flesh, do you see it? He knew the answer was to trust God but he had a hard time letting go of the old way he'd learned to live, lying and solving things himself. So do we. And in essence we are faced with the same choice as Jacob every day:

4. the choice: Will I now live as a "heel-grabber" or as the "prince" I am? Will I today in this situation live out of my flesh, my abilities, my solutions, my ways? Will I be Jacob the "heel-grabber"? Or will I trust God instead to live and express His power through me and live out of the power of His spirit. Will I live as Israel, the prince of God that I truly am and let God fight my battles? You see, once we know the lesson, living it requires a commitment, a voluntary surrender! And that's what we'll see in Jacob's life next time.

But before I quit, let me encourage you to learn the lesson by listening; learn it by looking at in Jacob's life; learn it by looking at it in Paul's life and in the Scripture he wrote. Don't make God have to send you to a place like Peniel where he has

to cripple you to teach you how much you need Him! *A tourist in Scotland was driving along and saw a flock of sheep in a field. But one sheep was far away from the flock, limping along with a broken leg, bleating and crying. The tourist stopped and the shepherd came over. She asked what had happened to the lone sheep. With tears in his eyes the shepherd said "I had to break its leg. It always kept wandering away from the flock and I could not keep chasing it all the time. I find that when a sheep's leg is broken and I care for it and nurse it back to health, it always comes when I call."* My friend, God loves you; you're His child. You're a prince and don't know it. And if you keep wandering off and doing your own thing, He loves you too much to let you go. He'll wrestle you and then He'll wrestle you some more. But if He has to, He may break your leg out of His love; He may put you flat on your back so there is nowhere to look but up and then nurse you back to health so you learn the lesson. But it's so much less painful to get it without that! Listen to Him today. You're a prince of God, not a heel-grabber. Jesus wants to be your strength, to fight all your battles, to be all you need. That's the way you were made to live. But you have to die to the old way; you have to die to self. Roy Brill's letterhead was, "Lord, help this proud and stiff-necked 'I', help me to bend the neck and die." Pray it!

One Man's Story: The Life Of Jacob

His Life In The Flesh Gen. 29-30

Now we follow Jacob into the first portion of his adult life. He's been sent to Syria to find his uncle's family and seek a wife. He's no longer at home by the tents with his parents; now he's on his own. But the not-so-amazing thing we discover is that even though he's left everything familiar behind, he's brought it all with him. For these 20 years or so of his adult life Jacob (to use a biblical phrase) lived according to the flesh. He went out and lived the way he'd been programmed to live and although he had a faith in God but it didn't play much of a part in his life. Let's begin by looking briefly at:

I. The Key Experiences Recorded For Us Even as he arrives near Haran, we have immediately:

1. Jacob's encounter with Rachel (29:1-14a) He meets her out by the well bringing the sheep. He gallantly moves the heavy rock from the well and waters her sheep and she takes him home to her father, his uncle Laban where he is well received. For a whole month he stays there as a guest helping out with the flocks before we have:

2. his engagement to Rachel (29:14b-20) Jacob in those 30 days has taken quite a shine to Rachel and decided that she was the object for which he'd been sent. Now in eastern culture marriages are arranged. The groom and the bride's father strike up an agreement of marriage. There is a payment involved, a dowry, a bride-price. But, funny thing, when Mom and Dad sent him on his journey to get a wife, they neglected to send any money! He was broke, penniless. He had no dowry to offer. So, he offered himself i.e., his service. He offered to work for 7 years without pay for her. This gives you some idea of the magnitude of the dowry that would have been expected. So, 7 years pass, but quickly because he is so much in love with her. But on his very wedding night we read of:

3. his deception by Laban (29:21-30) Rachel has a sister Leah and in the dark of that night Laban switches Leah for Rachel. How he pulled that off is to my thinking nothing short of miraculous. Jacob must have been drunk; Rachel must have been hog-tied and gagged somewhere and Leah must have deliberately pretended to be Rachel. Gee, does that sound familiar? Why would Laban do this? He saw a way to get 7 years more free labor so the following week Jacob actually got Rachel and then had to work 7 more years to pay off his debt for her. So now he had 2 wives, something he never planned on. And what resulted from that was:

4. the baby contest (29:30-30:24) It's like "Baby Wars". Leah has 4 sons in a row and Rachel can't get pregnant and she's angry so she figures out a plan: I'll give Jacob my maidservant Bilhah as his concubine and she can have children for me. (Wonder where she got that idea? Grandfather Abraham?). So now Jacob has essentially 3 wives and Bilhah has 2 sons. But Leah is not to be outdone. She herself can't seem to get pregnant any more but she has a maid too and so she gives Zilpah to Jacob and she has 2 more sons by him. That makes 8. Then Leah conceives again and has 2 more and finally, finally, #11, Rachel has a son whom she names Joseph. All in 7 years, do you believe it? Jealousy will drive people to great lengths. But at last, his servitude is over and he asks to leave but Laban doesn't want him to go. He knows a good thing so he offers to start paying Jacob now and we have:

5. his deception of Laban (30:25-43) Laban says "How's this? I get all the white sheep and goats born from now on and you get all the ones that are speckled or spotted or colored." Jacob agrees and says in his mind "I'll fix you!" and sets out to fool Laban. He comes up with this crazy scheme to peel sticks and stick them in the troughs in front of the flocks when they come to water so that as they mate, they will conceive striped and speckled offspring. Not very genetically sound but somehow it worked and he gathered huge wealth for himself.

And thus passes 20 years of his life before you know it. It was what the New Testament would call:

II. Life In The Flesh - Eph. 2:1-3 and I'd like to take a detour to Ephesians for a moment and look at what the Scripture has to say about it. The NIV *sinful nature* is a not-so-good translation of the Greek word *sarx* which means flesh. The flesh is something that every human being has which affects his life. It is obviously not just the physical flesh or meat that we call our boy. What is it?

1. what flesh is: *that part of you which is not spirit* Your spirit is the core of your being, your true essence which is the part capable of knowing God, the place where Christ comes to reside and join himself. Everything else which is not your spirit is part of what the Bible calls your flesh. So, to put it another way:

- ***it is your mind and body indwelt by the presence of sin*** It is your ability to think, your mind; your ability to feel, your emotions; your ability to choose, your will; it is all that makes up your personality along with the physical body in which all of that resides. The problem is that because you are descended from Adam, a power or force called sin lives there. Before you were saved, sin actually dwelt in your spirit too but God took care of that and gave you a brand new one when Christ came in. But all the rest of you, all that's left, i.e., your flesh is indwelt by the force of sin which drives it in a wrong direction, away from God. Now let me use another phrase to define flesh:

- ***it is your self = all that you are apart from God*** It is all that you are if you just take God out of your life totally. A lot of things in you are the result of the fruit of God's presence in you. The flesh is all that you would be on your own without that, if left to just your self. So, you can call it *the self* as opposed to God and His work in your life. And in a very practical sense you might define flesh as:

- ***your old ways = ways you learned to live out of your own resources*** The habits and practices, the ways of thinking and acting which you developed on your own as a human being apart from God to get your needs for acceptance and significance met. Bill Gillham says we develop "green highways" as we grow up and live apart from God to get our needs met. For instance, Jacob developed a green highway for deceiving. It was a pattern he learned from little on up by which he got his needs met. That deception was part of Jacob's flesh, the way he got his needs as a human being met on his own terms. And every one of us, including you, my friend, has our own particular variety of flesh, green highways that we've become programmed to follow to get our needs met apart from God. And that's exactly:

2. what flesh does: *produces wrong ways to meet your needs* Since you are born without God, the sin principle in you begins to connive all kinds of ways for you to get those basic human needs met. You begin to experiment and see how you can get those needs met and sin provides all kinds of creative solutions. Look at vs. 3:

a. it produces wrong (selfish) desires You discovered, for example, that you could feel significance and worth by exercising power over others and dominating or controlling them. Or you could find it through having money and things and possessions, or through having an image and a reputation and you name it. You could find the security and acceptance you needed through performing right for people and doing what they wanted. Or if you didn't get much love at home, you might try to find it through illicit sexual relations. The flesh produced in you from moment 1 all kinds of wrong and selfish ways of meeting your own needs which then as they were used time and again became ingrained patterns of living. So, your flesh produces in you desires for wrong things. And:

b. it produces wrong (selfish) patterns of thought along with those desires. You developed wrong ways of looking at yourself and other people like for instance seeing yourself as more important and treating others as objects to be used to serve your purposes, or like being critical of others to make yourself feel better and meet your need for acceptance. It produced wrong views of yourself as either inferior or superior, worthless or wonderful, and all of the above without God! Then add in this factor:

c. it is impacted by environment and Enemy programming The experiences you have in your home and in your life growing up and even later impact your flesh and program you to act and react in certain ways which you are taught. And then you live in a culture which also programs you to think in certain ways and do certain things. And Satan is the one with overarching control over the environment and culture in which you live so much of the programming that has gone into you is not godly in nature but is from the Enemy of our souls. So, the bottom line is that because of the presence of sin inside and the presence of Satan outside:

d. it results in wrong ways of living aimed at meeting your needs apart from God. Unless God intervenes and you learn to see Him and to seek Him as the source of everything you need, Christian or not, you will live out of your flesh, your old ways even as a believer. And all of us do it to some extent or another, some all the time, some much of the time, some seldom, but we all live in the flesh in some degree. Now returning to Genesis we can see that's what Jacob did.

III. Jacob's Life In The Flesh Here's Jacob living for the first time on his own, having been programmed by all the events of childhood we talked about last week and you can see clearly:

1. the things Jacob practiced

a. he continued to make self-directed choices All his life he made choices according to his flesh. He never was never taught to seek God's direction in anything and it is no surprise that when it comes to choosing a wife we read **(29:16-18)** Now remember he had only known the 2 for 30 days. This choice was not based on character or long-standing romance and emotional attachment; it was an arrangement and he chose according to appearance. He looked at Leah and Rachel and his flesh did the choosing. The only thing noted about Leah is her eyes. The Heb. wd. means *tender or delicate*. In 16 occurrences this is the only place it is translated as weak. It doesn't mean Leah

was half-blind. She had tender, delicate eyes but Rachel was lit. *beautiful in shape and beautiful to look at*. Leah was average with attractive eyes but Rachel was Miss America. Now look at **vs. 26**. Laban is probably not lying. He probably should have asked for Leah who was older; in everything, even the birthright and blessing it is older before younger. It is evident from the rest of the story that God's choice was Leah. She was the one God gave children to, through whom He really built the house of Israel, not Rachel, and from her offspring Messiah came! But Jacob never consulted God for direction; he chose out of his fleshly desire. Never once in any of the deals or choices Jacob made do we read that he consulted God or prayed for wisdom. He just made choices according to program, followed his green highways! Then note that:

b. he continued to perform for acceptance (29:20), and look at his later description of these years in **(31:40)** Remember I told you last week that he was the model boy at home. So now he tried to be the model shepherd and servant. He performed for Laban to get what he wanted, Laban's acceptance and his daughter. He worked hard night and day and Laban's wealth increased considerably because of it. Whatever Jacob was, he wasn't lazy! But it never accomplished its purpose. Then note:

c. he practiced the conditional love he'd received (29:30-34) He ended up with 2 wives and instead of loving them both with all his heart, he did what his parents did, what he learned. He loved Rachel and obviously didn't love Leah and she knew it. With every child she had she said "Now he'll love me for sure". She had the same idea of performance by having babies but she could never earn his love. He just decided not to love her and it stretched to the children **compare 37:3-4**. He loved Joseph more than the rest because he was Rachel's kid although he had 10 others first and he showed it openly! He grew up loving the way he was loved instead of the way God loves and wants us to love. And finally, when performing failed to meet his needs:

d. he reverted to the practice of deceit just as he always had. He decided that he'd find a way to outdo Laban with his little breeding scheme. **(30:37-39)** By the way, God showed him the real reason that it worked in a dream **(31:10-12)** The speckled and spotted rams were the active breeders because God made it so. It had nothing to do with the crazy sticks! But he had a green highway built to get his needs met by deceiving and when pushed to the wall, he went down that highway instead of trusting God to meet his needs.

He lived his adult life the way he'd been programmed to live i.e., in the flesh. That's what all of us do to some extent or other! But, guess what? It costs us to live that way! So now we have to look at:

2. the price Jacob paid I want to show you a principle that is always, always true **Gal. 6:7-8** What you sow you reap. It's a law God has set up and you can't get around it. If you sow to your flesh i.e., if you follow those green highways and live the way your flesh tells you to live, it will result in corruption, destruction and eventually death! But if you sow to the Spirit i.e., if you yield your life to the control of the Spirit of God instead of the flesh, you will through Him receive the things that are part of that wonderful, abundant, eternal life which He has given you. Just look at Jacob:

a. his self-direction resulted in loss of control He made his own choices, chose his own path by the flesh, wanted to be in control and where did he end up?

(1) he ended up with two wives which he never wanted and there wasn't a thing he could do about it. And instead of freedom:

(2) he ended up in bondage to Laban (29:27) He ended up a slave, a servant without pay for 14 long years. When he tried to control, he ended up being controlled by the very things he tried to control! Then:

b. his performance was taken advantage of All that good performing, that hard work which was to gain acceptance and make a place for himself and get rewarded, Laban took advantage of. Here's his summary later **(31:38-41)** He who had taken advantage of others now was taken advantage of himself, even though he was performing and working hard! And:

c. he became the victim of deceit He who learned to get what he wanted by deceiving met his match in his uncle Laban:

(1) Laban deceived him in the matter of Leah (29:25) Can you imagine the feelings going on inside him when he discovers that it's Leah and he's been deceived, especially when Laban says "It's not our custom to give the younger before the older..." What goes around has come around! And to top it off:

(2) Laban cheated him for years (31:6-9) He changed his wages ten times. Anything to keep him down, to keep him from getting anything. Cheat, cheat, cheat. Deception! When you practice deception, my friend, you are always the one who ends up being deceived! But when you live in truth, you end up seeing truth! And finally:

d. he experienced continual family strife Because he loved conditionally based on whim and performance:

(1) he had warring wives (30:1, 15) There was continual strife and jealousy between the two sisters and Jacob himself was in the middle. On one occasion Leah even bought the right to sleep with him from Rachel for a handful of mandrake plants. They bargained and plotted continually against one another. And it didn't stop there:

(2) his children were permanently affected Reuben became an adulterer and slept with his own father's concubine. Simeon and Levi became cruel and vicious men who killed all the men in an entire town through a wicked scheme. Judah violated his own daughter-in-law. All 10 of them learned to hate Joseph and almost committed murder but in the end sold him into slavery.

Listen again: Don't be deceived; God cannot be mocked. His law will stand. If you live out of your flesh, if you follow the green highways that are programmed into you, you will reap misery and corruption and destruction and death and your sins will be visited upon your children to the third and fourth generation! But if you will learn instead to choose to live out of the Spirit of God and the resources that are found in Jesus Christ, you will experience true life and spread it wherever you go! You have a choice to make and you make it daily. You either live in the flesh or the Spirit in every situation. It's either your way or God's way. And the consequences are eternal.

One Man's Story: The Life Of Jacob

His Life Transformed Gen. 34-35

There is a profound difference between the Jacob who in the early part of his life cheated his brother and deceived his father and the Jacob we meet in the later part of his life down in Egypt who lives by and is commended in Heb. Ch. 11 for his faith in God. He is truly a man who was transformed and God indicates that by changing his name. On two occasions God tells him: you are no longer Jacob; you are now Israel. There are two key experiences which produced that transformation in him. At Peniel we saw last week that God wrestled him and finally crippled him and brought him to the end of his own abilities. There he learned that only God could meet his needs. Today we'll see him at Bethel where he learned how his life could be changed through that principle. Let's briefly mention:

I. The Key Experiences Recorded For Us in these 2 chapters

1. the violation of Jacob's daughter (34:1-12) Jacob settled near Shechem after he crossed the Jordan and a sort of integration with the locals began to occur. His daughter Dinah was through this association seen and raped by the local prince named Shechem who then offered to marry her. Strangely, Jacob did not react on his own in the flesh this time, as he might have previously. He stood back and let his grown sons handle it.

2. the revenge of Jacob's sons (34:13-31) They devised a plan. The men of Shechem wanted to integrate the whole family and absorb them. So, Simeon and Levi said "You have to be circumcised first, and then we'll intermarry with you." However, while all the men of the town were weak and sore, the 2 brothers went door to door and massacred them wholesale and plundered the whole village in revenge for what Shechem had done. Again, Jacob was worried for his life and family if the surrounding Canaanites should retaliate but God had a piece of unfinished business with Jacob. There was a little place in the countryside where there was a rock he had used for a pillar and he had told God that if God would bring him safely back that spot would become a place of worship and so God appeared to him and called for:

3. Jacob's return to Bethel (35:1-15) This is where we'll concentrate our study today. It is where he learned the principles that transformed his life. And after that we read of:

4. various family events (35:16-29) including the death of Rachel and the birth of the 12th son, Benjamin, an act of incest committed by the oldest son, Reuben, and finally the reunion of Jacob with his father Isaac and Isaac's death. Now before we examine what happened to Jacob at Bethel, let's go to the New Testament and look at:

II. The Process Of Transformation - Rom. 12:1-2 I'm sure most of us have had these 2 verses memorized for years and that's good because they are very important. They describe for us the process by which God transforms us from those who walk according to our flesh into those who walk according to the Spirit. First note that this process:

1. it is rooted in gratitude: responding to God's mercy toward you in saving you. It is so easy to take what God has done in our lives for granted, to fail to appreciate the significance of that fact that He saved us and transported us out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His dear Son! That has to become real. It became real for Jacob at Peniel. He had no way out and God rescued him and so when he goes to Bethel, he says *Gene 35:3 (niv)* *Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.* You won't begin to have a transformed Spirit-filled life until you see how utterly incapable and worthless your flesh is with all its schemes and abilities and that only God can meet your needs. If you're ever going to be anything, it is not going to be by trying harder and performing better. The flesh can't produce the fruit of the Spirit! So, you've got to go to Peniel first, to the end of self, before you're ready for God to transform you! How does it happen?

2. it occurs by an act of worship: presenting yourself completely to God Paul describes it in the symbolic language of the Old Testament sacrificial system. You undertake an act of worship. You become the victim, the sacrifice. You lay yourself, your own body, on the altar as a sacrifice belonging completely to God. Only you're not a dead sacrifice like those animals of old but a living sacrifice i.e., the whole of your life is given over and utterly abandoned to God for Him to do with as He chooses and pleases! You surrender every bit of control over your life, every right to yourself. You offer yourself as a whole burnt offering to Him. That's what God wants. That's what pleases Him. Absolute surrender. Now here's the catch. Everybody thinks that's a once- and-done thing. It's like getting your muffler replaced at Midas: you pay once and it's good for the life of the car! But I'll let you in on a secret: it doesn't work at Midas and it doesn't work for us either. This is not an action God wants you to take once in your life; it's a posture He wants you to live in every day of your life! He wants you to live like a dead man, like a man who can't do anything for himself but knows that he is God's to move at His will and to animate by His strength every day and in every situation of your life. Yes, there may be one dramatic beginning where we first get to that place of surrender but we must stay there and when we wander off, we must come back there! Somebody put it like this: the only trouble with a living sacrifice is it keeps trying to crawl off the altar! That's us! Now vs. 2, as we learn to stay there more and more:

3. it results in a new pattern of thinking: renewing of your mind You see your flesh is programmed by or conformed to the pattern, molded into the shape of this world! You think and react and operate according to the pattern you've developed on your own for living. But the more you choose to stop and abandon that and to lay yourself open to God for His thoughts and His direction something wonderful happens: your pattern of thinking, your mind is changed into something new. You learn to think a new way and react a new way and to feel a new way and to live a new way. God transforms you! He metamorphosizes you into something you never were before and never would have been on your own. And the Greek tense is interesting: it's a passive imperative. It's something you *must* do but you aren't the actor; it must *be done* to you. e.g., *Get a haircut!* means go let somebody cut your hair! Choose by laying yourself at God's disposal to let Him renew your mind instead of just conforming the e.g., flesh patterns you have always had. And guess what:

4. it ends up as a new way of life: living out the will of God It's not that you will discover what the will of God is and then go do it. It's that as you yield moment by moment to His control and allow your mind to be changed, you will end up living out His will moment by moment, day by day, hour by hour, situation by situation! You will prove it out, demonstrate it, in your life. **2 Cor. 3:18** *And we, who with unveiled (unhidden) faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* It's simple. The more we surrender, the more the Spirit controls and the more we look like Jesus to every watching eye. It occurs gradually but continually in stages throughout our lives. And that's how Jacob got to be Israel by the time it was all done. So, let's go back and look at:

III. The Process God Gave To Jacob (35:1) There are 3 things God told Jacob to do in that verse and they are all important because each one is symbolic. Then we read in **(14-15)** the account of how Jacob did them. Let's look at them one at a time. God said first:

1. go up to Bethel... Notice the:

symbol: the place (Bethel=House Of God) where God talked with him

The symbol here is in the name of the place itself. Beth-El means House of God. When Jacob was there the first time on his way to Syria, his reaction was "Surely the Lord is in this place..." In 14-15 it is described twice as "the place where God had talked with Him." Bethel symbolizes for us the presence of God, the place where you meet God. And the lesson here is the:

lesson: enter the presence of God to talk with Him "Jacob, the answer to living life, to solving your problems is not to go and figure out and do; it is to symbolizes go into My presence and commune with Me. I am what you need!" Oh, if we could get hold of that! Day by day when the Canaanites around us are giving us trouble and we get afraid we won't be able to stand, if we could only realize that what we need is not a new set of Canaanites or to go out and buy the latest patented Canaanite-whooper-device-thing-a-ma-bob or a seminar on I'm OK and the Canaanites are OK or to download seasoned anti-Canaanite advice from the electronic oracle at Delphi; what we need is to go into the presence of God. He is always the answer. Now you name the problem! Any problem will do! Jacob, go up to Bethel! And when you arrive:

2. build an altar there... Now altars were a relatively new thing for Jacob. He knew about setting up pillars, monuments, things to help you remember, but altars were for offering sacrifice. He had set up one at Shechem after Peniel and before the tragedy happened there. He even called it by his new name El-Elohe-Israel (33:20), God, the God of Israel, his first real act of faith. But we don't know what he ever sacrificed on it. Now God says: Go to Bethel, into My Presence, and build an altar there i.e., offer to me a sacrifice. What did he offer? V. 14 says he set up a stone pillar as an altar and offered a drink offering on it. So, the:

symbol: the drink offering poured out Drink offerings are a new thing. This is the first mention of it in the Bible. They are not mentioned until the law of Moses. But basically, drink meant wine and wine was red and it symbolized blood being poured out, the giving of life. So, what's the:

lesson: pour out your life at His disposal Go up into my presence, Jacob and pour your life out at My feet, sacrifice it to me, offer it to me completely. Tell me that it is mine, given and consecrated to Me and I can do what I want with it. That's why Jacob went up to Bethel. However, he had by that time realized something. Surrendering his life absolutely to God meant there was something he had to do first. He had to get rid of everything he had put in God's place. You see, surrendering your life:

a. it requires seeing, admitting and burying the idols in your life (2-4) It was everywhere around him but it had never bothered him before. Rachel's father Laban had household idols, teraphim, in his tent. Rachel stole them when they left without Jacob's knowledge and probably still had them somewhere. And when he called for them, everybody else seemed to have a few too hidden away somewhere. And they were all wearing rings in their ears which must have somehow in that culture been associated with idol-worship (no offense to you ladies with beautiful earrings!). But Jacob had first to see them, to realize they were there and to admit it and then to take them down to the oak tree and bury them for good! They had usurped the place of God in some way and they had to go. Now I know you think you and I wouldn't ever do that. How interesting that John closes his first letter with this warning: *1 John 5:21, Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.* Anyone or anything that gets control over your life whether it's a person or a job or a substance or money or whatever becomes an idol. We don't openly worship it but we when we give our lives to it, it becomes idolatrous. And we need to ask God to open our eyes so we can see these things that have taken His place in our lives, and admit what they are and then bury them! Take them out of that place of allegiance for good! And note what Jacob says:

b. it requires purifying both your heart and behavior from them Purify yourselves i.e., wash, take a bath, cleanse the part people can't see. And then put on some clean clothes. Change the part they can see. Ask God's forgiveness and surrender that part of your life; purify your heart. And then change your clothes. By His strength depend on Him and ask Him to change the behavior that goes with it. Present yourself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. And then God said, Jacob:

3. settle there... Lit. *dwell there, remain there, abide there.* When you get to Bethel, into My Presence and lay yourself out completely to Me, STAY THERE! And in vs. 14, there is a symbol that gives even deeper meaning to it.

symbol: the oil (the Holy Spirit) poured on the drink offering After Jacob had poured out the drink offering on the altar symbolizing his own life poured out unto God in complete surrender, he then poured oil upon the altar on top of it. Oil in Scripture almost always symbolically represents the Holy Spirit and His ministry. And there is a truth here in this symbol. It is when we are at the end of ourselves and utterly surrendered to Christ that the Holy Spirit will fill us and control us and we become His instruments. It is as we stay there on the altar of sacrifice that the Spirit of God stays in control of us and we live a life that is really His life through us. So, when you take God's command to stay there and the symbol of the oil together you have the:

lesson: abide continually in God's presence and power- Jn. 15:4-5 *Remain [or abide] in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* He is the Vine and the sap flowing out into the branches and bearing fruit is the Holy Spirit. He's not talking about staying saved. He's saying that unless we remain in continual dependence upon Him as our source, upon the life-giving power of the Spirit to flow through us, we will produce no fruit! Oh, we may produce some good works in and of ourselves, but the Spirit will produce no fruit through us! We must abide or remain in Christ and that means learning to remain in continual surrender, in continual offering of ourselves to Him so that He can indeed flow His life out through us!

And that, my friends is what eventually transformed Jacob into Israel. He didn't literally continue to dwell at the place Bethel, though perhaps he should have. But as his life progressed, he learned more and more the principle of staying spiritually at Bethel, of giving Himself to God's control and depending upon Him and the more he stayed there, the more he was changed until he finally became the Israel, the man of faith that Hebrews talks about. But I want you to see one last thing:

IV. The Blessing God Bestowed Upon Jacob (35:9) At Bethel God blessed Jacob. This whole thing is not simply for God's benefit. It is for Jacob's. God does not call us to be transformed by laying down control of our lives simply for His good, but for ours. He wants to bless us! Look at what He gave Jacob there:

1. the understanding of the change in his identity (10) This announcement that his name was changed from Jacob to Israel had already been made back at Peniel and he had even begun to use the name some but it is here that I think the realization of what it meant began to sink in. God was giving him a new identity. He had changed who Jacob was and I think Jacob could begin to see it. It meant:

a. I am no longer a heel-grabber (Jacob); I am God's prince (Israel) I am no longer somebody who makes his own way, who gets ahead. I have been chosen by God; He has made me a prince and He fights my battles. I am a person who lives in submission to Him. And lest you think that's just for Jacob, listen to **1 Pet. 2:9-10** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* That's you my friend! Put your name in there. You are a chosen one of God. You are a king who reigns with Christ. You are a holy priest who can enter His presence with full acceptance. You are a person who belongs to God! That's your true identity and when you lay yourself down on the altar of surrender, that's when you get to understand it. Who I am is not the life I've lived, the things that have happened to me, the sins I've committed. Who I am is the choice and the work of God in my life. I have an identity that if formed and linked to Jesus Christ and:

b. when I abide, my behavior reflects what I truly am When I go back to living in the flesh and do things the old way, I'm living like who I'm not. I'm a hypocrite. But when I abide in His presence in full surrender, then I am living like what I truly am. John wrote **1 Jn. 2:28-3:3** *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.... How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.* A true child of God is a child of God by grace, it's a gift. But if I am a child of God then I live like one, I purify myself. I lay at His feet and continue or abide in Him, not in my flesh! Why? Cause that's who I am! And then old Israel got a second blessing:

2. the promise of God's control over his future (11-12) God had a plan for Israel's future and He is El Shaddai, God Almighty, the God who has power to do whatever He plans to do, the Omnipotent God. God made it clear: you put your life in My hands. I will control it and here's what I'm going to do with it. Now when Jacob got to living it, it didn't look like all that on the surface. Soon he would lose a wife and later a son and then there would be a famine and then in old age he would leave the promised land and move down to Egypt with his family and die there. It wouldn't look or feel much like what God had promised was going on. But what he couldn't see was that in the soil of Egypt God would plant the small seed of Israel that would grow to several millions of people and then He would destroy Egypt and bring them out with a mighty hand and turn them into a mighty nation and bring from them a line of kings that one day would bring forth the King of Kings who would bless every nation on the face of the earth! All he had was the promise of God's control but that was enough. He learned to live by faith trusting that his future belonged to God and God would control it. So does yours.

Listen, God's principle of transformation has always been the same. Go to Him and lay your life at His feet and stay there. That's it, pure and simple. He may have to wrestle you to get you to see it but that's all there is to it. The choice to respond is yours. *A young man went into a church and started praying. He was so anxious to find God's will for his life that he took a piece of paper and wrote down all the things that he was going to do for God. Then he started to pray that God might reveal to him whether these promises were acceptable to Him. Suddenly he heard a voice speak to him saying, "This is not the way I want you to find My will. All I want of you is to sign your name and leave the paper for me to fill."* Do you want to be an Israel instead of a Jacob? Just go into His presence and hand him the blank paper of your life and ask Him to fill it. And stay there, won't you?

One Man's Story: The Life Of Jacob

His Walk Of Faith Gen. 37-50

Today we come to the final years of Jacob's life. You know, it's not how you start a thing that is most important but how you finish it! I remember our missionary Dean Franklin when he was preparing to leave London for furlough and then to move on to a new position in the Caribbean asking us to pray that he might "finish well" both in his remaining time in Europe and that he might "finish well" in the remaining years of ministry he has left in the Caribbean. Finishing well is important. Jacob didn't start out so good but he finished well. The Scripture commends him for the faith in which he walked during the closing years of his life. Now at Ch. 37 the emphasis of the story line of the book of Genesis switches from the story of Jacob's life to the story of Joseph's life. That's a study for another day. We're interested in the remaining glimpses we find of Jacob himself in the midst of that story which covers the last 30 years of Jacob's life. Let me summarize briefly:

I. The Key Experiences Recorded For Us

1. Jacob loses his son Joseph - Ch. 37 Hatred develops between Joseph and his brothers during his growing up years. When he is 17 it peaks and while they are out in the field, miles from home, they intend to kill him but instead sell him as a slave to some passing Midianites who take him to Egypt. They lie and put blood on his coat and tell his father they found it, so from Jacob's perspective, Joseph is dead, he is gone, lost forever. But while Jacob is busy missing him:

2. Joseph ascends to the throne of Egypt - chs. 39-41 by way of a false accusation and two years in a prison. At age 30 Pharaoh yanks him out of prison and makes him ruler of all Egypt because God shows Joseph that a tremendous famine is to come upon the world. And in time the famine does come. The whole near-eastern world is starving. Nobody has grain to eat so:

3. Jacob sends his sons to Egypt - chs. 42-45 where they meet Joseph. But they don't recognize him, of course and he in turn tests them by accusing them of spying and ordering them to bring their youngest brother Benjamin back down to prove that they are telling the truth. The end result is that Joseph forgives his brothers and is reunited with them but also with Jacob himself and so we have:

4. Jacob's life in Egypt - chs. 46-50 for his final 17 years. What is recorded for us here is not so much events as the final blessings he gave to all his children. And he finally dies in Ch. 49 and in Ch. 50 they carry him up to Canaan and bury him.

It is during these last years of his life particularly that Jacob lives as Israel. Instead of walking in the flesh as he did for the first half of his life, now he learns for the most part to walk by faith. Before we look at his life, however, let's go to the New Testament and look at:

II. The Principle Of Living By Faith - Gal. 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

There are 2 important facts there. Do you see them? First, Christ has become my life. I don't live any more. The old "I", the old man, my old spirit that was separated from God is dead. It was nailed to the cross with Christ when I was placed into Him at salvation. But I still live. How? His life has created a brand new spirit in me that is joined to Him so that He has become my life. John said that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the son has life! Paul wrote, "when Christ who is our life shall appear...". If Christ were to remove His presence from me; I would cease living. He has become my life! And that should change the method by which I go about daily living. Paul says: the life I NOW (in Greek, missing in NIV) live in the body, I live a new way: by faith in, i.e., by trusting in the Son of God! By trusting the Son of God who is my life to live my life, to live out His life through me. That is living by faith. I quit trusting myself to do things, to handle situations, to react to people and I trust Christ to do it through me! Call it living by faith, walking by faith, walking in the Spirit, or whatever term you choose, it means trusting Jesus moment by moment and situation by situation to do my living, to supply my power, wisdom, and whatever else I need. Now Jacob didn't have the advantage of the personal indwelling of the living Christ like you and I have or the internal presence of the Holy Spirit like we have, but he still learned in the end of his life to walk by faith like his grandfather Abraham. He started to live more and more as Israel the prince of God. However:

III. The Flesh Of Jacob (Which) Was Still Present Just in case you were thinking that eventually your flesh would just gradually disappear and you wouldn't have to bother with it, let me clue you in: it ain't so! Sin still dwells in your flesh so there's always a force there remobilizing and remobilizing it at every turn. The most godly saint among us still faces the struggle Paul spoke of in Galatians (5:17): *the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other...* The key is what v. 16 says *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* Living by the Spirit will give us regular victory over the desires of our flesh but it won't make it go away and there will be times when all of us fall back into our flesh patterns. Even though Jacob was now different, there were still parts of his life where he lived according to the godliest patterns his flesh knew. For instance:

1. he "idolized" Joseph (37:3-4) i.e., he made Joseph into an idol in his life. Joseph was the first son of Rachel, the wife he really loved. He was the son he'd wanted all along and because he grew up in a family where the children were loved unequally and favorites were played, he did the same. He loved Joseph more than the others and he showed it outwardly, not just by giving him a beautiful coat but every day in the way he treated him. He kept him at home while the others went to pasture the flocks and so on. It made the others bitter. Jacob raised Joseph to too high a place in his heart. So, what did God do?

a. God took Joseph away from him Sold him into slavery. Jacob thought he was dead! God took Joseph away and look at:

b. his self-centered reaction (37:34-35) Interesting words: he *refused* to be comforted. Can't you hear him. "No, I won't stop being sorry. I deserve to mourn. I'm going to die mourning. In fact, I'd rather die, now than live now that Joseph is gone!" Do you see? Joseph has become life to him unlike Job who said in the same circumstance "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away..." Do you see, here's another one of those little gods that has sneaked into his life and taken the place that only God should have. He eventually got over the sadness but what happened was that next:

2. he "idolized" Benjamin (42:1-4) Benjamin took Joseph's place. He was the only son left by Rachel and the youngest. Now he stayed home with dad and became Jacob's life. When the famine came and somebody had to go to Egypt, he couldn't let anything happen to him; the others were expendable so he sent them! But:

a. God (in essence threatens to take) **took Benjamin away from him** Joseph insisted that the brothers couldn't return to buy grain unless they brought Benjamin back with them when they came and kept Simeon as a hostage to ensure they would. And just look at:

b. his self-centered reaction (42:36-38) Do you hear it again? If he dies, I'll die. His brothers understood that. Compare what they said later on **(44:30)** Again, Benjamin has become an idol; he has taken the place that only God should have in Jacob's heart and God has now put him in a place he has to willingly give him up or sentence himself and all his family to starve. God is testing Jacob, saying, Will you let him go and trust Me instead? Will you let me be Lord? Will you let me have the right to control your life, even Benjamin? And so, at last you have:

3. his surrender to God (43:1-7, 11--14) Can't you hear him little by little letting go?

a. he released his idolatrous clinging and trusted God Note the surrender in 14. His well-being depends on God, not on my protection. And the choice over whether he lives or not is God's. God and His will is more important than mine! God dealt with him about this and he surrendered at last to God. And look what God did:

b. God gave him back both Joseph and Benjamin! (45:25-28) Oh what a hallelujah meeting that must have been! A son back from the dead and Benjamin there to tell it besides! Now look, please don't think that I'm saying that all your stories will have a happy ending or that God will give you back everything you surrender to Him. It doesn't work that way but that's not the point.

All the way along there are going to be issues like this in your life because you still have flesh and they'll come up. God will bring them up. One by one He will point out the things that occupy His place in your heart and ask you to surrender them to Him. And sometimes there will be struggles, no matter how close you grow to God or how old you get. But what I want you to see at the same time is:

IV. The Faith Of Israel Which Continued Steadfastly This is not my thought but a distinct statement made by the Holy Spirit in **Heb. 11:21** *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.* Jacob is commended for his faith. What is not obvious is that if you read the Genesis account, this statement refers not to one incident but to two incidents in Jacob's life in which he displayed the faith he had learned to walk in. Let's take the second one first:

1. he counted God's Word as true ...he worshipped leaning on his staff refers to the incident in Ch. 47 where Jacob speaks to Joseph alone and makes him promise to bury him in Canaan. In order to understand this fully let's look at a few preceding thoughts. First of all, notice:

a. he stayed in the land where his father had sojourned (37:1) That's significant. He stayed as a dweller, put down permanent roots in the land where his father was only a sojourner, a temporary alien. Why? Cp. **(35:12)** At Bethel God had made him a promise, first when he went to Syria and then when he went back up to Bethel, God said "This is your land, the land of Canaan. It belongs to you. I give it to you and your descendants." Jacob counted God's promise as true and he stayed there. In fact, when Joseph sent carts from Egypt to bring him down to live there:

b. he left the land obediently counting on his return (46:1-4) God had to reassure him that it was OK to go down and reassure him that he would return. He obeyed and went down but counted trusted God that he would return. And that's why when it became apparent that he was going to die in Egypt:

c. he made Joseph promise to bury him in the land (47:27-31) Oh, picture it: "Joseph, this isn't my land. God told me that Canaan is my land and your land and that all of us are going back there. He told me I'm going back there and now I'm dying here. Swear to me you'll take me back and bury me. Please, Joseph, please. I don't want my bones to lie in Egypt. I believe the promise of God and I want to lie in Canaan." And it was when Joseph assured him he would do that that he leaned upon the top of his staff and worshipped God. Thank you, Lord, you have kept your Word; You are faithful. What you have said to me is true. And even in his last moments:

d. his last desire and command was to be buried in the land (49:29-33) Why? It was faith. Trust that God was going to bring his descendants back. Joseph died in the same kind of faith. Hebrews reminds us that he too gave commandment that when the time came that God brought Israel out of Egypt, they were to take his bones with them! He got that from his dad. God said it; I believe it; whether it looks like it or not. His Word is true.

That was his consistent attitude over the last 30 years of his life - FAITH. Trusting God to do what He said He'd do. Is that how you live day by day? Counting on what God says as true, leaning on Him like Jacob leaned on his staff and worshipping, thanking Him that it's true! How about *Rom. 8:28* *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...* What if the all things means your spouse dies? What if the all things means losing a child of 17? What if the all things means having to move to a strange place and leave all that's familiar to you to live in a place you'd rather not be? What if like for Corrie Ten Boom, the all things means a prison camp and great suffering? Faith says, "Even in this God is at work for my good..." Faith consistently says "Let God be true and every man, every circumstance, every feeling, a liar!"

If you want to live out that transformed life, staying on that altar presented totally to God means trusting His Word more than anything your 5 senses tell you!

In 1958, a U.S. soldier wandered the streets of Berlin to see the sights. Despite the bustling new life in parts of the city, reminders remained of the destruction of World War II. Walking through a residential area one evening, across the cobblestone street he saw an open space edged with flowers. In the center stood the stone front of what had been a church. The building was no longer there, but the rubble had been cleared away in an attempt to fill the empty space with a little park. The former church's main door was shaped in a Gothic arch, and over it was carved into the stone in German: HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY. What a graphic way for God to declare the truth; His Word will not pass away; we can trust it! Then, Hebrews commends Jacob for a second thing:

2. he submitted to God's control over the future ...when he was dying, he blessed both of Joseph's sons That happened in Ch. 48 after the first incident. Jacob was ill and Joseph came to see him with his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh and Jacob found strength to give Joseph through the boys his dying blessing, just as his own father had done so many years before. But, look what Jacob did:

a. he declared God's choice of Ephraim over Manasseh (48:13-19) He was by this time listening to God, understanding His will and direction. He was in these last 3 chs. a prophet speaking for God. And he deliberately put his hands in reverse order; he set the younger before the older. And when Joseph gets upset because that's not the natural way, he says "I know son, I know..." He did know. His own father had refused to do it. He refused to bless Jacob instead of Esau even though before their birth God had made it clear that Jacob was the one He had chosen. You see, Jacob had learned now something that Isaac never did:

(1) he learned to choose God's way over his own programming It didn't matter what the culture said. It didn't matter who made the most delicious stew. What mattered was what God wanted. He had learned to say "OK, Lord. Whatever you want..." And it also indicates that:

(2) he learned the importance of God's choice over achievement He realized it didn't matter how much Manasseh did, he couldn't alter the future God had planned for him. Nor could Ephraim. And nor could he. For all his own conniving and getting ahead, it was God who was his Shepherd and God who had delivered him from harm to that very day. All because it was God's choice. The future belongs to Him. In the same way he then called for all his sons and did it again:

b. he declared God's choice of Judah over Joseph (49:8-10) Oh, how he wanted Joseph to be the chief and the head and he was while they were in Egypt. But ultimately God had chosen otherwise. Messiah, the One to Whom It Belongs, Shiloh, would come from Judah's children. Judah would be the royal tribe from which the line of kings and ultimately the King of Kings would come.

Faith to Jacob now meant trusting control of the future to God. Trusting that He, the all-wise and all-powerful God will bring about His will and that's what's important, not mine! That's walking by faith. What about you? What if God chooses for you a path and a plan for your life that you don't want, that you don't even like? Do you live by faith in the Son of God, trusting Him with it all, bowing submissively to His will? Or do you want to hold on and control it for yourself? *In May 1995, Randy Reid, a 34-year-old construction worker, was welding on top of a nearly completed water tower outside Chicago. According to writer Melissa Ramsdell, Reid unhooked his safety gear to reach for some pipes when a metal cage slipped and bumped the scaffolding he stood on. The scaffolding tipped, and Reid lost his balance. He fell 110 feet, landing face down on a pile of dirt, just missing rocks and construction debris. A fellow worker called 911. When paramedics arrived, they found Reid conscious, moving, and complaining of a sore back. But here is the irony. As paramedics carried him on a backboard to the ambulance, Reid had one request: "Don't drop me." (Doctors later said Reid came away from the accident with just a bruised lung.) He'd been saved from a 110 foot fall but was worried about falling 30 inches.* How like us. God saves us from an eternity in hell and bestows upon us an eternity in heaven. But we can't trust God for these few years of life we have left. We have to control it. We have to protect ourselves, to do it our way! God is saying, "Let go, my child, let go. Trust Me. Put your future in My hands. Say yes to what I choose. The life you now live in the flesh, live by trusting in Me, the One who loved you and gave Myself for you!" Will you do it?

OUTLINE

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

- I. God's Preparation For Redemption - Chs. 1-6
 - 1. He Prepared The Circumstances - Ch. 1
 - 2. He Prepared His Servant-Leader - Ch. 2
 - 3. He Called His Servant-Leader - Chs. 3-4
 - 4. He Prepared Israel Through Discouragement - Chs. 5-6
- II. God's Process Of Redemption - 7:1-15:21
 - 1. He Displayed His Glory In Judgments On Egypt - Chs. 7-8
 - 2. He Continued To Display His Glory In Judgments - Chs. 9-10
 - 3. His Final Judgment On Egypt - 11:1-12:42
 - 4. His Memorials Of Redemption - 12:43-13:16
 - 5. Israel's Final Deliverance From Egypt - 13:17-15:21
- III. God's Preservation Of The Redeemed - 15:22-18:26
 - 1. He Provides For His People - 15:22-16:36
 - 2. He Protects His People - Ch. 17
 - 3. He Preserves His Leaders - Ch. 18

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

- I. The Seriousness Of God's Instruction - Ch. 19
- II. The Core Of God's Moral Instruction - Ch. 20
- III. Civil laws: Servants and Injuries (I) - Ch. 21
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- V. Civil laws: Justice, Sabbath and Celebration (III) - 23:1-19
- VI. The Covenant Of Law - 23:20-24:18

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

I. God's Preparation For Redemption - Chs. 1-4

Today we begin a new series of messages, studying through the book of Exodus. Exodus, as you well know, is the story of how God redeems a people, how God rescues the people of Israel who are in bondage in Egypt and brings them out. Indeed, the name Exodus means *the way out* or *the going out*. And it is a very popular story. The story of Israel's going out has been told and retold on the movie screen and TV by everyone from Charlton Heston to Disney's animation studios. The Jews, of course, cling to it as the source of their national identity. Yet everyone loves the story of poor suffering people being victorious over their proud dictator in the end. But Exodus is so much more than that. It is not really a story about Israel; it is a story about God, a story that was told and retold by parents to children generation upon generation for one purpose, to teach them to worship Him! Listen to the Psalmist:

*Ps. 66:1-7 Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! **Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you; they sing praise to your name."** Selah Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf! [What's he talking about, what works?] **He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot-- come, let us rejoice in him. He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations-- let not the rebellious rise up against him. Selah***

Exodus is the story of how God proved to all the world that He is the only True and Living God by destroying the mightiest nation on earth and taking the smallest and least deserving for His own people. If you stop to think about it, the whole of God's redemptive history of the human race is built around two key events: the Exodus and the Cross. Before Christ, people of faith for 1400 years looked backward to the Exodus as the once-for-all proof that Jehovah alone must be worshipped and redemption is found in Him, the same way that for 2000 years believers have looked back to the Cross and the Resurrection as God's once-for-all proof that Jesus alone is Lord and must be worshipped because redemption is found in Him! An Israelite could look back at the Exodus in faith and include himself in saying, "God redeemed US from our bondage!", just the way you and I look back at the cross and say, "Jesus redeemed US from our sins!" That's how im-

portant this event was and it is no wonder that the Exodus itself points forward to the Cross and pictures it as we'll see. The outline of these 18 chapters falls under 3 major headings:

I. God's Preparation For Redemption - Chs. 1-4

II. God's Process Of Redemption - 5:1-15:21

III. God's Preservation Of The Redeemed - 15:22-18:26

And we begin today with His preparation. We want to look at how God set the stage beforehand for what He was about to do, for the redemption He was about to accomplish. And the first thing that stands out clearly as we begin to read the story is that:

He Prepared The Circumstances - Ch. 1

But for the moment, hold that thought, and let's look carefully at:

I. The Historical Reality: which is that the Israelites at that time were in a veritable **Holocaust Of Suffering**. Here's how it unfolded. It began with:

1. the dramatic multiplication of Israel in Egypt (1-7) How many were there in Jacob (Israel)'s family when they came down to Egypt to live with Joseph? 70 males! No big deal. Pharaoh takes care of 70 of Joseph's relatives; a hundred people living in a whole nation of Egyptians. But look at v. 5: they were *fruitful* [they had a lot of kids]...*multiplied greatly* [like mice or rabbits!]...*became exceedingly numerous* [in 4 generations there were now 2-3 million of them!] and...*the land was filled with them*. At first there were just a handful of them up north by the Nile delta in the land of Goshen but now they were everywhere you looked. 2 million people take up a lot of space; they consume a lot of food; they create long lines at the bazaar! I have no idea how you can know the population of Egypt at that time, but I read on the internet that scholars estimate that it was between 3-4 million. If so, half of them were Israelites! This was a veritable population explosion and transformation! And the worry of the Egyptians is obvious: **vs. 8-10** "There are more of them than there are of us! They could take over our country and rule the land or join our enemies against us. Or what if they leave! We've become economically dependent on their presence. We would be impoverished without them!" And so, the new Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph and didn't remember how he saved Egypt began:

2. the systematic oppression of Israel by Egypt (8-22) It had 4 notable elements and they increased in severity as each one failed. The first oppressive act was:

a. public enslavement (11) Men were taken away from their homes and from their crafts and their jobs and forced into public labor building cities to store provisions for Pharaoh's army, fueling Pharaoh's war machine. Egypt at that time was the mightiest Empire on earth, its chariots and horses were feared by all as the most advanced weapon system of the day and were exported for sale to other nations. Pharaoh thought to disrupt family life, to change the ease under which such a large population had bred, to stem the increase. But it didn't work. So, the Egyptians resorted to:

b. personal cruelty (13-14) They treated them harshly, gave them the heaviest of manual labor: making bricks, mixing mortar, carrying stones, laboring in the fields gathering straw. And they worked them as hard as they could with no sympathy, without rest, without regard for injuries or stamina. They made their lives bitter, hoping that all this would reduce their virility, that they would stop having children. But they kept right on. So next Pharaoh resorted to:

c. population control (15-16) It was a secret command, not known to the public. Shiphrah and Puah were probably the leaders or superintendents among the Hebrew midwives and they were told quietly to kill every boy that was born but to let the girls live. His thinking was simple: as time passed more and more of the Hebrews would be women and more and more they would have to be taken by Egyptian men so their children would be Egyptian and they would eventually be absorbed into the Egyptian population. Over time there would be no more Hebrews, only Egyptians! What a sinister plan! And it would have worked but the midwives wouldn't do it! They refused and made up excuses. So, at last the situation escalates to where the fear is so great that Pharaoh resorts to:

d. purposeful genocide (22) He made a law; He issued a decree binding on everyone in Egypt to kill outright every Hebrew baby boy that is born by throwing them into the Nile, a sacrifice to the river which was itself worshipped as a god. Genocide: kill the Hebrews outright because they're Hebrews. Does any of this sound familiar? It has been tried against the Jews time and again. Hitler was not the first! The Persians almost pulled it off 4 centuries before Christ, had not God used Esther to intervene! The Russian Empire had a series of pogroms over hundreds of years where Jews were attacked and killed. Central and Eastern Europe joined in their own pogroms as did the Arab world at various times. Hitler's mass murder of 6 million Jews was simply an attempt at the modern fulfillment of what Pharaoh wanted centuries before. Jews live in fear that it will happen again from their own history.

Yet I would hasten to point out that these are the same tactics that have been used against the Church, almost from its inception. From the persecutions of Saul down to the Cultural Revolution of Mao Tse Tung in which millions of believers

died simply for their faith, Pharaoh's "wipe them out" genocidal tactics have been tried time and again. We heard two weeks ago about some of the persecution our brothers and sisters face in Serbia. A hand grenade tossed into a public gathering. In Azerbaijan, the CLC bookstore was robbed and one of its workers beaten a few months ago. Last Christmas out by Lake Issyk Kul one brother was martyred for his faith in Kyrgyzstan. Over the past few years our brothers and sisters in southern Ethiopia were being wiped out wholesale, entire villages at a time carried away as slaves or killed. And here we still think that is a strange thing, even though Jesus warned His followers repeatedly that they would be hated and arrested and even killed for His sake. We're considered as sheep to be slaughtered. The historical reality is that as God's people we are often forced to live in a crucible of suffering, suffering that is not of our own doing. God allows that and even chooses for that to happen to us. But here is:

II. The Heavenly Reality: in the midst of it all **God's Plan Is Being Carried Out!** Go with me back to the book of Genesis and stand with Abraham even before Isaac was born as he heard:

1. the revelation of God's plan - Gen. 15:12-16 "Not only will I give you a child; I will multiply your descendants like the stars of the heavens (v. 5). And here's how I will do it: your descendants will go into a foreign country where they will multiply. And there they will be forced into slavery and harshly treated and at the end of 400 years, 4 generations from now, I will judge that nation and bring them out with great possessions when My timing is right for them to come back into this land and dispossess the Amorites who live here because at that time their sin will be at a place where they are ready to be judged for it." In other words, even though Israel was living through a holocaust, through bitter suffering, slavery and genocide, and it might have appeared like God had forgotten and forsaken them, the plan of God was right on track; everything was happening according to a decree He had set in motion 400 years ago! In fact, God was using their dire circumstances to prepare for one of His mightiest acts in all of history! Wow, that sounds a lot like *Rom. 8:28 (NASB) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to [His] purpose. John Piper tells about a family in his congregation. The son was hurt in a boating accident where a motorboat actually ran right over him in the water. He survived, but his knees were severely injured. There were cuts on his neck and chest from the propeller. One day his father stood up in a deacons' meeting and gave a testimony about taking comfort in the sovereignty of God. He said, "God has His purposes for the life of my son and for my whole family. This will turn out for the good of all of us as we trust in Him. God could have taken my son with another half-inch difference. But instead, He said to the blade: 'Thus far and no farther.'" [The Pleasures of God by John Piper. Multnomah, 1991. Page 68.] Even in the crucible of tragedy and suffering God is in absolute control and He makes no mistakes. His plan is right on track! So, essentially, you're faced with two choices: you can resist it or you can cooperate with it! And in this chapter you can see both. On the Egyptians' part you can see:*

2. the futility of opposing God's plan Look at the result of the oppression in v. **12**. The more they oppressed them the more they multiplied! So, they began their program of genocide and look at vs. **20b**. They multiplied even more! You can't stop what God is doing no matter how hard you try! You can't fight against God! Pharaoh learned that the hard way in the end. Mao Tse Tung tried to stamp out the church in China but instead he drove it underground and through the blessing of his persecution it multiplied and grew incredibly until today there may be as many as 100 million believers in China! That's a warning for the Pharaohs and the Hitlers of earth, but don't miss the fact that it's a warning for you too. God may have you in the crucible of suffering and you may not like it, but if that's where He wants you at this moment, your best course is to accept it and praise Him and run to Him for strength! So many times, our first response is to become angry and upset at God and blame Him for our suffering as though He doesn't love us or to frantically get involved in our own schemes to get out of the circumstances we're in by hook or by crook. That's where Israel went, as we'll see, and that's opposing God just as much as the Egyptians were. When suffering comes, God's desire for you is to be where Job was when all that terrible stuff happened: *Job 1:20-21 At this, Job...fell to the ground in worship and said...The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised. Worship Him; praise Him; run to Him. He will be all you need! Now on the other hand you can see in the story of the midwives:*

3. the blessing of cooperating with God's plan (17-21) Shiphrah and Puah determined to obey God rather than Pharaoh. They knew it was evil to kill babies and they did not do it. They made up an excuse to Pharaoh, but it was really God who allowed them to do that without losing their own lives as you would expect. They cooperated with God and sought to obey Him in the moment and God blessed them there in the midst of the crucible. He gave them families of their own. Following God, no matter how impossible or untenable it looks in your suffering, is always the path to blessing. Now let me remind you of one last thing from this story:

4. you have a specific place in God's plan You can see this most clearly as the story is retold by Paul in **Acts 7:17-20a**. AT THAT TIME Moses was born. God multiplied the people and placed them into a time of suffering and now that everything was prepared for their redemption, AT THAT TIME God sent Moses into the world in the midst of it all. He arrived at the exact time God had determined to fulfill a specific place in His larger plan. So did you! You may not be a leader like Moses. You may not be queen like Esther, but like her *...you have come to royal position for such a time as this!" - Est. 4:14* You have arrived at the exact place, the exact circumstance where you are right now at the very time that God has determined and wherever you are, God has something for you to do there! Ask Him! *Rowland Bingham, the founder of SIM International, was once seriously injured in an automobile accident. He was rushed to a hospital in*

critical condition. The following day, when he regained consciousness, he asked the nurse what he was doing there.

"Don't try to talk now, just rest," she replied. "You have been in an accident." "Accident!" exclaimed Dr. Bingham.

*"There are no **accidents** in the life of a Christian. This is just an **incident** in God's perfect leading."*

Friend, your life has not been derailed and God hasn't taken a long vacation. You are right on track and He is right there. You are right where God has planned you to be. If your life is at this moment a life of bondage that is made bitter with hard labor, know that He has a plan to use it for your good and for His glory, just as He did the Israelites. *For more than 50 years, John Wesley, the great English preacher and missionary of the 18th century, heeded the command of Psalm 37:1 (Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong.) as he correlated it with Romans 8:28 (God causes all things to work together for good...) He attributed much of his spiritual strength and freedom from worry to a total reliance upon God's sustaining grace and overruling providence. He said, "Ten thousand cares trouble me no more than ten thousand hairs upon my head. Yes, I feel certain things and at times may even grieve over them, but I fret at nothing!" He always delighted in those who clung to God in faith, rolled their care on Him, and refused to worry. In his Journal, Vol. 5, p. 66, he relates this incident: "Today I visited one who was ill in bed. She had buried seven of her family in six months, and had just heard that her beloved husband was cast away at sea. I asked, 'Don't you fret at any of these things?' She answered with a loving smile on her pale cheeks, 'Oh, no! How can I fret at anything which is in the will of God? Let Him take all besides; He has given me Himself. I have learned to love and praise Him every moment.'" There it is, beloved, the truth that makes all the difference! He has given me Himself! What more could He give? His Presence will go with Me and He will give me rest! IF, I am willing to rest in Him and in Him alone. Are you?*

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

I. God's Preparation For Redemption - Chs. 1-4

He Prepared His Servant-Leader - Ch. 2

God not only prepares circumstances as part of His plan; He prepares PEOPLE! There is one key lesson I have learned throughout the years: whenever God wants to get something done, He raises up a person to do it! A champion, a leader, a person who has been prepared for the task and has a sense of being called to it. He operates that way right here in this church all the time; when He wants something done, He raises up someone to do it. So, it is no wonder that when God decided to redeem Israel and bring them out of bondage in Egypt, that He prepared and called a man, a man who was destined to become one of the well-known leaders in all of human history: Moses. The story of his life begins in Chapter 2 and in this chapter, we'll see how God prepared Him for the task; we'll see later in chs. 3-4 how God calls him to the task. First of all, I want you to see how:

I. God Shaped The Course Of Moses' Life By Events just as He does with each one of us. In Moses' case, we are given in the record only 3 of the thousands of events in his life so I'm figuring that these 3 are obviously what God wants us to know and that they are likely the 3 key events that shaped his life the most. The first is:

1. an incident of protection (1-10) *[read text]* You remember Pharaoh's genocidal edict from Ch. 1: every Hebrew baby boy that is born must be thrown into the Nile. For Moses to be born at this moment in history and live, God had to protect him, and He did, supernaturally! Of course, His protection:

a. it involved human means (2-4) His mother was a courageous woman and a loving mother. She had her baby in secret and she hid him as long as she could. But she was also smart. She had a plan. When she couldn't hide him any longer, she made a little ark, a basket boat out of reeds, cementing them together with tar and sealing the outside with pitch, exactly the way the Egyptians boat makers did it. Their papyrus boats crossed oceans and Moses' little ark built by her loving hand was no doubt safe and well-sealed! Then she put him in it and put it in the reeds near the bank, as though it had lodged there, near a public place where he would be found. But I'm also sure she did not choose just any place! For him to be found by any old Egyptian or even a Hebrew would probably guarantee his death. They'd be afraid for their own lives and throw him back into the Nile! The only ones who would not be afraid of the Pharaoh's decree would be his own family! I have a feeling she knew this was where Pharaoh's daughter came to the Nile to do her ritual washing, to pay her homage to the Nile god. And she stationed Moses' older sister Miriam, only a girl, nearby to watch over him and see what would happen. It was a daring, bold, well-thought-out human plan that God used, but:

b. it involved Divine intervention This plan, even though carefully crafted, was pretty feeble, as most of our human plans are. The right person had to find him. Their heart had to be touched with sympathy and they would have to want to keep a child of another race for themselves. What are the chances of all that happening? Well, you read vs. 5-6! The person to hear him was Pharaoh's own daughter. Jewish tradition has given her the name Bithiah from 1 Chr. 4:18 but at any rate, when she opened the basket Moses was crying and God touched her heart. She was moved with compassion and pity and decided to rescue him in defiance of her own father's decree! Just at that moment Miriam stepped up and volunteered to find a Hebrew wet nurse for him so in v. 9 Moses' own mother gets him back and gets paid to nurse and raise him! How neat is that! But what's even neater is the implication of v. 10, that because of God's intervention in this way, Moses is raised, not only as an Egyptian, but in the very court of Pharaoh. That day changed the very course of his life. In one hour God made him an Egyptian by default. Think

about it: Pharaoh decrees that every Hebrew boy must be killed and God has Pharaoh himself raise and protect as his own grandson the very Hebrew who is destined to rescue Israel! What irony, protected by the very tyrant who decreed his death! Only God could do that!

How many times has God protected you! How many of us would be dead right now if God had not kept us from a car accident or healed us of some deadly illness? How many times has He spared your life in ways that only He could do so that you would be here to be used in His plan? *Felix was a priest who served the Lord in Nola, Italy during the late 200's AD. Persecution under the Emperor Decius broke out and he was being sought. As he was fleeing from his enemies, he called on God for help and took refuge in a cave. He had scarcely entered when a spider began to spin a web over the opening. The pursuers saw the spider's lacy veil blocking the entrance and didn't bother to look inside. They figured that no one could have entered without disturbing that delicate curtain of silk. So, they left, and the life of one of God's noble men was spared for additional service for Christ. Felix of Nola later summed up his experience in these words, "Where God is, a spider's web is a wall; where He is not, a wall is but a spider's web."* God prepares us for His service by protecting us and if He has decreed that we will be safe then it does not matter how hot the fiery furnace we are thrown in! Trust in Him, but know that these incidents of His protection are His means of shaping your life for His service. Your life is not your own; save it for His purpose! Now the second major event we know of in Moses' life was:

2. an incident of decision (11-15) It is now 40 years later. I have no idea how long Moses' mother got to keep him with her, but I'm pretty sure that it was way beyond the time when she stopped nursing him. Whatever months or years she had with him, God must have used to help him remember one thing: that He was a Hebrew and Hebrews worshipped the True God. On this day he went out to watch the Hebrew slaves, his own brothers at work. He was touched by the injustice they were suffering. He couldn't take the cruelty that was being dished out to one man and he made a decision that changed his life forever. He ended up murdering the Egyptian and hiding him in the sand to cover up his deed. And of course, the result was that it became known, he became a wanted criminal and had to flee the country with the clothes on his back. That one decision shaped his entire future. Fortunately for us, we know:

a. the true nature of his motives because God wrote it down for us from the lips of Stephen as he retold the story in **Acts 7:22-25**. The NIV omits one word in v. 23. "When Moses was *fully* forty years old..." This was not the rash impulse of a 20 year old youth with a crazy dream; this was the decision of a 40 year old mature leader. It was not born out of an outburst of anger but out of a reasoned conclusion that Moses had come to as he pondered for years the fact that God had him "switched at birth" from a Hebrew slave into a Prince of Egypt. At some point he had come to believe in the God of Israel and reasoned that God had put him in that place of power to rescue his own oppressed people, to deliver them! Surely God would use him to be the savior of his people, to end their long night of suffering! And so, he made the decision to act, the decision that changed his life. He thought surely his people would understand that and appreciate him, but they didn't, as he found out the very next day. But let's not skip over this too lightly; let's look at:

b. the true nature of his decision It is recorded for us in **Heb. 11:24-25**. He chose to identify himself with God and with His suffering people rather than with the power of the throne of Egypt. He chose Christ and with Him suffering rather than the path of selfish pleasure. He chose eternal reward over temporary ruling. And even though his understanding of how God would work was faulty, he did what he did because of faith, because he believed in the God of Israel and forsook the gods of Egypt. That is a decision God wants all of us to make and at one point or another He brings us all to a choice point. There comes a day when we have to make a decision: surrender our lives and our future and everything about ourselves to Him and risk the consequences of that or go on living to please ourselves, doing what we want, wasting our short earthly lives fulfilling our own lusts. That day came for me when I was 19 and the decision I made put me here today instead of where I had planned to go with my life. Many of us have already made that decision; we have sold out and recognized that all we are and have is His and we're willing to follow Him anywhere and do anything He asks. Our life is lived asking, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" But a lot of us are still too reluctant to leave the palace of our own dreams and desires and go out and join our true brethren who are following Him. We're not willing to risk all, or even risk much at all, for Him. If we think it's going to cost us our friends or our job or our money or our comfort, we're not willing to sign up. But Moses was! And as in our case too:

c. God determined the consequences of his decision Vs. 14-15 tell us that his deed became known, Pharaoh found out and became furious and tried to arrest him and put him to death for this act of treason. And he fled for his life, alone and probably on foot 250 miles through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula up around the end of the Gulf of Aqaba on the east across the boundary line of Egyptian territory into the land of Midian, the southern extreme of modern Jordan or northwest Saudi Arabia, where he sat down exhausted by a well. That moment of decision took him back from prince to pauper just as quickly as the moment of protection had taken him from pauper to prince. It cost him everything, but God used it to get him OUT of the land of Egypt where he would learn more about God through:

3. an incident of provision (16-22) He was a stranger, alone and without food. Yet:

a. he followed God's moral will. In v. 17 he rescued some shepherdesses who were being bullied at the well when they came to water their flock. He stood up for them and fought for them, one against several, just because it was the right thing to do. But unbeknownst to him:

b. God ordered his circumstances Their father Reuel (or Jethro) turns out to be a godly man, a priest of God even. And in vs. 19-20 he takes in the stranger, offers him a place to stay and then employment caring for his flocks and in time even offers his daughter in marriage. What was not clear while he was fleeing through the wilderness was becoming clear: "God has been at work and has provided a way for me to live. It wasn't what I expected but it sure must be from Him." And note that:

c. he accepted God's provision for him v. 21 says Moses "agreed"; the KJV says he was "content", lit. he made a decision of the will to stay with Jethro and accept this life. He decided that since he was being obedient and this is what God had led him directly to, that he would accept it from the hand of God. So, for 40 long years he becomes a shepherd, tending sheep in the wilderness with a staff, knowing nothing more than the simple joys of family life, a wife, a child, a hot fire and warm food at night and honest hard work during the day, forgetting all about that palace life in Egypt and the suffering of his people. He accepted what God provided and that provision also proved to be a key experience in his life.

You see, God not only shaped the COURSE of Moses' life by these 3 key events:

II. God Shaped The Character Of Moses' Life By His Experiences as a result of those events. Look back a moment and think about it:

1. his 40 years in Egypt gave him the qualities of a leader - Acts 7:22 says *Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action*. Moses was no dummy. He had years of the best education Egypt could offer. He became a powerful man among his people, a leader that could be followed. It made him a man whose mind knew more than brick-making, one who understood freedom and justice and power and nations, one who was unafraid to step up and lead for the right cause. God needed that in him! And yet:

2. his birth and years with his mother **gave him his unshakeable identity as a Hebrew - Acts 7:23** reminded us, *When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites*. Why? Why care about them? Why visit them and be concerned about their suffering? No matter how hard he tried, He couldn't shake it. He was ONE of them; they were HIS people. And God needed that in him desperately. But then came the ultimate decision of his life and his whole world came crashing down around him. Yet:

3. his immense failure brought him to deep humility His cause was right, but Moses thought HE would deliver his people. He was too full of self for God to use. So God showed him how little and small and vulnerable he really was and sent him packing out of Egypt. And you know what the ultimate result of that was? A parenthesis in **Num. 12:3** which says years later, *Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth*. How did he get that way? I suspect it didn't happen in Egypt, but rather through his awful failure, which is how God so often has to break us of our self-centered pride. And finally:

4. his 40 years in Midian gave him the patience of a shepherd which he was going to need to lead a million and a half grumbling and complaining people across that wilderness to the promised land. On one occasion in the middle of it he complains to God, **Num. 11:12** *Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?* That was his assignment, to carry a nation of people in his arms as a nurse carries an infant. And how did he learn that? By carrying a flock of sheep back and forth across the desert in his arms for 40 years. There he learned the patience God would need to have in Him.

Someone put it this way: "Moses spent 40 years in Egypt learning to be something, 40 years in Midian learning to be nothing, and 40 years in the wilderness proving God to be everything!" And that last would not have come without the first two. God uses everything He sends into your life to shape your character and to create in you exactly the qualities He needs in you to fill the place in His plan He's shaping you for. The good news is that you don't have to understand the details of how He's doing it; you just have to trust it's taking place and follow Him no matter what happens! Now here's the key thought that pulls it all together:

III. God Correlated The Preparation Of His Man With His Entire Plan (23-25) Think about how God caused all these circumstances to come together.

Moses' 80 years of preparation ended at the exact time...when Abraham's 400 year promise was complete. God told Abraham that after 400 years his children would be brought out of slavery and 12:41 says, *At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt*. V. 25 tells us that his preparation ended... *when the Pharaoh died who wanted to kill him* so that now he could return to Egypt without being a wanted man. V. 26 tells us it ended... *when the Israelites were desperate enough to leave their life in Egypt*, when their suffering was so awful that they were groaning and crying out for help, ready at last to leave Egypt and its gods. And it ended at the exact time... *when God was ready to*

judge the peoples of Canaan by bringing Israel into their land. The life of one man and three nations of peoples all woven together in a specific pattern that only the hand of God could correlate, a pattern called the plan of God. And that's what He's doing with your life too. He's preparing you, shaping you, molding you, for that exact place He has for you in His plan. It is not always easy. Only God knows how much Moses must have cried and agonized and perhaps despaired at times. So will you, but the lesson of Moses' life is that despite all of the upheaval and agony and pain that may come into your life, trust God; He knows what He is doing. I leave you with this poem by an anonymous author found in Ray Edman's book "The Disciplines Of Life":

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man,

When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;

When He yearns with all His heart
to create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;

While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!
How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;

How He uses whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try His splendor out--

God knows what He's about.

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

I. God's Preparation For Redemption - Chs. 1-4

He Called His Servant-Leader - Chs. 3-4

In chapter 2, we saw how God prepared Moses for the task that He had planned for him. In chs. 3-4 we'll see how God called Moses to the task He had planned for him. This idea of being called by God to His service is a scary thing to many believers. Often, they feel God only calls people to big important tasks like He did Moses. For instance, God might call a person to become a pastor or a missionary. But I believe God has planned a place of service in life for each one of us. It may be in those kinds of major life-altering directions or it may be a calling to go on a short term missions trip or to teach a Sunday school class or to care for babies in the nursery or even to care for the church's website. But whatever He has planned for us, He has prepared us to serve in that role and He also has to call us to serve in that role. Now that call may be very dramatic and unmistakable like Moses' was. I met an old preacher once who told me he was called to preach while operating a bulldozer one day, that God spoke to him just as clearly as you or I would. But God's call may be also be the aligning of a set of circumstances that all point to you as the one to do the job or it may be as simple as a desire He has placed in your heart to do the task that is in front of you. But however the call comes to you, it will contain the same 3 elements. Let's explore them together in the story of Moses' call.

I. The Elements Of God's Call [read 3:1-6] Every call, if it is from God, contains:

- 1. a vision:** and by that I don't mean a miraculous sight like bush that burns but never burns up or a picture in your mind or a dream. I mean that every call, no matter how dramatic or how mundane, imparts to you: **a clear sense of who God is.** You see, God's call:

a. it comes in the midst of life's experiences to one who is ready Moses was busy being a shepherd, watching sheep and leading them all over the wilderness to find pasture. He felt called to that simply by the fact that all the circumstances pointed to it clearly 40 years earlier when he fled from Egypt and arrived in Midian. And he was simply going about it when God stepped into the midst of his experience to interrupt it and say clearly: "There is something else I want you to do!" That's how God works. He is always leading us on to the next task. His calling comes to us right where we are in the midst of life; you don't have to go off on some week long spiritual retreat and sit under a tree to hear it. He comes to you right where you are in the middle of all that you are doing and says, "Look at this. This is what I want you to do." When Moses saw the bush, he was interested. He knew it was a wondrous thing, a supernatural thing. He knew God was in this somewhere and when he heard his name, he said, *Here I am!* That means more than "I'm over here!" It is the Hebrew way of saying, "I am ready; I am waiting for Your instructions; I am at your service." Isaiah heard God and responded by saying, "Here I am; send me!" God doesn't call people who don't want to know His will, who don't want Him in their lives. God calls people who will "come over to look", people who live in readiness, who pray, "Lord, what will you have me to do!" And when God is making His presence known in our lives:

b. it always brings a sense of Gods' holiness and sovereignty. The fact that Moses saw a bush burn is incidental. Moses realized that God is sovereign, that He is in control and that he is holy and pure. He took off his shoes and bowed his head in reverence. He came before God humbly, reverently, with a sense of God. Whenever God shows up in our lives, we get that sense that Jacob had when he woke up after his ladder dream: *...Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew [it] not.* "This is God talking to me" and you feel humbled that He is showing Himself in your life and want to submit to Him. When you have a call, you always have a strong sense of WHO it is from. Secondly, every call contains:

2. a purpose: that is, a **clear understanding of what God is doing (3:7-9)** Moses hadn't thought much about that in years. Egypt and the suffering of his people was out of mind. His life was occupied with what was in front of his nose, sheep and shepherding. But God told him, "I'm about something bigger than this; I have redemption on My heart. I hear the suffering of My people in Egypt and I'm getting ready to rescue them and bring them out." Oh, Jesus has a bigger purpose on his heart than the daily stuff that we are so occupied with and bogged down in. He is about redemption! He is *...taking from all the nations a people for himself - Acts 15:14.* He is making disciples from among all the nations, building His church, advancing His kingdom into the hearts of people where you live and where you work as well as all over the world. The heart of God is not about building the size of your flock, or increasing the amount of money you have in the bank or making your business successful; it is about redeeming people from the bondage of sin and delivering them out of the kingdom of darkness where they live and into the kingdom of light where you live. That is why you are on earth! That is His program and He has a place for you to be involved in it! If God is calling you, He makes it clear to you not only who He is, but how the most important task on earth is bringing people into relationship with Him! Then thirdly, every call contains:

3. a plan: that is, a **clear direction as to what I am to do (3:10)** God says, "I need a man to lead my people out and I want YOU to go do it!" He showed Moses the place he was to have in the purpose God was about. Of course, He does not call everyone to be the leader, the "Moses". He calls plenty of "Joshuas" to assist the leaders with practical details and He even calls "Bezalels" and "Oholiab" to build the physical structure where He will be worshipped. But whatever His plan for you is:

a. it is revealed specifically (16-22) Notice how He tells Moses who to speak to and exactly what to say. God's call is not "Here, go do this and make up your own plan!" He is a God of details. He wants to lead us in the specifics. He wants to show us what, when, how and who. But that brings up another thought. His plan:

b. it is revealed progressively God gave Moses an outline but He didn't tell Moses everything all at once. All of the 10 plagues God was planning are covered by the simple statement of v. 20. Moses had to keep on listening and as he needed instructions, God would make them clear. That's how a call works. After you take the first step that God has made plain to you, He will make the next step clear and then the next and the next. God will not give you a blueprint for the next 10 years of your life all at once; He reserves the right to be Lord, to superintend and direct as you go. What He has in mind is often nothing like what you imagine and He has the right to change it as He goes. The future is His; the important thing is to obey what He has shown you do to NOW and rest in this:

c. it is revealed sufficiently Whatever He has shown you to do is ENOUGH. It is all you need to know. If you needed more, He would have given it! When He lifts your eyes to what He's about and impresses on you, "I want you to do THIS.", just DO it and trust Him.

Listen to this testimony of one couple who were met by God's call in their lives:

As I stood on the trail, a shot rang out. I whirled around because the noise was loud, coming from close by. I peered into the woods, but no one was visible. I placed my hand on my leg and felt something warm. When I pulled my hand away, I could see that it was covered in blood. I had been shot! I would later consider this as God's call on my life. During my recovery from the bullet wound I had time to think. Why did this happen to me? What is the meaning of this? While recuper-

ating at home I read about the need for agricultural missionaries in Bangladesh. I learned it was one of the world's poorest countries. There was a desperate need to increase agricultural production to feed its starving population. I had been raised on a farm, had a degree in agriculture and was working as a soil scientist. After talking with my wife, Donna, praying and discussing my thoughts with our pastor, I submitted an application to a missions organization for possible service. Then I waited ... and waited and waited some more! I never heard back from the mission's office. With time, I accepted that as God's response. God didn't want us in Bangladesh for some reason. We now know that God had other plans for us. Over the years, while working in the secular world, Donna and I have found a variety of ways to serve. They have included ministering in choir, the church kitchen, servant ministries, church maintenance, human resources, on the nominating committee, official board, as delegates — wherever we can contribute. We have learned that God's call to service doesn't always mean full-time work in missions or ministry; it just means full-time service to God wherever we are. Donna and I are now close to retirement age. We don't feel that God only calls the young. We know that God calls those who are in their 50s, 60s and beyond. We don't feel too old for ministry. We are waiting on the Lord with obedient hearts, praying for His guidance and continuing to listen for His next call. [“God's Call” by Glenn Weesies www.freemethodistchurch.org/Sections/LifeAdvice/Stories/08-20-04_Weesies.htm] God has a call for you too, if you're listening! What is yours? But once you've heard it, the question becomes, how will you respond? Let's look at Moses' response to what God revealed and we will see:

II. The Effects Of God's Call

There are two of them. The first, as I've already alluded to, is:

1. genuine humility: (3:11) Moses' first thought is: ***I am not worthy!*** He is absolutely awed with a profound sense of wonder that God would use him for so great a task. That's a tremendously healthy thing. If your reaction is, “Wow, God finally noticed my abilities and gave me something important to do!”, you're in deep trouble! Jesus said, *you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'*” - Luke 17:10. Even the great Paul never lost that; he wrote, *I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle* - 1Cor 15:9. We are not worthy of whatever privilege God has granted us. But in answer to that we have:

- **God's assurance: (3:12)** God says, ***I am with you!*** Always! This means nothing to the proud, but to the humble it means everything. When God calls us to a thing; He will be WITH us in the thing! What more could we ask! And the second effect of His call is:

2. genuine curiosity: (3:13) Our question is always ***How will this work?*** “What should I say?” “What about this or that?” “What if this happens or that happens?” We're curious; we always want to know how God is going to work out all the details. It's natural. But in answer to that we have:

- **God's answer: (14-15)** God did not explain the details; He simply said, remember this: ***I AM who I AM!*** “My Name is Jehovah, the Eternal I Am, the One who always was, always is and always will be! I am the God of your fathers, the God who was there for all the generations of the faithful before you and who will be there for all the generations after you. I gave Abraham a son, I gave Isaac a wife, I delivered Jacob from Esau and put Joseph on the throne of Egypt and I haven't changed!” Get the point? God is God and that's really all you need to know! How it's going to work is HIS problem!

Humility and curiosity are normal reactions when God calls us to serve Him, and God is quite patient with us and willing to reassure us. But in Ch. 4 Moses had some other reactions too. These are actually:

III. The Objections To God's Call (4:1-23)

These are not brought in a spirit of humility but in a spirit of resistance and doubt. The first one that always comes up is:

1. impracticality: (1) The first thing we always object is: ***This won't work!*** And we always have our reasons! “I tried this before. They didn't listen. You don't know them; they're hard-nosed people. Yada...yada...yada...” We always have fifty reasons why it doesn't make sense to do what God is telling us to do, why it will never work. But again, we have:

- **God's assurance: (2-9)** God says, ***I will MAKE it work!*** “What do you have in your hand? A stick? Just watch! I can make a stick into a snake and I can make it back into a stick again when I want to. I can give you an illness and I can take it away from you just as easily. Water changes into blood or into wine at My Word! I will MAKE Israel listen to you!” Nothing is impractical if God chooses to do it! Moses divided the sea by waving a stick. Gideon sent almost all his soldiers home to win the battle! David killed a 9 foot armor-clad giant with a stone and Israel knocked down impenetrable walls at Jericho by shouting at them. And if God tells you to do something, He will make it turn out exactly as He has planned, no matter how impractical or foolish it looks. And the second objection that always comes up is:

2. inability: (10) ***I can't do it!*** “I can't speak in public. I'm too shy. I'm not organized enough. I have no experience. I've never done anything like that before. I'm not strong enough. I'm not smart enough.” The excuses are many and varied but they stem from one faulty thought pattern: this depends on ME! But that is not what God intends at all. We have:

- **God's assurance: (11-12)** God says, ***I will enable you!*** “It is not about you or your ability. It is about ME and MY ability. I made you and prepared you for this and I will empower you to do what I command!” God has no lack of ability! Rather what He needs is our availability, our willingness to obey and do what He says. But often when we throw up the objection of inability to God, it is merely a disguise for one of the:

IV. The Obstacles To God's Call that we see in the end of the chapter (4:13-26). Was Moses really not eloquent and slow of speech? Stephen said in Acts that at 40 he was a man "mighty in words and deeds". The truth is that he was trying to disguise his:

1. unwillingness: (13) There's what he really means: ***I don't want to do it!*** "I like my life as a shepherd here with nothing to worry about beyond these sheep. I don't want to go back there and get involved in all of that. I don't want to face the trouble, the danger, the responsibility. Send somebody else! I don't want to go!" Now God has been very patient with Moses up to this point, and has assured him and even reassured him after his objections. But Here is the line. When I am unwilling to do what God wants me to do, that is insubordination against the Lord of the Universe. He doesn't like that (14-17) Moses got the tone of that. Accommodations God will make, but unwillingness is an offense and Moses knew better than to continue in it. So in vs. 18-23 Moses finally obeys and goes! He heads home and tells his father-in-law and packs up his family and heads for Egypt. And on the way we have this strange story in vs. (24-26) that spells out for us the final obstacle that impedes God's call:

2. disobedience: (24-26) I don't have time this morning to explain all there is to know about this story. Just note that in v. 20 mentions Moses' sonS, plural. His first son, Gershom, was born over 35 years earlier in 2:22; he was a full-grown man. This fight is over his second son, who is unnamed here, but whom we find out later he names Eliezer in connection with this incident. Look at 18:1-4. God sent his wife and sons back to Midian after this incident. Eliezer's name is given with the exclamation, "God saved me from the sword of Pharaoh." When? Look back to 4:19. That's his response to God's news that Pharaoh is dead! My guess on what's happening is this: Zipporah was pregnant while Moses was out in the wilderness meeting God. He arrived home in time for the birth. Hebrew children were always circumcised on the 8th day as far back as Abraham. Moses and Gershom packed up mom and baby and started for Egypt and the 8th day happened on the way. That night Moses was supposed to circumcise and name his son and he and Zipporah have a fight about it. She will not give in. It is a bloody custom! And Moses is evidently about to give in to her and disobey God's command so God holds him paralyzed until she gives in and he obeys. Now you don't have to buy that scenario, but it makes sense to me. In effect Moses said: ***I WILL NOT do what You say!*** until he was forced. Unwillingness and disobedience are the two obstacles that fully stand in the way of your calling. As long as you remain unwilling or disobedient, instead of using you, God has to discipline you! Remember Jonah's lesson! And don't forget this lesson from Moses, either. Be like Mary, who when God's call came to her answered, *"I am the Lord's servant,...May it be to me as you have said."* - Luke 1:38. A businessman by the name of Reynolds from Peoria IL, gave this testimony about evangelist D. L. Moody, *"The first time I ever saw him was in a little shanty that had been abandoned by a saloonkeeper. He had managed to get possession of the place in order to hold a meeting that night. I was a little late and had never met Mr. Moody, but when I came in, the first thing I saw was a heavyset man standing up holding a small black boy in his arms. By the light of a few tallow candles he was trying to read to him the story of the prodigal son. A great many of the words he could not make out, and so he had to skip them. I thought, if the Lord can ever use such an instrument as that for His honor and glory, it will certainly astonish me! After the meeting was over, Moody said to me. 'Mr. Reynolds, I have only one talent; I have no education, but I love the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to do something for Him. Pray for me. Pray for me every day; pray now that the Lord will keep me humble.'" Reynolds reported later, "I have never ceased, from that day to this, to pray for that devoted Christian soldier. I have watched him since then, have had counsel with him, and know him thoroughly; and, for consistent walk and conversation, I have never met a man to equal him."* God used D.L. Moody to change the world of his day just the way He used Moses in his day. And He will use you just the way He has planned. If you maintain that humble spirit and have a heart that has truly caught a vision of His greatness and wants to do something for Him, He will call you to it. Are you listening? How will you respond?

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

I. God's Preparation For Redemption - Chs. 1-4

He Prepared Israel Through Discouragement - Chs. 5-6

In Ch. 1 we saw how God prepared the circumstances to redeem Israel. In Ch. 2 we saw how God prepared Moses to participate in that redemption and then in 3-4 how God called him to that task. But God's final step of preparation for what He was about to do in chs. 5-6 is one that we would not immediately recognize. Ch. 5 is the story of a grand failure. Moses goes and does what God tells him and it backfires; it makes everything ten times worse than it already is. It has the opposite effect of everything he intended. And as a result, both He and Israel become discouraged. Now failure and discouragement are not high on our list of favorite ways we'd like God to work. In our estimation they rate right up there with root canals and colonoscopies as things He might use to enrich our lives, yet failures, discouragements, setbacks and like painful events are some of His greatest and most powerful tools as we've already seen in Moses' early life. So, let's trace the story together and see what we can learn. We begin with:

I. The Hopeful Obedience Of God's Servants Moses is on his way back to Egypt as we meet him in 4:27-30: So, notice that:

1. Moses went to the elders of Israel exactly as God had commanded; he did what he was told and **he was encouraged by seeming initial success (31)**. They believed him! That was a miracle in itself! And they bowed down and worshipped; they believed God. I'm sure Moses thought, "Wow, this is really working!" And so:

2. Moses went to Pharaoh as God had commanded (5:1) Can't you see him marching in there full of confidence making his demand? I'm sure he fully expected Pharaoh to comply with it in one way or another or at least to reject it temporarily in some more minor fashion, but he was clearly not prepared for:

II. The Discouraging Results Of Their Obedience Pharaoh had a fit. He reacted entirely the opposite of how they expected that God would have him react! You see, we think (and we are taught) that if God is in it, it has to succeed; it has to work! But what about when God is in it and we do everything by the book and it doesn't work? Now Pharaoh is kind of the villain of all villains, the kind of guy you love to hate. He is a picture of every haughty, proud person who lifts themselves up against God and His people. He's a type of every tyrannical ruler who tries to persecute the church down through the ages. And in the end, he's a pretty good stand-in for Satan himself as he stands opposed to the work of God, to God's redeeming actions, whatever form they take. God's people obediently advance and he fights back. Just think how this looks from the viewpoint of Moses and Israel. As a result of their listening and going to Pharaoh:

1. their God was ridiculed (2) "Who is this God of yours, anyway? I never heard of him! He's not real or if he is, he is the god of slaves! Look at how he treats his people! He lets you suffer!" When failure comes, when tragedy strikes, when you suffer, it does not take long for someone to mock and say, "Where is this God you're always talking about!" You probably know what that feels like, it's discouraging! You wanted this to be a witness and instead, it turns out to reinforce the opposite. And, of course:

2. their demand was rejected (2b) Pharaoh would not do what they wanted; they were not able to move forward. In effect, their prayer for deliverance, their groaning that the Lord heard, was not answered. He seemingly didn't do anything to set them free. I'm sure you know what that's like: you pray and pray for something and what you wanted with all your heart does not come to pass. How discouraging is that? When all you've planned and worked and prayed for doesn't come through, it's very discouraging. And what's worse is:

3. their motives were maligned (4-5) Pharaoh says, "You're lazy, that's the real problem. You just want to get the people a rest!" And he repeats that theme a little later when the Israelites can't do what is demanded of them **(14-18)**. "You're lazy! Work harder and you won't be worried about this religious stuff!" When our plans fail, when our prayers go unanswered, how often are we ourselves blamed? Called fakes or charlatans, even if not out loud, in other people's minds. We're bigoted or narrow-minded or archaic or we're in it for the money or we're hypocrites, etc. etc. We want to see the glory of God and we get accused of all kinds of things, especially when we don't succeed and that is REALLY discouraging. And the worst result is:

4. their misery was multiplied (6-13) Now they had to make bricks without straw, and just as many of them! If they worked 12 hours a day before, now they had to go out and gather straw for another 6 hours so they could make the bricks and it was more than anyone could do. Their lives went from hard to impossible because Moses tried to do what God commanded! It backfired; instead of freeing them his efforts deepened their bondage and made them twice as miserable as they already were! You pray and you obey and instead of life getting better, it gets worse. New problems happen. New challenges arise. Instead of moving toward a light at the end of the tunnel, you become overwhelmed with the mountain of circumstances falling down all around you, too heavy to bear. Talk about discouraged! They were in the pits and when Moses saw what happened it sent him into the pits too! Now when you become discouraged it really affects you and you can see in the record that follows:

III. The Destructive Effects Of Discouragement When we become discouraged, it seems to be in our nature to look for someone to blame for our pain. And the three most likely candidates are other people, God or ourselves! When we are discouraged:

1. it often results in bitterness toward leaders (19-21) When people are leading us, we expect results and when things don't turn out the way we all expected, it's easy to say that it's their fault. Not that this is anything like what happened to Moses, but just as a case in point, myself and all our elders were very excited over the last year about the Jesus Video Project. We led you to donate something like \$5,000 and to prayer walk repeatedly and finally 48,000 videos got mailed out at Easter. And we waited for the promised response cards...and waited....and asked...and waited. And last Thursday we got 3, yes 3!, cards in the mail. The lack of response has been tremendously discouraging all the way along and this is nearly unbelievable. And one very natural response you could have would be to blame me or to blame our leaders and we feel like blaming the leaders we know from Campus Crusade who led us into this thing. But the truth is that every home in 7 zip codes had the Gospel delivered to its front door; that WILL bear fruit. And moreover, every one of the leaders involved was only trying to be obedient to God as they were understanding His instructions to them. But when results don't happen and especially when things backfire and create worse problems, we become bitter toward our leaders:

- and display an **unwillingness to follow them** God sent Moses to speak to the Israelites again, but look at **(6:9)**. Discouragement and suffering make us unwilling to listen, unwilling to follow the very people who are giving their lives to help and care for us, whether it is parents, teachers, or even church leaders. Secondly, discouragement:

2. it often results in bitterness toward God (5:22-23) Moses felt like God had failed, like He had not done His part, like He had forgotten that He was supposed to help. Oh, it is in these kinds of moments that Satan loves to implant these lies. "God should have protected me but He didn't. It wasn't fair, God shouldn't have let that happen to me; He doesn't love me!" You would be amazed at how many believers have some form of that lie hidden and buried away inside of them because of painful experiences they've gone through. We so often blame God when things go sour or if we're too scared to blame Him, we blame ourselves so that discouragement:

3. it often results in self-doubt (6:10-12) "It must be my fault. If only I'd have spoken with more authority or was more eloquent. If only I had known more... There's something wrong with me; that's why nothing ever works!" There's another lie that's buried down inside so many of us! And it keeps us from pressing on and serving God, because after all, "there must be something wrong with me! If I were better, smarter, stronger, more eloquent (you name it), things would have worked!"

And did you notice that all three of those responses on the part of Moses and Israel fell right in line with Pharaoh's plan? "Keep 'em in bondage! Make 'em suffer and they'll forget this Moses; they'll forget their god!" That has been Satan's strategy from that day to this! He wants to use discouragement and failure and suffering to drive wedges between you and the people who want to help you and between you and God! Divide and conquer; he knows that stratagem well! A few weeks ago, we watched a movie about the 16th century reformer Martin Luther. *Luther was often overcome with depressing doubts. On one such occasion a friend said to him, "Our Lord in heaven is looking down and probably thinking, 'What shall I do with this man Luther? I have poured My mercies upon him and given him many gifts and much grace, and yet he will despair of My goodness.'" These well-chosen words shook Luther out of his gloom and uncertainty. So later on, when another friend visited him to complain about how severely the devil was buffeting him, Luther told his visitor, "The devil can do that in a masterly way; otherwise, he would be no devil! You come to me, dear friend, and believe that I can surely comfort you through God's Word, and that is good. But if you expect good from me, what may you not expect from Christ who died for you? Look up to Him who is ten thousand times better than I."* Luther clearly learned how Satan wants to use our discouragement to defeat us and so must we. But we must also learn to see:

IV. The Purposes For Which God Sends Discouragement That's right, I said "God sends discouragement". I want you to turn back in the story with me for a moment and notice something. Look what God had told Moses before he ever went to Egypt: **3:18-20, 4:21** God had already told Moses Pharaoh wasn't going to listen! That Pharaoh was not going to let them go! God already knew it, planned for it and told Moses to expect it; when it happened, he should have been saying, "Wow, see! God said this was going to happen; everything is right on track!" It's clear that this setback, this failure, this discouragement was part of God's plan from the beginning. And God has also planned to build some of it into our lives, even if He doesn't spell it out so clearly for us. But why on earth would God put failure into His plan? Well, first of all:

1. God often enhances His glory through seeming failure Look what he says to Moses who is wallowing in doubt and discouragement **(6:1)**. *NOW you will see what I will do!* Failure:

a. it reveals the human impossibility of what God is about to do Peter and the boys had been fishing all night and had failed to catch a single fish. Jesus came to them and said, "Let down your nets for a catch!" Peter's response was, "We've been fishing all night and we're the fishermen here; we know there aren't any fish out there to be caught! But I'll humor you and do it anyway." And when they pulled in all those fish, Peter's first response was to fall on his knees and say, "Depart from me for I'm a sinful man Lord!" He knew he was in the presence of God! His failure prepared him to understand that when the impossible happened that God was the one doing it. Moses' great failure proved to all Israel beyond doubt that their situation was humanly hopeless. No Moses, no mere man, could help them. So, when they were delivered it had to be the hand of God! Along those same lines, failure:

b. it reinforces the reliability of God's word when it eventually comes to pass Joseph had two dreams, that one day all his family would bow down before him. He thought they were from God. But what happened? His brothers sold him as a slave. They said, "We'll see what happens to his dreams!" He's taken to Egypt and just when he begins to get hope he is falsely accused and thrown into prison, and just when he begins to get hope, he is forgotten and left there two full years. But the Psalmist wrote, *They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.* - *Psalm 105:18-19*. Imagine the shock as his brothers are bowing down before him, now the #2 man on the throne of Egypt and he says, "I am Joseph!" I imagine that after their terror was over, they looked at one another and said, "He was right all those years ago; GOD was right! God's Word is true!" When God says something it always comes true and temporary failures just reinforce that all the more. It comes true DESPITE failures and discouragements. And failure:

c. it reinforces to us our absolute dependence on Him When we fail, we learn, "If this is ever gonna happen, it HAS to be God, 'cause I sure know I can't do it!" It throws us back on our knees crying out to him!

God finds all kinds of ways to get glory out of our very failures. They end up enhancing His reputation, verifying to us the very things He's taught us all along. But here's a second line of thought:

2. God often makes us willing to leave "the familiar" through suffering When life in Egypt was good, the Hebrews didn't want to leave. Egypt had become their home. If Moses had come and offered to lead them out, they'd have asked, "Why? We like it here!" So, God let them experience slavery and bondage, but even that wasn't so bad for a while. When they looked at Moses' offer to lead 2 million people out into the desert of Sinai where there were no roads and there was no water or food, maybe it wasn't so bad to work hard making bricks all day and at least have a couple of meals every day and a safe place to sleep. People stay in their suffering all the time because it's familiar; it's more comfortable than the alternative. Battered wives stay and keep getting battered because at least it's familiar and they understand it and can cope with it. So, in the bricks without straw phase God cranked the heat up a notch on Israel. He made their suffering so severe there was no way left for them to endure. He made them ready to leave! So often it is in times of failure and discouragement and suffering that we become willing to finally part with the things we're holding on to, that we become willing to "risk" following God into some new desert experience that we would have never have considered before! Then thirdly, if we're looking for Him:

3. God often reveals Himself more clearly in our time of suffering It is now, down in the pit of despair, that God chooses to give Moses a theology lesson (6:2-8). Why now? Why when is Moses so discouraged, he's hardly willing to go on? Well:

a. it is in these times we come to truly realize WHO He is (2-3) God says, "Moses, I've told you my Name, but now I want you to UNDERSTAND My Name! I am THE LORD, JEHOVAH, the Eternal One! Three times He says it, v. 6, 8. Through this time you will know me in a way that you never knew Me before, in a way that even your fathers never knew me! You will find out who I really am and what I can do! You'll see the greatness of My power revealed through your weakness! And:

b. it is in these times we come to truly realize He HEARS us (5) When He meets us down there in the pit of despair, when know we have reached our limit and our hope is dashed and God shows up and God speaks to us in a way that we can't miss. Then we KNOW it is HIM and that He cares! Sometimes in the midst of our discouragement we are finally ready to hear his still small voice because we've finally quit talking!

Irma Levesque tells this story: "I grew up in rural New Hampshire, the eldest daughter in a family of six children. In our chaotic household I found refuge in make-believe, often pretending that I was a beautiful girl named "Joan Bishop" (Joan from Joan of Arc and Bishop from the English translation of my French last name). I never told anyone else about Joan Bishop. It was a secret between God and me. Little girls grow up, though, and the day came when I bade good-bye to Joan Bishop...and to God. I moved to New York, got caught up in a fiercely competitive line of work, and gradually found my personal life getting lonelier and lonelier. In time I knew I wanted to return to God, but I hesitated. Would He welcome me back? One Sunday morning I could not stay away any longer. I went to a nearby church. I walked down the north aisle, past the old pews, each with its own waist-high door and tiny brass nameplates, relics from the 19th century when parishioners purchased their seats. I chose an empty pew and closed the door behind me. 'Please, God,' I began to pray, 'I'm lonely and afraid. Are You here? Is this the place for me? Will these people all around take me in?' I wanted God's assurance that I should stay in that church, but no assurance seemed to come. Suddenly I felt an overpowering urge to leave. Hastily gathering up my coat and scarf, I opened the pew door and stepped into the aisle. As I turned to shut the old door, my eyes were drawn to its tiny brass nameplate. The plate read: J. BISHOP. I returned to my seat. I was home again." [His Mysterious Ways. Fleming H. Revell, 1988. Pages 72-74.] It is in those times when it feels like the bottom has fallen out of our lives, when all our hopes are dashed and discouragement threatens to sweep us away. It is then that God often speaks the clearest if we're listening.

O my friends, when you fail is not the time to give up. When you're discouraged it is not the time to throw in the towel and become bitter and blame other people and blame yourself or even blame God. It is the time to listen harder, to say, "OK God, I know that NOTHING happens to me outside of your plan and You know what you're doing. This thing did not take you by surprise. So speak, Lord! I'm listening! Show me what to do next. Show me more of who You are. Show me how you want to get glory out of this thing. Speak Lord, for I love you no matter what the enemy seems to be shouting. I wait upon You for your instructions! Amen!"

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

II. God's Process Of Redemption - 5:1-15:21

He Displayed His Glory In Judgments On Egypt - Chs. 7-8

The second major portion of the story of the Exodus actually began last week. God began the process of redeeming Israel by allowing discouragement when Moses first approached Pharaoh. Israel was now in total misery, daily making bricks without straw and both the people and Moses are totally discouraged. So, God says at the beginning of Ch. 6, "Now you

will see what I will do!" And in chs. 7-10 we see it! God sends ten awful plagues upon the land of Egypt. This is probably the most familiar part of the story to you, but before we get into the details, let's consider together:

I. God's Purpose In Sending Ten Plagues Upon Egypt (7:1-7) Before He did it, God explained why He was going to do it. First of all, these plagues:

1. they were judicial: they were mighty acts of judgment; they were **His means of punishing Egypt for her sins (4a)** God laid His hand upon Egypt and literally destroyed and devastated the whole country because of their sins. Not only were they idolaters who rejected the true God, but they wickedly enslaved His people, innocent people. They were cruel and heartless and ruthless in the way they treated God's people. And they were guilty of the wholesale slaughter of thousands of Israelite babies that were killed by being thrown in the Nile. In fact, that seems to be the very point at which God decided to step in and bring Moses into the picture. That ought to stand as a warning to those who destroy the innocent whether it is genocide in Africa or infanticide here. God will only tolerate this so long before judgment falls! Then at the same time as they were judicial toward Egypt:

2. they were merciful toward Israel: They were **His means of saving Israel from her suffering (4b)** These mighty acts are the means by which He heard the cry of His people and brought out and delivered them. They are an expression of His love for His people and a display of what lengths He will go to help us when we cry to Him! But beyond both of these, the ten plagues:

3. they were primarily spiritual: They were **His means of declaring His own glory**, of displaying and demonstrating who He truly is. As for the Egyptians who were terrible idolaters:

a. they taught the Egyptians that He is the true God (5) He wanted the Egyptians to know who He is, to know Him. He sent these plagues so that they would know Him. Look with me at **12:12**; the plagues were judgments on the gods of Egypt. In each one of them God showed Himself superior to one or more false gods they worshipped. By the time He was done, He wanted them to know that their gods were nothing and He was God. When in the end He drowned their army in the Red Sea, look at **14:4, 18**. He wanted glory and worship from the Egyptians! But the plagues also served the same purpose for the Israelites:

b. they taught the Israelites that He is the true God - 10:1-2 Israel entered Egypt worshipping the Lord but while they were in Egypt, Ez. 20:7-8 tells us that they learned to cling to the idols of Egypt and they even continued doing so after God brought them out. Joshua had to tell them in the land to throw away the gods they had worshipped in Egypt (24:14). So, God's point in all these plagues was to show Israel as well as the Egyptians that He is the only true God so they would worship Him with all their hearts for generations to come! And indeed, they did sing and write about this event for a thousand years. But even beyond these two peoples, these ten plagues:

c. they taught all the world that He is the true God - 9:16 God made Pharaoh obstinate so He would multiply His miracles so that all the watching world would hear about it and fear Him. Did it work? Listen to what Rahab told the spies 40 years later when they came to Jericho: **Josh. 2:10-11** *We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*

That was His point. He picked the most powerful nation on earth, the U.S. of its day, the greatest military power, and destroyed and devastated it completely to demonstrate to the whole world who He is so they would believe and worship! That is ALWAYS His point: that He might get glory and the nations might worship Him! Some of you are spending your nights like I am glued to the news about the war going on between Israel and the terrorist group Hezbollah in Lebanon. There is horrible devastation and terrible loss of life. But God's point is not whether Israel is right or how quickly American citizens get evacuated from Lebanon. His point is that He wants to use this fear and terror and loss to drive people to Him, to bring about believing Israelis and believing Lebanese and even believing members of Hezbollah and US citizens! That is always what He is up to! So, it all begins when Moses goes back to Pharaoh and we see:

II. God's Power Displayed (7:8-13) Pharaoh challenged Moses, "Let your God prove Himself! Let Him do a miracle!" So immediately Moses throws down his rod as God has told him to and it becomes a snake, no doubt a cobra! You can bet they jumped back quickly! But Pharaoh wants to make sure this is not some two-bit magician's trick so he calls his own magicians and:

1. the magicians attempt to duplicate God's power, to see if they can do what HE can do! And it seems they can; their rods "become snakes" too. Was this an illusion or could they really create life? Well, I rather think it was an illusion. And later they "prove" they can turn water red and cause frogs to come out of the Nile and conjure up biting flies just like God. They had warning for all these things and time to prepare. You see magicians do harder things on TV today than these and it's not just trick photography. Tremendously convincing illusions can be created, but make no mistake, some of these kinds of folks are connected to the spirit world and are demonically energized. The False Prophet of Revelation 13 is given satanic power to "perform great and miraculous signs", genuine miracles to deceive the world into worshipping the Antichrist. And I don't doubt that these magicians had a measure of that demonic power also. But

as we'll see, there came a point when they gave up! Actually, I would think that if they had real power, they would have spent their efforts trying to STOP what Moses was doing instead of duplicating it! Clear up the Nile, drive back the frogs, blow away the biting flies and so on in a true magician's duel, but they didn't even attempt that. And even they came to admit to Pharaoh that he was dealing with God, not with magician's illusions like their own! In that there is a:

2. the lesson: all religious falsehood will be exposed By the way, we happen to know the names of the two chief Egyptian magicians, thanks to Paul, and he tells us the lesson in **2 Tim. 3:8-9**. Their names were Jannes and Jambres and the lesson is that men like these will not get very far; they can only do so much and their abilities will end; their falsehood will be exposed so that everyone can see it. Not all that looks religious, that looks like it has spiritual power is of God! In the end if it is a false counterfeit it will be exposed, you can count on it! God is willing to take on all challengers and they all lose whether it's Moses and these two, or Peter and Simon the magician in Samaria, or Paul and Elymas the sorcerer who opposed him on Cyprus and was struck blind! In the end God shows them all for what they are, charlatans and impostors. Their snakes get swallowed up by His and He proves that He alone is God! But now that the stage is set for the contest:

III. God's Plagues Begin in earnest. We'll look at the first 4 of them briefly today and the rest next time. The first was:

1. the plague of blood (7:14-25) Please note how serious this was. Egypt is a vast expanse of desert sand except for the fact that the Nile River flows through it from south to north. The Nile is what gives life to Egyptians. They drink its water. They irrigate their fields with its water. Every year it overflows its banks in a great flood, bringing with it rich silt eroded from the mountains at its source and depositing it on the land creating great fertility. The Nile literally gives life to Egypt. Small wonder that they deified the Nile itself into a god and worshipped it. So, when God turned it to blood:

a. it was directed against Hapy (not "Happy") **the god of the Nile**, who is often pictured as a fat-bellied bearded man as well as other gods and goddesses of the Nile [they had literally dozens of gods and goddesses worshipped at various places and times - it's confusing!]. At any rate the ancient Egyptian *Hymn to the Flood* says, says in speaking about the Nile: *Lightmaker who comes from the dark, Fattener of herds, Might that fashions all, None can live without him!* That was God's point! He polluted their source of life by turning it blood-colored to remind them of the blood of those innocent drowned infants and causing it to become foul and stink and be full of death! They had to dig pits and let fresh water seep in through the sand to get water to live for a week. So:

b. its lesson was clear: **Jehovah is the God of life!** Not the Nile! Jehovah, the true God controls the Nile and turns off its life-giving powers at His command! Hapy is powerless! Now you should know that when the annual flood comes, the Nile naturally runs red with clay silt from the mountains and must be filtered for drinking. But whether God amplified some natural phenomenon like this or not, remember this miracle happened in a moment of time at God's command as Moses' rod struck it. Yet that was not enough for Pharaoh; his magicians could make water turn red too, so next God sent:

2. the plague of frogs (8:1-15) Did you ever wonder, "Why frogs?" Frogs don't bite; they don't eat crops or destroy anything. Why send frogs? At worst a million frogs are just a huge annoyance. Well, in Egypt, the frog was a sacred symbol, a symbol of fertility. Each year the Nile naturally teemed with frogs; literally millions of them were born right after the annual flood so they were seen as the sign of the fertility that the river brought and, of course, the Egyptians decided to worship them! So, this plague:

a. it was probably directed against Heqet the frog-headed goddess of fertility She is usually pictured in hieroglyphs as a woman with a frog's head (how attractive!) But she is the god of reproduction; midwives called themselves servants of Hequet and her priestesses were trained as midwives. Her title was *she who hastens the birth* and women in labor wore amulets and prayed to her. So, a million frogs are a good thing to the Egyptians and certainly nothing new, except that they always stayed in the river! Now they came out of the river and covered the land. They got into every house, every room, everywhere! I remember one year we were at the shore in Delaware and they must have had a mini-frog plague in the lakes we were staying on because dead frogs were everywhere on all the roads of the development. You could hardly ride a bike. Imagine them by the millions how annoying that would be. So, Pharaoh wanted the plague called off and that brings out this plague's:

b. its special feature: Pharaoh named the time for it to cease Moses said, to prove this is from Jehovah, I'll let you pick the time and of course he picked the next day and all the frogs died the next day. Yuck! Heaps of stinking dead frogs everywhere! Yes, the magicians could find ways to get frogs to leave the Nile too, but this was obviously **no coincidence!** So, what was:

c. its lesson? Jehovah causes fertility and reproduction, not Heqet or any of the other fertility gods. God opens and closes the womb; He creates and brings people into the world. He makes the frogs every year and brings about all the fertility in the animal and plant world that humans enjoy. Stop worshipping idols! Hey, we're not much better, you know, when we attribute all of the bounty we enjoy to purely natural means; we may not worship a frog but in many ways our culture worships nature itself! We even make our own goddess out of it, Mother Nature! As though creation runs by itself or the earth itself is our mother, the source of all of us! No, God is the source of it all

and this lesson is for us too! But just as the lesson is often lost on us, it was lost on Pharaoh who broke his promise to let Israel go. So next God sent:

3. the plague of gnats (8:16-19) Despite the KJV calling them **lice**, they were likely not the head lice that we would think of. Nor were they probably the harmless little bugs that swarm around your head in your back yard. The word *gnat* is actually a non-technical term that is used to describe many species of small insects including biting midges (which we call no-see-ums and sand flies that sting and suck blood) and the whole family of mosquitoes which multiply quickly wherever there is standing water! This is a plague of biting, stinging, blood-sucking little pests. The last week or two before this heat wave, we've felt our back yard was like that. It rained and was damp and you couldn't mow and the grass was high and when you were out in the yard at night you got eaten alive! Now multiply that a thousand times and you get the idea of what this was like, Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people covered with little red welts, swatting and swishing, unable to escape it. But look where they came from: the dust. Moses struck the desert dust with the rod of God and as it swirled up it became insects. Not just there but all over the land as the little dust-devils kicked up they became mosquitoes! This plague:

a. it was probably directed against Set, the aardvark-headed god of the desert Imagine worshipping the image of a man with a pointy-nosed aardvark head! But the desert was all the rest of Egypt not along the Nile and Set was the god of it, supposedly a very powerful god. He was the god who controlled sandstorms, like our troops faced in Iraq and was prayed to by desert caravans. This was his dust that God changed into a plague of mosquitoes. And please note:

b. its chief feature: it could not be copied; the magicians couldn't replicate it and they told Pharaoh, "This is no trick, **this is the finger of God!** Only a god could do this!" From here on they quit trying. And of course:

c. its lesson was: Jehovah rules the desert sands and storms, not Set. And even Set can't stop Him. He made man of the dust of the earth and breathed life into him and He can make bugs out of it when He wants and He can make them all die when He wants! He is the God of the river and the God of the land, the God of ALL creation! But Pharaoh missed that somehow and so God sent another similar plague:

4. the plague of swarms of insects (8:20-24) Please understand the word *flies* is not in the Hebrew text anywhere. It simply says, *swarms* and its root means both *mixture* and *incessant motion*. So, it could mean swarms of all kinds of wasps and bees and other stinging insects. But this seems so similar to the previous plague, and v. 21 says that they would be on the ground, plus *Psalms 78:45* in recounting this says *He sent swarms [of flies] that devoured them...* So, some scholars have suggested that there is a species of beetle, the oriental cockroach, that naturally arrives in swarms in Egypt in the fall of the year. These beetles gnaw and devour clothes, furniture, plants, animals and people if they can. Their Egyptian name sounds similar to the Hebrew word here and regardless of which particular insect is meant, this plague:

a. it was possibly directed against the god Khepri, the scarab beetle Egyptian artifacts are filled with scarabs, little oval-shaped amulets in the image of the scarab beetle. They observed this beetle rolling a huge ball of dung across the ground and somehow imagined that the great ball of the sun is rolled across the sky each day by a mythological beetle god, Khepri, and they worshipped him! So now swarms of their sacred beetle buddies were suddenly everywhere biting and chewing up everything in sight! And notice the distinct feature of this plague:

b. its feature: it affected only Egyptians. Moses made it clear. There would be no swarms in the land of Goshen among God's people. So, the Egyptians who worshipped the beetle would suffer but the Israelites who worshipped Jehovah would not. The message was clear: **this was Israel's God!** And God told them in v. 22 what the lesson of the plague was:

c. its lesson: "I, Jehovah, am in YOUR land; I control YOUR land!" You see, the Egyptians and most other ancients thought all the gods were localized. The god who is worshipped in this city or that land is the most powerful there where he is, but over here THIS god is most powerful. God says, "Lookout boys, your beetle is a hoax. The true God is IN YOUR LAND and I am ALL powerful EVERYWHERE! All power in heaven and on earth is MINE!

Listen, our God is the God of all the earth! Jesus Christ is Lord of the whole creation! It is not enough for us to think that He is our God here and that's enough. He was in Egypt and He is in America and He is in all the lands of the earth and He demands and deserves worship from them all. He says so: *Mal. 1:11 My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty.* David states it well in *Psalms 86:8-9 Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours. All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name.* God was at work carrying out His purpose then and He is still carrying it out today. *Will Longenecker of WEC told this true story a few weeks ago. In the early 1970s in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, there were so many Muslims becoming Christians that the Muslim religious leaders asked the authorities of Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, the largest Muslim University in the world, to come and help them to stem the movement of Muslims to Christianity in their country. At the head of the entourage from Al Azhar was the Presi-*

dent of the University, Dr. Fahaam, and after surveying the situation and discussing with the Indonesian Muslim Clerics, Dr. Fahaam and his Egyptian colleagues returned to Egypt. In order to better help the Indonesian Muslim Clerics, Dr. Fahaam procured a Bible to understand his enemy better and to garner convincing religious arguments to help his colleagues in Indonesia in their dilemma. It so happened that during this time Dr. Fahaam's young daughter had a medical problem, and it was thought best to send her, accompanied by her mother, to a London Hospital for treatment. As it also happened, two Christian ladies who had a burden to minister to the sick in that hospital happened upon the Egyptian mother and her ailing daughter in the hospital. After getting acquainted and inquiring about the medical problem, the sisters offered to pray for the daughter's healing in the Name of Jesus. No Muslim will ever turn down such an offer. At that very moment Dr. Fahaam was in his study reading the Bible, and Jesus appeared to him, calling him by name. The fact that Jesus knew him personally was rather ungluing, and then He said something which really puzzled Dr. Fahaam. Jesus declared, 'I have healed your daughter!' How could the Founder of Christianity show any regard for one who counted Christianity as the enemy and was trying to destroy it? Then Jesus left him. As Dr. Fahaam pondered this, the phone rang and his wife said, 'You will never guess what has happened here in London.' Dr. Fahaam responded, 'I know what has happened, Jesus has healed our daughter!' His wife blurted out, 'How could you know that?' He said, 'Jesus just told me.' Subsequently, President Anwar Sadat called Dr. Fahaam in and told him, 'I cannot protect you here in Egypt, you must leave immediately, and we will tell the people that you have been having some problems and that you have gone to the West for treatment. Dr. Fahaam and his family first of all went to Germany, and then they ended up in Belgium where they were discipled by an Arab Evangelical Congregation in that country.

My friend, Jesus wants the whole world to know He is God and to worship Him. He is doing great and mighty things among the nations even today! But He wants you to know it too! He wants you to realize what He's up to and dedicate your life to declaring His glory right where you are and to the ends of the earth. Will you?

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

II. God's Process Of Redemption - 5:1-15:21

He Continued To Display His Glory In Judgments - Chs. 9-10

We left off last time right in the middle of the story of the ten plagues that God sent upon the land of Egypt in the process of redeeming His people. And one of you was sharp enough to point out to me that I didn't mention the time frame of these plagues. The truth is that we're not given a time frame in Scripture; we know they ended in our March/April because that's the time the Passover was instituted and celebrated each year since. But we don't know when they began. Any story told in writing naturally appears compressed as the writer moves on from one event to the next so our tendency is to feel like the 10 plagues all happened one immediately after the other in perhaps 3 weeks' time. And, indeed, for all we know, they may have, but most interpreters feel that they are a connected series of events that began sometime in late summer and ended in March, covering perhaps 9 months. The reason for that is that in many of these plagues God seems to be supernaturally intensifying a cycle of natural events that occurs in Egypt each year. I told you last week that the Nile floods every year in mid-summer and turns red with clay silt washed down from heavy rains in the mountains at its source. God seems to have intensified that in turning the Nile blood-colored and filling it with a red-tide of bacteria in the first plague. I told you that after the flood goes down, millions of frogs hatch and the Nile naturally teems with them, but God supernaturally drove them out of the river and into the homes of the Egyptians in the second plague. After the flood, Egypt naturally teems with biting insects but God made millions more out of the dust in the third plague. So, if this is indeed the case, then there was some time between each of these plagues and some of them, like that third plague of gnats have no ending time mentioned and may have taken weeks to die off! Plus, we're not told how long some, like the fourth plague of swarms of insects or beetles, actually lasted before Moses ended them. So, we're probably into the fall of the year as we pick up the story and:

I. God's Plagues Continue with plague number 5:

1. the plague on livestock (9:1-7) Whether the disease of this plague was anthrax or hoof and mouth disease, we don't know but it killed a great many of their cattle. By the way Hindus are not the only ones who worship cows as sacred; the ancient Egyptians did the same thing. This plague was obviously:

a. it was against Apis, the bull god Apis was said to manifest himself as a real living bull, which, after death, reincarnated itself into a new bull. The black bull which matched the required sacred markings was selected from the herd, brought to a temple, given a harem of cows, and worshipped as an aspect of the god Ptah. At the temple, this live Apis bull was used as an oracle, his movements being interpreted as prophecies. His breath was also believed to cure disease, and his presence to bless those around with virility. He was given a window in the temple through which he could be seen, and on certain holidays was led through the streets of the city, bedecked with jewelry and flowers. The war god Menthu was also said to manifest himself in a white bull with a black face, which was referred to as the **Bakha**. A wild bull was chosen and was worshipped as such. When these bulls died, they were mummified, and placed in a special cemetery known as the Bucheum. Can you imagine in the morning when the Egyptians found their bull gods lying dead of God's plague! **Hathor**, the goddess of motherhood, was often depicted as a golden cow or as a woman with the ears of a cow and a headdress of horns. But it wasn't only cattle. **Osiris** was a

ram-headed god said to be incarnated in a live ram kept at Mendes just like the bull gods! [source: wikipedia.com]. They worshipped animals as gods but their animals died just the same, however notice this plague's:

b. its feature: God protected Israel's livestock Their mighty war gods couldn't protect themselves, but all Jehovah's animals lived; **not one died!** Every Egyptian herd and flock of every kind of animal suffered loss; thousands of dead carcasses lying on the ground in one morning, but not one Hebrew animal in Goshen! Pharaoh couldn't believe it and sent investigators to make sure, but it was really true. Not a single animal died! The lesson should have been extremely clear:

c. its lesson: Jehovah controls both life and death! He, not the Nile, is the giver of life and if He wants to kill you, you're dead. No war god can protect you! By the way, in case you have any tendency to think that you're invincible, that you somehow are immune to dying by accident or disease or whatever, think again. You have All-mighty God to thank for the fact that you're breathing right now! Still Pharaoh is unmoved and God sends a sixth judgment:

2. the plague of boils (9:8-12) We don't know what this disease actually was but it sounds like some kind of horrible itching festering sores that broke out on everybody and even on the remaining animals throughout the land. This plague:

a. it was directed against Sekhmet, the Egyptian goddess of war and disease. She was a blood-thirsty violent goddess with a lioness' head, dressed in red. She was also seen as the bringer of disease and was prayed to in order to cure disease by placating her. The name "Sekhmet" literally became synonymous with doctors and surgeons during this period and many of Sekhmet's priests were often considered actual physicians. But pray as they would to Sekhmet, she could not protect them from Israel's God! And look at this plague's:

b. its feature in v. 11: the magicians could not stand before Moses. Now, they had quit trying to duplicate the miracles a few plagues back, but they were still with Pharaoh for moral support! But as Moses threw the ashes into the air, suddenly these sores broke out on them and they itched and ached so badly they couldn't stand there anymore! They ran away to try and find relief! You see, **God cannot be opposed!** Nobody can stand against Him; it's futile to try! And:

c. its lesson is obvious: **Jehovah sends and heals disease!** Not Sekhmet or any other false god. Look at the point God makes later in **v. 15**. "If I wanted to, I could have wiped you out long already! I could have sent the cattle plague on you or just had you die in your sleep! Healing and health are from ME! The fact that you're alive and standing here is from ME!" But even this didn't break Pharaoh's pride, so next God sends the seventh judgment:

3. the plague of hail (9:13-35) Judging by the note in v. 31 we're now in February when the barley harvest was about to be brought in and the flax plants were blooming. As you might imagine, it seldom rains in Egypt and hail is something that might not occur once in a century! To have a hail and lightning storm so violent that it beats down and destroys all the crops, strips the trees and actually kills animals and people who are out in the fields, can't be anything but supernatural! This plague:

a. it was directed against Nut, the Egyptian goddess who is the **sky** and would control these kinds of things in her domain! And probably against **Tefnut**, her daughter, the **goddess of rain**, dew and moisture. One by one Jehovah is showing so clearly that their beloved gods are no gods at all. But this plague also has a special:

b. its feature: it includes **an offer of mercy** Vs. 18-19, "**bring in your livestock** so they won't die!" Egyptians usually kept their cattle stabled from May through December during the Nile flood and the drying of the pasture lands, which explains why there are still cattle left to die after the livestock plague which only affected those "out in the fields". But by now the rest were being released to the outdoor pastures once again, and some of the Egyptians believed God and ran to get them all indoors once again. See, God does not hate the Egyptians and love the Israelites. He is not just a lover of one people; He wants the Egyptians to believe; He is willing to extend mercy to them too. In fact, that is this plague's:

c. its lesson: Jehovah is a God of mercy! He tells Pharaoh in v. 15, "By now I could have killed you easily but I want to use you to bring the whole world to believe in Me. I want YOU to believe, to bow!" But in spite of such obvious devastating power, Pharaoh still wouldn't and God sends judgment number eight:

4. the plague of locusts (10:1-20) [Read 1-6, 12-18] Now locust invasions are not new to this region, nor is the hot *sirocco* wind, the desert wind blowing from the east in late February. But this time the wind blew in from the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea a newly hatched cloud of locusts so thick that they covered all Egypt and devoured the wheat and the spelt which had now sprouted after the hail and any remaining green thing that was left. This plague:

a. it was possibly directed against Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld who was considered **the god of vegetation** who caused things to grow from the earth or perhaps **Geb**, the earth god. But neither one of them could stop or control it. In this plague:

b. its feature: Pharaoh's officials begin to see truth (7) "Egypt is ruined, destroyed, perishing! We have nothing left to eat! Let them go before their God kills us all!" Pharaoh is so busy with the pride thing that he really hasn't noticed what's going on. His land has been turned into a desolated desert. The worst famine Egypt has ever known is upon him and his people. I think that is this plague's:

c. its lesson: Jehovah provides food for mankind! Listen to **Ps. 65:9-13**. It's all from God! You don't do any of it. Whatever you have, whatever you enjoy, the very food on your plate every meal is a blessing from the hand of God and He deserves to be praised and worshipped for it! Pharaoh almost gave in on this one, but it was still not enough so God sends His ninth judgment:

5. the plague of darkness (10:21-23) Moses didn't even tell Pharaoh it was him when everything went dark, but he knew it was. Some have suggested this was an eclipse of the sun, but the text says the darkness was thick; it could be felt. Even inside their houses, the Egyptians could not see if they lit a lamp. Light would not penetrate it. Everyone stayed in their home and groped their way around in the dark as if they were blind. Some have suggested it was a sandstorm or some type of black fog-like mist. We don't really know, but it's obvious that:

a. it was directed against the chief gods of Egypt, **Ra** or Atum-Re and **Horus**, both of whom were **sun gods**. He-liopolis, the city of the sun, was the site of the great temple to the sun god. The sun ALWAYS shines in Egypt! To blot out the sun for 3 days, to blot out light itself, is clearly the work of a God more powerful than the very sun! But notice:

b. its feature: God's people had light! Inside their houses the mist did not penetrate. Their lamps shined and they could see! This darkness was from THEIR God. And the lesson of the plague I've already given you:

c. its lesson: Jehovah created and controls the sun! And yet culture after culture from Asia to Latin America has worshipped the sun itself as the giver of life instead of the God who made it. How sad! Now notice also **Pharaoh's final threat** in vs. 28-29. He draws a line in the sand. "NO MORE! One more plague and I will kill you, Moses!" Little did he know how true it was that he would never see Moses again and that God was the One drawing the line and saying, "I am about done; I will bring one plague more and Pharaoh will let you go!"

Whew, what an amazing season this must have been in the land of Egypt, for Egyptian and Israelite alike. But let's not leave the plagues without pointing out:

II. Some Lessons For Ourselves The first one is:

1. a lesson about refusing to compromise Pharaoh was a shrewd dude, just like his master, Satan, and throughout these plagues he offered a series of four compromises. The first two highlight for us:

a. our temptation to settle for partial obedience Pharaoh offers: "*Go, sacrifice in the land (8:25)*" "Take a few days off, have a religious festival. I'm not an unreasonable guy. Why go into the desert? Stay here and do it; it's easier anyway." But Moses wouldn't bite so he ups the ante saying, "*How about you go... in the desert but not very far (28)*" Stay nearby. Go camp out over the hill there by the shore where we can keep an eye on you. That should meet your God's demands!" Would you bite? Would you be tempted to say, "Half way is good enough. After all, look at who we're dealing with; look at how his foot is on our neck. This is all we're gonna get, so let's do it!" It is SO tempting to go only half way, to do only PART of what you know God has told you to do! If Israel had done that, they'd STILL be in Egypt and if that's how you choose to obey God, half-way, you WILL be right back there soon enough. The second two compromises highlight for us:

b. our susceptibility to the pull of family and possessions Pharaoh makes a new offer: "*Have only the men go (10:11)*" "Let your women and kids here. They're not important anyway; gods don't care about them. Go ahead, follow your god, but let them stay (and under his breath he's whispering, "that way I know you'll come back to my slavery!")" Then later when Moses wouldn't buy that one, he offered "*Take the kids but... Leave your flocks and herds behind (24)*" "Why take all of those things? Leave all your money here in the bank, your house, your car. Go camp out in a tent for 3 days, (you'll be back!)" How many times are we tempted to obey only in part, to do only part of what God has told us to do because of our loyalty to our family or because we really love our possessions? Satan can use those natural pulls to drag us right back into slavery to his cause if we are not careful to obey ALL that the Lord our God has commanded us!

John Fletcher was a coworker of John Wesley and as he stepped into his pulpit one Sunday to preach, the message he had prepared was suddenly swept from his thoughts. He tried to recall the text, the sermon, some illustration, but the mental blackout remained. All at once a picture of the three brave Hebrews who were cast into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace came to his mind (Dan. 3) and he therefore began to preach extemporaneously on that story. The congregation sat spellbound. But unknown to Fletcher, a woman in the audience was risking her life merely by coming to that

service. Her husband was a baker, and he had sworn to her that he would kill her by putting her into his large oven if she ever went to church again. Yet she felt that she must obey God rather than man. So, in spite of his threatenings, she came to worship and the Holy Spirit reminded her that God is able to deliver His own even from a "burning fiery furnace." When that woman arrived home, her angry husband was standing in the doorway brandishing his big bread knife. With a prayer on her lips, she walked up to him with the confidence that God was with her. Suddenly he began to shake under deep conviction. Falling to his knees, he wept and pleaded, "Pray for me. Please pray for me! I'm a terribly wicked man!" After that threat she may have been tempted to compromise, to worship by herself at home in the closet or the shed or at night or to go out of the village under a tree. But she felt God wanted her to go to church and her obedience resulted in her husband's conversion. She refused to compromise; Moses refused to compromise; and so should we. Finally let me point out that in this story there is also:

2. a lesson about the hardening of hearts You can't help but notice the mentioning of Pharaoh's heart again and again, 15 times during the story of these plagues. They were designed to impact his heart but it was hardened, he hardened it and God hardened it, the various references say. Let's just look at **(9:7, 12, 34-35)**. Now did the circumstances harden it? Or did he harden it himself? Or did God harden it? The answer is, "Yes, yes and yes!" All are true. Circumstances harden many people toward God and certainly people proudly choose as he did to defy God, but the real point of the texts is the danger that:

a. God may harden the heart of one who is unyielding God granted Pharaoh's own choice and reinforced it and made him even MORE obstinate and unyielding to get more glory by sending more plagues and destroying Egypt more thoroughly. Did they deserve it? Yes, they... *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.* - Rom. 1:23 They chose their path but because they chose it, God gave them over to what they had chosen and let them be blinded and hardened by it. He hardened their hearts and:

b. God has every right to harden (9:16) Paul explains that verse in the New Testament - **Rom. 9:17-24** God has the right to do what He wants. He can extend mercy if He wants and surely He did, once and for all, at the cross! But He can also harden if He wants, for His own glory.

There is a tremendous danger in resisting and refusing Him. He may give you what you want. *Aaron Burr, the third Vice President of the United States, was reared in a godly home and admonished to accept Christ by his grandfather who was Jonathan Edwards. But he refused to listen. Instead, he declared that he wanted nothing to do with God and said he wished the Lord would leave him alone. He did achieve a measure of political success in spite of repeated disappointments. But he was also involved in continuous strife, and when he was 48 years old, he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. He lived for 32 more years, but through all this time he was unhappy and unproductive. It was during this sad chapter in his life that he declared to a group of friends, "Sixty years ago I told God that if He would let me alone, I would let Him alone, and God has not bothered about me since." Aaron Burr got what he wanted. Pharaoh got what he wanted. Solomon warned: He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth [his] neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.* - Prov 29:1 (KJV) Do NOT resist and reject God; you may just get what you want!

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

II. God's Process Of Redemption - 5:1-15:21

His Final Judgment On Egypt - Chs. 11:1-12:42

God has brought nine plagues upon the land of Egypt, nine terrible judgments upon them for their sin and to cause them to let His people Israel go. The land of Egypt is devastated; it has no crops remaining in the fields, very little livestock and even the fish in the river have died off. Yet Pharaoh remains proud and refuses to let the people go. Chapters 11-12 tell the story of the 10th plague. The first 9 have been more or less the Divine amplification of natural events to epic proportions; the 10th is the direct going out of God Himself to take human life. We left chapter 10 with Moses standing in Pharaoh's presence saying, "You will never see my face again." Then as we begin chapter 11, we have:

I. Egypt's Final Plague Announced: Moses proclaims that God will bring about one final plague: The **Death Of The Firstborn (11:1-10)** Now in the first three verses we actually have:

1. God's instruction that He had given to Moses privately ahead of time **(1-3)** God had already told Moses, "This will be the last plague; you will leave after this one. In fact, instead of holding you back, they will drive you out! And not only that, be sure to have everyone ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold and silver before they leave." In other words, "I will cause them to send you away with parting gifts the way one is supposed to free a slave after his servitude is done!" But now at vs. 4 this parenthesis is over and we continue the live conversation with:

2. God's warning given to Pharaoh (4-10) "Tonight at midnight every firstborn son in Egypt will die. Your son, Pharaoh, will die, and so will the firstborn of your slaves and of every citizen of Egypt and even your animals." Now that is a direct challenge to Pharaoh; God had told Moses back at the burning bush in Ex. 4:22-23 *Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you re-*

fused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son." And that's what he's warning here! Not only is that a challenge to the Egyptian goddess Isis who was considered the mother and protector of the Pharaoh but Pharaoh and the son who would succeed him were both worshipped as gods themselves! But Pharaoh would not, could not believe it. So Moses stomped out furious that thousands of lives were going to be wasted because of his sheer pride. Now if you'll permit me to make a more personal application here, for us this plague of death is a:

3. the picture of the penalty of our sin Listen to the lesson in **Ez. 18:4**

(NASB) *"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.* God is the owner of all human lives! He creates them and they are His! And Has a law. The soul who sins will die! Paul put it like this: **Rom. 6:23** *...the wages of sin is death...* The penalty for rejecting the grace of God, for refusing to bow before Him acknowledging His sovereign right over you is death, physical and spiritual eternal death! At one time all of us were just like Pharaoh, already dead in our trespasses and sins, waiting like all the Egyptians, for the rest of the promised judgment to fall! But in the next chapter we see a glorious thing; we see that for God's people:

II. Egypt's Final Plague was Averted: by the **Death Of The Lamb (12:1-13, 28)** God gave a final sign to Pharaoh; while all the households of Egypt would be affected, every one of the Israelite households would be protected from this plague of death in a special manner. First of all:

1. it required the offering of a perfect sacrifice (1-6): A substitute was needed for their firstborn and it was to be a **lamb**, a perfect, spotless year-old male lamb of the sheep or the goats. That lamb was to be chosen and kept until the right time and then slaughtered on that very night at sunset and the death of that lamb would form the basis for the Israelites to avoid the certain death that was coming. However:

2. that sacrifice required application (7, 12-13) The lamb could be killed and the meal could be eaten, but it would all be in vain unless there was **blood on the doorposts**, unless they would take the blood and go outside and smear it on the doorframe and the lintel of their house, death could still enter. But the blood on the door was a sign that the sacrifice had been offered and that God's people dwelt here under the blood, protected by it. And God's judgment of death would pass over that house. The blood of that sacrifice had to be applied and:

3. that application was done by faith (8-11) They were to eat the lamb ready to leave. They were to eat it with their bread unleavened and their robes tucked up under their sashes ready to walk. They were to eat it believing that in the morning they were leaving. They were to put the blood on the door in faith that they would be protected from death and live to leave tomorrow. Both of these were acts of faith; how do I know? Listen to **Heb. 11:28** *By faith [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.* The blood on the door and the eating of the meal was a declaration of trust in God for protection and belief in His Word that they were leaving. Now you can hardly talk about this without seeing:

4. the picture of our redemption in Christ Peter explains it clearly for us in **1 Pet. 1:18-19**. The perfect lamb pointed to Christ, God's perfect, spotless Lamb who would take away the sin of the world by shedding His own precious blood. He would be our Substitute, the Lamb who died in our place, who took the judgment of death that was coming upon us and poured out His life to save ours. Yet that sacrifice must be applied. I have to paint His blood upon the doorposts of my own life. By faith I have to declare that I trust in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to save me from my sins. I give up all vain hope that anything else will rescue me and place myself under the blood. *Byron Chen says that in Chinese writing, the symbol meaning righteousness is formed by placing the character for a "lamb" above the character for "I". The Lamb is over me. When by faith I place myself under the merits of Jesus, God's spotless lamb, I am declared right for all time and eternity and God's judgment of eternal death passes over me!*

Well, now we move to the third portion of our chapters where we find that:

III. Israel's Redemption was to be **Commemorated (12:14-27)** This event was not something God intended to be done one time. He intended them to sacrifice a Lamb and eat a Passover meal every year to commemorate perpetually what He was about to do that night, so they would never forget it in the generations to come. So:

1. their departure meal became the Feast of Unleavened Bread (14-20) Every year they would remember the day they left Egypt because that night they ate their bread in haste; they ate it flat, without yeast in it. They would eat that same bread annually, not just for one day but for 7 days to remind them of how God brought them out bondage in Egypt. And:

2. their sacrifice that night became the annual Passover ceremony (21-27) Every year on the anniversary of that day they would slaughter a lamb again and put its blood on the door so they would never forget how they were spared from death in Egypt that night, how God passed over them because of the shed blood of the lamb on the door.

Now I want you to look with me at **1 Cor. 5:6-8** where Paul explains the deeper meaning of these. The Passover sacrifice and ceremony are:

- **a picture of our protection from death through Christ's shed blood** Christ, our Passover, has already been sacrificed for us. His blood has been shed and placed over the doorposts of our heart by faith. We stand under the protection of the blood of Christ. So, the Feast of Unleavened Bread which started on that very day is:

- **a picture of our cleansing through Christ to live a holy life** We are now living in the days of Unleavened Bread! He tells us what the yeast represents: malice and wickedness! It represents sin in our lives and it represents (in this passage specifically) sin in the church! And if it is left there and not thrown out, not removed, it will spread throughout the life or the church body and leaven the whole lump. We have been cleansed by Christ and protected from judgment by Him to live a holy life! So, we need to keep the Feast! We need to throw out the old leaven and live in sincerity and truth.

And now we come to the last part of the chapter where we see:

IV. Israel's Redemption Accomplished: We call it **The Exodus (12:29-42)**, lit. *the way out* or *the going out*. That night at midnight:

1. the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain (29-30) Now on a side note, please don't think of this as a kind of crib-death that killed thousands of innocent babies. How many of you are the oldest son in your family? Oldest sons come in all ages. Some of them were old men. Others were in the prime of their life and heads of families. Some were young adults working hard at their jobs and yes, some were children too. An entire cross-section of Egyptian society from young to old died suddenly at midnight as their families probably stood by helplessly waiting and praying to their gods, hoping against hope that this threat would not come true. But it did and in all the homes of Egypt someone died and they began to wail and mourn their losses. Now once this happened, four things occurred exactly the way God said that they would. Even though Pharaoh wouldn't *let* them go for anything before, now:

2. the Israelites were driven out (31-33) Pharaoh summoned Moses and by means of his officials said, "Go! Leave! Get out of Egypt! Take everything and everyone you have with you and leave! Now!" And the Egyptians hurried them along saying, "Go, please, quickly! Hurry up before we ALL die!" Isn't that what God had said would happen? **compare 11:1, 8** God made Pharaoh do the exact opposite of what he had wanted to do and instead of holding them in, thrust them out! Next, we read that:

3. they plundered the Egyptians (34-36) The Israelites all ran to their Egyptian neighbors and asked them for gold and jewelry and they gave it willingly. "Go, take it, take it all! Just get out of here before we all die!" So, they ended up with a tremendous amount of valuables. But again, isn't that exactly what God had said would happen. **compare 11:2.** Way back in **Gen. 15:14** God had promised Abraham: *I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.* And they did! The text says they plundered the Egyptians the way you would strip all the spoils of war from your enemies who lay dead on the battlefield. They took much of the wealth of Egypt went out into the desert with them. And notice that:

4. they went out a great nation (37-38) 600,000 men have 600,000 wives and most have at least one child and many have more. Seventy men came down to Egypt with their families and when they left there were probably between two and three million people, a great nation. But again, isn't that what God had told Abraham? **compare Gen. 12:2** *"I will make you into a great nation..."* In **15:5** *He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."* And that's how they went out, from one man as many as the stars of heaven! And finally notice this:

5. they went out at the promised time (40-41) We often regard 400 years as the length of time Israel was in bondage in Egypt. Do notice the NIV's marginal reading on v. 40 *in Egypt and Canaan*. I rather think that 400 years is the time from the promise God made to Abraham in **Gen. 15:13** where *...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 and afterward He would bring them out.* At any rate Moses' point, whether we understand the dates exactly or not, is that they came out at the exact time that God had promised! So, what's the lesson from all of this? It's simple:

6. the lesson: His words are true Jesus said: **Mt. 24:35** *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.* God's Word is unalterable, unchangeable. It comes true even if centuries pass. Not the smallest detail is ever forgotten. It is more sure than the very creation itself. You know, there is an application we can make for ourselves here. The context of that verse is the question about the timing and the promise of Christ's return. The Israelites are not the only ones who suffered in bondage. The whole of creation is suffering in bondage, Paul says in Romans, to this very day. It is waiting, waiting, for what, for the final redemption of the people of God that will occur at the return of Jesus Christ when all of creation will also be set free into the glorious liberty of the children of God! Just like Abraham, we too have a promise. But how do we know that day will come? How do we know that one day this long Egyptian night of suffering and bondage and evil for the whole world will end and Jesus will come again?

In 1958, a U.S. soldier wandered the streets of Berlin to see the sights. Despite the bustling new life in parts of the city, many reminders remained of the destruction it had suffered during World War II. Walking through a residential area one

evening, across the cobblestone street he saw an open space edged with flowers. In the center stood the stone front of what had once been a church. The building was no longer there, but the rubble had been cleared away in an attempt to fill the empty space with a little park. The former church's main door was shaped in a Gothic arch, and over it was carved into the stone in German: HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY BUT MY WORDS WILL NOT PASS AWAY. [Coleman L. Coates in *Leadership* - Vol. 9, #4]. That's how we know He is coming! His Word is sure. Every promise He has ever made He keeps! We have only to trust Him.

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

II. God's Process Of Redemption - 5:1-15:21

His Memorials Of Redemption - 12:43-13:16

Israel has now begun the long march out of Egypt. 12:37 says they had traveled out of the city of Rameses (perhaps Avaris?) that they had helped build as slaves in the Nile delta and pitched their first camp in the region of Succoth, perhaps 20 miles to the southeast. They are not out of the land yet, but they have been loosed. The name Succoth is interesting because it means "booths" or "lean-to shelters" and no doubt there they were introduced to the type of living quarters they would enjoy for the next 40 years, huts of branches. Later on, God would have the Israelites celebrate a feast of booths or tabernacles every year to remember those little huts in the wilderness. And, speaking of remembering, it appears that in that first camp God spoke to Moses about 3 other things that He wanted the Israelites to remember forever. He gave them 3 practices to serve as memorials or their redemption. In Washington my family and I have been to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It's a black granite wall engraved with the names of 58,249 soldiers who gave their lives in that conflict. As your eye scans name after name, its very presence causes you to stop and reflect on the depth of the sacrifice that was made in this conflict. It was put there so we will never forget. But not all memorials are objects; some are actions, ritual ceremonies that we repeat as a living visual reminder of something in the past. In the church communion and baptism are living memorials of Christ's death every time we act them out. On this night Israel was instructed about 3 things, 3 practices that would be acted out as living memorials of the event by which God set them free from the Egyptians the night before. The first event was:

I. The Passover Celebration (12:42-51) [Read 42-43a] They had slain and eaten the Passover lamb the night before and had spread its blood on the doorposts. Now they are given instructions to repeat this slaying and eating of the lamb every year as a memorial ceremony. And there are four specific principles that Moses is given which I think can help us reflect on the redemption from sin that we have experienced through Christ. First:

1. ONLY those who belong to God eat of the lamb (43-45) Circumcision was a sign of the covenant. God made a covenant that Abraham and his descendants would be God's people and the sign of that covenant was that all the males in his household would be circumcised. Circumcision set them apart as those who belong to God. To be uncircumcised became a term of derision for the Philistines and other enemies who did not believe in the true God. And eating of the lamb was a sign of participation in what the lamb symbolized. The lamb's blood over the doorposts saved them and those who eat the lamb are those who were saved by the blood. So, no foreigner, no stranger, no uncircumcised unbeliever can eat the lamb; he can't claim to participate in redemption along with God's people by eating because he is not one of them! The lamb did not die for him; its blood did not rescue him! This distinction was important because v. 38 tells us that other people, Egyptians and maybe other non-Israelites, went out of Egypt along with them. So, this ceremony reminded them that they were different from the whole rest of the world; nobody else could join them, only those who belonged to Jehovah. By the way, that's the same reason why only believers should eat of the Lord's Supper today when we celebrate it. Why? Because eating is a sign of participating in the redemption that was bought by the body and blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. And if you don't know Jesus, if you haven't given your life to Jesus, you haven't been rescued by that broken body, you haven't been saved by His blood and you don't have a right to eat! We are different from all the people of the world; only those who trust in Christ have a right to eat of His table and remember how He redeemed them at the cross! Second:

2. eating of the lamb must be done in God's way (46) You don't eat it outside on the patio with your buddies for a picnic; you don't stop by McJacob's for a "lamb-burger" on your way home from work and count that as eating the Passover. You eat it the way God said, with bitter herbs, with shoes on your feet and a staff in your hand and with unleavened bread. Why? Because that redemption was a serious thing; it saved your lives. You don't break any of the bones of the carcass. Why? They probably never knew but John tells us the real reason: **Jn. 19:33, 36** ...*when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.... These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."* Not breaking the bones was showing respect in advance for the precious body of Jesus, the true Lamb of God. And in like manner, we are to treat our memorial, the Lord's supper, with respect and honor in our hearts and eat it in God's way. At Corinth, Paul said that treating these symbols lightly or disrespectfully was resulting in sickness and even death among the believers; it is dishonoring the precious body and blood of the One who redeemed us! Who's to say that it would not do the same thing today? Paul says, examine your hearts before you eat! Third:

3. EVERYONE who belongs to God must eat of the lamb (47) It is not optional. Every one of God's people must eat the lamb each year, He says. You can't say, "Oh well, I'm really too tired or I have too much work in my carpenter shop or my kids have a donkey polo game tonight, I can't eat the lamb this time!" The whole community, everyone who belongs to God, must eat it! Well, that's not so different from our memorials either, is it? Baptism is something Jesus commanded for all His followers. He told us to celebrate the Lord's Supper until He comes. They're not optional. They're called ordinances, commands given to the church so we will not forget our redemption. But here's the good news. Fourth:

4. ANYONE can choose to belong to God and eat of the lamb (48-49) A stranger is welcome to eat the lamb. Anyone can freely choose to come and belong to God, to trust in Him. Egyptian or Amorite can become one of His people and take the sign of circumcision and then he participates in the redemption of God's people and can eat the lamb! How similar to the Gospel invitation that whosoever will may come and believe on God's Lamb, Jesus, and become one of God's children and then he can participate in our memorials of redemption right along with us! Now let's look at the second memorial practice God gave Israel which is:

II. The Consecration Of The Firstborn (13:1-2, 11-16) We see in vs. 1-2:

1. the principle: the firstborn male of every womb belongs to God God laid claim to every firstborn male whether human or animal because that night in Egypt they would have been destroyed, but God saved them by giving them the lamb as a substitute. He saved them and so now they belong to Him. Now look down further where the instructions for:

2. the practice of this command are given **(11-13)** And while we're at it, turn to God's restatement of this practice in **Num. 18:15-17**. Let me summarize:

a. the firstborn of clean animals was sacrificed An ox, a sheep or a goat are all clean animals, fit for sacrifice. Their firstborn was to be given directly to the Lord as a sacrifice. But some animals like the donkey or camel are not acceptable as sacrifices. So, the:

b. firstborn of unclean animals was either redeemed, replaced, or destroyed You could give money to the Lord in place of it. You could give the Lord an acceptable animal like a lamb in place of it and offer that as a sacrifice. Or if you didn't have means to do either of those you would simply kill it outright as it was not yours but the Lord's. Of course, when it comes to human beings, sacrifice is out of the question so:

c. firstborn sons were redeemed by a price, by the payment of 5 shekels of silver, that is, roughly two ounces. No one knows how much that was worth, but I'm sure it was more than pocket change because 400 shekels bought a field back in Abraham's day, so maybe that's like having to pay something between \$50 and \$100 today. Certainly not the full value of a life but yet a significant amount for a young couple to put out when their first son was born. Now what was:

3. the purpose of this practice (14-16) It was to be a sign, something that points beyond itself, and in this case:

a. it was a symbol of redemption from death in Egypt The redeeming of a firstborn child or animal was a visual reminder of that night many years before when God had spared the firstborn of Israel from death. And continuing to do this every time there was someone or something firstborn:

b. it enabled perpetuation: *when your son asks you...* in the years to come, you'll have an opportunity to tell him, to remind him about the redemption that happened so many years ago, which he was not there to see. As generation after generation redeemed their firstborn, the story of that night in Egypt would be told over and over and passed down forever. And this:

c. it enabled identification: By participating in this practice each generation could say **God redeemed US!** It is more than a piece of history; it is MY story. God redeemed ALL His people and that includes me; if not for that redemption I wouldn't be standing here today, I'd be making bricks in Egypt as a slave! Now of course what's important is:

4. the spiritual lessons from this practice that apply to us today. Well, have you ever thought about the fact that:

a. all believers are part of the "church of the firstborn"- Heb. 12:23 *[You have come...] to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.* In Israel only firstborn sons were redeemed, but in the church, we are ALL God's firstborn! In Old Testament times the firstborn son is the most important; he inherits a double portion; he is the leader and priest of the whole clan. But in Jesus we are ALL in that position of most important to Him, joint heirs with Him of everything. We are ALL direct participants in God's redemption through the death of His lamb. So, to continue to use the analogy, we need to practice the memorial of our redemption. How? Well, Paul urges that:

b. we offer ourselves as "living sacrifices" - Rom. 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.* Instead of

paying money or killing some animal in our behalf, we put our own bodies on the altar and yield them to God so that He can live through them. We make our lives to become a living sacrifice. We let go of all control and give our life up to Him because it is His. Why should we do that? For the same reason that every firstborn belonged to the Lord in Israel:

c. we are not our own because of the price paid for us - 1 Cor. 6:19-20 You don't belong to yourself anymore! When Jesus paid the redemption price to save you with His blood, He bought you. You are HIS, not yours and that's why the goal of the life you live has to always be to glorify Him!

We have a hard time grasping this so let me tell you this story: *Many years ago, an Englishman was watching a group of African prisoners as they were marched in front of a tribal leader. The chief singled out one of them because he had headed up a rebellion against him. Justly displeased with the man's crime, he ordered one of his warriors to kill him. The visitor's heart went out to the victim, so he offered to purchase his freedom with a large sum of money. "I need nothing," replied the angry chief. "I have sufficient. All I want is this traitor's blood." As the bowman prepared to shoot, the Englishman raised his arms in an effort to defend the condemned man. The next moment an arrow was buried in his own flesh. Removing it, he walked up to the chief and said, "Here is blood - my blood - I give it for this poor slave, and I claim his life." The chief had never seen anyone defend another in this way, so he released the victim, saying, "Yes, white man, you have bought him with your blood, and he shall be yours." The happy man was set at liberty and went away weeping tears of joy. That's what Jesus did for us! His blood rescued us from death and at the same time it bought our lives so now He owns us; we are His, His to command, His to do with what He wills for His own glory! Finally, the third memorial practice Moses was instructed about that night was:*

III. The Feast Of Unleavened Bread (13:3-10) *[Read 3-7]* Just like on that day they ate their bread without yeast in it because they left Egypt in haste, so every year they were to eat bread without yeast for 7 days and of course:

1. it was a symbol of release from the slavery of Egypt (3) It reminded them that they are not slaves any more. God brought them out and they are free. They no longer had to live like they did back in Egypt. And because they did it every year:

2. it also enabled perpetuation and identification (8) As the practice was passed on from year to year and generation to generation, it would continue and each new generation of God's people would be able to say, "God did this for ME! I came out of Egypt! God set ME free!" And so:

3. it was a reminder to live as redeemed people (9-10) "You are now Jehovah's people, not slaves in Egypt. So Jehovah's law ought to be on your lips. The central concern of your life ought to be obedience to Him." Does that sound familiar? It should. Look with me at **Rom. 6:17-19**. We were all in bondage; we lived in slavery and our Pharaoh's name was sin! It ruled our lives, but when Jesus bought us at the cross, He bought us out of that slavery and set us free to follow a new master, Himself! Sin no longer has power and authority over us unless we choose to yield to it; we are free. And Paul reasons, *...now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life - Rom. 6:22. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery - Gal. 5:1.*

A ragged boy with a violin under his arm roamed the streets of a great European city. Because he had no home or family, he wandered around for food and shelter. He had a strange gift for music and had somehow gotten hold of a violin, and would stand on the corners and play for the crowd. When finished they would toss some coins and this is how he lived. In the same city was a famous musician. One day he happened to hear the boy playing and was impressed by the quality of music. "Son, to whom do you belong?" he said, "I don't belong to anybody," the boy answered. "Well, where do you live?" was the next question. "I don't have any place to live. I just sleep on the streets or wherever I can." The man thought for a moment and then asked, "How would you like to be my boy and come to live with me? I'll teach you all I know about how to play the violin." The boy's eyes sparkled, and he said, "Mister, I'd love it." So, the great musician took him to his own home, had him cleaned and dressed up, and the man became like a father to him. For several years he poured into the eager young mind and heart all he knew about the violin. Finally, the boy was ready to appear on the concert stage for his first public recital. The house was filled to capacity. At last, the boy came out, put the violin beneath his chin and began his concert. He played beautifully and there was much applause. The boy, though, paid no attention. He kept his eyes turned upward and continued to play. The audience was mystified by his behavior until someone said, "I don't understand why he is so insensible to all this thunderous applause. He keeps looking up all the time. I'm going to find out what is attracting his attention!" Moving about in the concert hall, the observer found the answer. There in the topmost balcony was the old music master, peering over the banister toward his young pupil. He was nodding his head and smiling, as if to say, "You are doing well, my boy; play on!" And the boy did play on, not seeming to care whether the audience laughed or applauded. He kept his gaze upward. He was playing to please the master only. That is the point of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God bought you, so now get rid of the yeast, stop yielding to sin in your life, live with His law on your lips! Redemption freed you from that old life and made you HIS boy; play the tune of your life to please the Master only!

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

II. God's Process Of Redemption - 5:1-15:21

Israel's Final Deliverance From Egypt - 13:17-15:21

As we pick up the story in the middle of Ch. 13, God's people have been freed and they have already begun the march out of Egypt but they are not yet finally delivered from the power of Pharaoh. God has one more thing that He intends to do, an act so great that it will be sung of around the campfires and in the homes of Israel for a thousand generations. He is going to deliver His people out of the very teeth of the mightiest army on the face of the earth by a miracle so grand that here we are 3,000 years later telling the story of it. This portion of Scripture falls naturally into 3 sections. First, we read about:

I. The Journey To Deliverance - 13:17-14:4 As Israel embarks on their journey and the first thing you notice is that:

1. God accommodated their frailty (13:17-18) Two million people are leaving Egypt headed east to the land of Canaan. There are only three ways to get there. The short way is the northern route along the Mediterranean seacoast through the modern Gaza strip. This is also the populated way. It leads through the land of the Philistines and they will no doubt have to fight their way through. The middle route is smack through the middle of the Sinai Peninsula which is a rocky desert with no water. The third route which God chose, here called the desert or wilderness road, led south following the outline of the Sinai Peninsula down around the coast of the Red Sea. It was basically uninhabited but there were known water holes along the way. And why did God choose this way? Because He knew that if Israel marched into war right away, they might give up and go back to Egypt, even after all they'd seen already! He knew their weakness. He knew what would discourage and dishearten them. He knew what they were and weren't ready for and He chose their path based on what they were ready to handle. On this road they would learn to trust Him for food and water and then in minor battles before facing the full onslaught of war. Aren't you glad He does that with us? Aren't you glad that He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust and adjusts the path of our life's journey wisely, knowing what lessons we need to learn before we face particular difficulties? Secondly:

2. God fulfilled His promise (19) Now if you remember, **Gen. 50:25** says that before he died, *Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."* So, when he died, they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt, probably one of those fancy gold sarcophagi like Pharaohs and important people had, but they never buried him! They never put him in a tomb. I don't know where they stored him, but throughout the years of their oppression that coffin was known to stand somewhere as the reminder of a promise made by God. Through the years one Israelite might have seen it and said to another, "Hey, why didn't they ever bury that guy?" And the answer would have been, "Joseph said God was going to come and take us out of here and we have to take his bones along when He does it!" Ray Urrich, my pastor's pastor, used to say that coffin was Israel's "Bible" during that long dark night of slavery. It was their visual reminder of the promise of God which somehow, they never forgot through all the years. Moses, even though he was born much later, knew the story of it; maybe he even saw it and learned about it as a child in the court of Egypt and God could even have used it to help him believe that God wanted to deliver Israel! So, when at last God fulfilled His promise made through Joseph, Moses grabbed his coffin and carried it with them as their fathers had promised. Aren't you glad that God ALWAYS keeps His promises? Though the night sometimes lasts long and the suffering seems to drag on and on, the promises of God never change; *for no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so, through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. - 2 Cor 1:20.* We will "Amen" every one of them eventually as He fulfills them on our life's journey! Third:

3. God guided their steps (20-22) On this day a new phenomenon happens. As they leave Succoth, a pillar of cloud appears in front of them and God is in the cloud. So, they follow Him as He moves forward until He stops and they camp at Etham on the edge of the desert. When nightfall comes the pillar of cloud changes to a pillar of fire so they could see and travel at night if He led on. That was His mode of directing them through 40 years in the wilderness. The cloud gave them protection from the burning desert sun and the fire gave them warmth in the cold desert night, but primarily these were to guide them. They had one responsibility - compare **Ex. 40:36-38**. When God moved ahead, they followed; when He stood still, so did they. They never planned their route; God guided their steps each day. What a picture of how God wants us to live life! There's nothing wrong with planning ahead for things you know are coming up, but our basic responsibility in life is to do whatever He puts in front of us each day, to do His will as far as we can see it one day at a time, relying on Him to continually go in front and guide us. If today doesn't turn out like I planned (and that's what most of mine are like!), I just follow and it ALWAYS turns out like HE planned! If we are ready to follow, He will guide us step by step and day by day on our life's journey. Then fourth:

4. God outwitted their enemies (14:1-4) None of these place names exist today but the point is that by turning Israel back to the west and then south, God deliberately put her on the wrong side of the Red Sea. She becomes hemmed in by the topography of the land with the sea to the east and mountains to the south. The only open route is west, back into Egypt, and there God tells her to camp! Why? She is the bait for His trap. He knows how hard Pharaoh's heart is,

that it will not be long before he thinks of taking vengeance for the death of his son, that he will realize his entire slave labor force is gone and want it back. He knows that it will seem as though poor, stupid Israel is lost in the desert, milling around and trapped, easy pickings for his chariots. Aren't you glad that in the journey of life, God is smarter than all your enemies? That He knows how Satan and his people plan to come after you and He's ready. All of this is simply an illusion designed to draw Pharaoh and his mighty army to the banks of the Red Sea where God has planned:

II. The Miracle Of Deliverance, the crossing of the Red Sea. We'll read the story one piece at a time in **14:5-31**. Just as God had said:

1. Egypt changed its mind (5-9) Their dead were buried and the terror of that awful night was past. Economic reality set in. "We have let our slaves go! Our land is a wreck and who will clean it up and rebuild it!" Pharaoh made his chariot ready. He got, it says, not only 600 of his best chariots, but ALL the chariots Egypt had, PLUS infantry soldiers on foot and set out to catch up with them. And he caught up with them camped against the sea and hemmed in by mountains with no way out! He was ready to massacre them wholesale if they would not return! No wonder that:

2. Israel became afraid (10-12) They were staring the full might of the Egyptian war machine in the teeth. Wouldn't you be terrified? And when God puts you in a place where you get scared enough you begin to say stupid things like, "I knew we should never have listened to God. We'd have been better off if Moses had never shown up! Moses, why did we ever listen to you; you're no prophet!" Is that what you do when you get to the end of your rope? People often do. Fear makes us say things we would NEVER otherwise say. This is exactly where we can get in trouble; if we let that fear, that panic, rule and control us, we make horrible poor decisions, we take desperate steps that make no sense and cause us great pain. But Moses was not afraid. He remembered what he had seen God already do, so:

3. Moses encouraged them to stand firm (13-18) He said, "Hey guys, just stand still. God didn't bring us here by accident; He has a plan. He will make a way where there is no way." Beloved, if you're following God and God puts you where you're hopeless and helpless between the Egyptians and the Sea, don't cast frantically about for some desperate solution; stand still and watch God work! This is HIS doing and His problem. Simply do whatever He tells you to do. God said to Moses, "stretch out your hand and watch Me divide the waters for you and destroy the Egyptians as they try to follow you!" At the end of your rope, hang on to Him and stand firm. Then notice how:

4. Israel was protected by God (19-20) All of a sudden that great pillar of cloud that had been in front of them and over them now began to move. It moved behind them and settled between them and the Egyptians and would not allow them to come closer. As it grew dark it changed to an impassible pillar of fire so that they were protected throughout that entire night. The army could not come near them. Oh, God has ways of intervening that you have no idea of! One friend that I pray with every Wednesday has a daily radio ministry which he funds largely through his secular work in addition to listener contributions. Two months in a row this summer the huge airtime bill came due and giving was down and there was not money in the bank to make the payment. And twice on the very last day an envelope came with thousands of dollars in it that protected them from losing their broadcast. Listen, if you got where you are by following Him and now it seems like all hope is lost, know that He is well able to protect you as long as He has you there until He makes the way out obvious! And that leads us to the fact that:

5. Israel crossed the sea on dry ground (21-22) God made a highway straight through the middle of the sea. His strong wind began to blow out of the east so hard that it blew a path right through the waters. And mind you, 2 million people can't cross even a narrow river single file in one night. For them all to cross that night, He had to open a path at least a half mile wide or even more. And the wind dried the ocean bottom up until it was firm and hard, DRY, it says, not a path of muck and mud. Down in they went and up again onto land on the far side, a huge broad stream of humanity flowing through God's highway all night. Listen, there is no limit to what God is able to do. Never limit Him to what YOU can think of. The Kyrgyz Chronicle in your bulletin today tells the story of an 8 yr. old boy in Kyrgyzstan who found a book about Jesus and accepted Him. The only person he told was his mom and for several years he prayed she would accept Jesus too. But she didn't. In fact, she was taken away from him and it seemed his prayer would not be answered! She was convicted of a crime and sentenced to 6-8 years in prison! Out of his reach, but not out of God's! So guess what? Two years later God saved her right there in the prison and now four years after that she is an evangelist herself inside the prison! The chorus says, "God can make way when there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see; He will make a way for me!" God made a way and in the process:

6. Israel's enemies were destroyed (23-28) To get the full effect you have to read **Ps. 77:16-20**. You would have thought the Egyptians got the point with the pillar of fire but they rushed into the seabed after the Israelites and only when their chariot wheels began to bind and fall off did they realize they were fighting God Himself! And there was lightning and thunder and at last the sea came crashing back and smashed them all! In one fell swoop the entire might of Egypt's army is destroyed and washed up at the feet of Israel on the shore. And what is the result of it all?

7. Israel trusted God and Moses (29-31) The Israelites ended up on their knees in holy awe and worship with their hands in the air. It moved them. It changed them. They knew once and for all that Jehovah their God was the true God

and they placed their trust in Him and in Moses his leader. That's how God has designed things to work. When He works in wonderful ways in your life, when He answers prayer when He saves that one you've been praying for or He takes that huge mountain of circumstances and melts it away, that is intended to have an effect. It is intended to teach you that you can trust Him going forward in ANY circumstance, that what your leaders have told you from Him really IS true and you can follow them!

Well, this whole event made such an impact on Israel that day that they immediately wrote and sang:

III. The Song Of Deliverance which has been recorded in **15:1-21** and preserved to this day. Now, no one has any idea what tune they sang to or what, if any, dance steps they used as they chanted it together. And also remember that it's a Hebrew song, not an English or American one. They didn't do things like rhyming and rhythmical stanzas the way we do. Nevertheless, you can sort of pick out three verses. The theme of:

Verse 1: God's power rescued ME (1-5) "Woo-hoo! Look what God did for me! He threw Pharaoh's horses and chariots into the sea as easily as you'd toss a stone into the waves and they sank straight to the bottom like that stone. That whole army, the pride of Egypt, the best of Pharaoh's officers are all floating with the tide! God did that for ME! He is my strength! He is my salvation, my deliverance! HE is for ME!" Then comes:

Verse 2: God's power is greater than ALL (6-12) "You are so great Lord that your anger burned them up like fire consumes a field of so much stubble. That mighty wind that drove back the sea was just the breath of your mighty nostrils. You heard them boasting to kill me and YOU killed them all. You are God Almighty; you are greater than ALL!" Then comes the logical conclusion in:

Verse 3: God's power will ensure our FUTURE (13-18) "Wow, Lord, if you can do that, You're gonna take us all the way to the promised land. If you destroyed Egypt, what chance do the Philistines and the Edomites and the Canaanites have! They'll melt away and be still as a stone until You take us into the promised land, the place where you're going to make Your sanctuary. Your power ensures our future for us!"

Moses sang the song first and all the men began to sing it after him. But then the women began to:

Repeat this refrain: (19-21) The very same song, the Song of Moses. They sang it all day antiphonally back and forth, men and women. They danced and sang before the Lord and worshipped with their hearts for this great deliverance He had wrought on their behalf. And to think how hard it is to get some of us excited about how He saved us! But in case you weren't paying much attention as we read that, you might want to go back and check it out again later because that's not the last time you'll hear it. When at the end of the age the children of God stand victorious in heaven and all His enemies lie at His feet, they're going to sing it again! *Rev. 15:2-4, And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."* When all the earth lifts itself in that last time against God and His people and it seems that all is lost and Jesus comes leading the armies of heaven on a white horse and destroys them all with a word from his mouth, in heaven they'll be singing that Song of Moses one more time. But it will have a new verse, a new subject. It will not be about the Egyptians and the Red Sea of old; it will be the Song of the Lamb, now reigning triumphant on His throne forever and ever!

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

III. God's Preservation Of The Redeemed - 15:22-18:26

He Provides For His People - 15:22-16:36

Let me sum up our study of Exodus so far: In the first 6 chapters we saw God's PREPARATION to redeem His people Israel. He prepared them, their circumstances and the one to lead them out. In chapters 7 through 15 we saw God's PROCESS of redemption, how He redeemed them by sending 10 plagues upon Egypt and then parting the Red Sea so they could cross and destroying Egypt's army. It was a process of mighty miracles designed to get Him glory from all the nations of the earth. Now in chapters 16 through 18 we'll see God's PRESERVATION of His redeemed people, how He preserved and cared for them through their long journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land, and, of course, in the process we hope to learn some lessons about how He preserves us, His people, as well. Now if you were to lead 2 million people out into a wilderness on short notice, what do you think would be the first issue to arise? PROVISION, of course! Where are you going to get water and food for all those people in the middle of nowhere? Chapter 16 is here to give us the simple answer: GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE! When God takes us to be His people, He provides for us what we need! So, in the end of chapter 15 we have the record of how:

I. God Provided Water In The Desert (15:22-27) Read (22-23) We live in Pennsylvania where there are streams and rivers everywhere, where it rains frequently. But the Sinai Peninsula and all the Middle East is not like that. Any traveler's first concern is water. Israel left the shore of the Red Sea and marched into a dry desert following God's pillar of cloud. They walked for 3 days and by that time their water skins were empty and their throats parched. At last, they came to the first water hole or well, a place called Marah but the water there was bitter, that is brackish and polluted, undrinkable. Now remember that they got there by following God, so:

1. God sometimes leads us into dry circumstances, doesn't He? Some parts of our life are filled with long, painful days of trudging forward in circumstances that are truly unpleasant, conditions where we long for rest and refreshment and wish that we weren't trying to wring every last drop out of our waterskin emotionally or physically or financially. Now why does He do that? Why doesn't His path of life for us always lead through pleasant places? Well, the truth is in a phrase at the end of v. 25 ...*there He tested them*. You see:

a. dry circumstances test us They show US what we're really made of, what's really going on inside of us. He already knows, but WE need to know. Do we follow and obey the Lord only as long as things are pleasant, or do we follow Him no matter what comes? Those dry circumstances **can make us bitter (24)** Can't you just hear them? Imagine that you've marched 3 days to find water and the pond you come to is full of scum and algae or alkali! Can't you just hear YOU? "I've been following God; I haven't stepped out of His path at all, and He leads me to THIS? What am I gonna drink?" It doesn't take much for us to get there, does it? Sometimes just a few days of suffering circumstances are enough to make us doubt His character and think awful thoughts. But God already knew that Marah had bitter waters and He had a plan (25). While Israel complained, Moses prayed. That's what God intends for us to do, to cry out to Him in faith. Well, there was a tree nearby and God showed it to Moses and said, "throw that wood into the water" and when he did, it became sweet, that is clear and drinkable, and 2 million people quenched their thirst! Now why a tree? Well, I think there's a spiritual lesson there; it reminds us of another tree, another piece of wood, the one on which our Savior was crucified. Did you know that:

b. His Tree can make our bitter waters sweet? The remedy for that bitterness that wants to rise in us when we suffer in life is the Cross! When we go in our minds to the cross and we behold what Jesus endured there to save us, suddenly we find that our bitter waters become drinkable! We find that because of what He endured for us, we have grace to endure this for Him, trusting Him in faith! *In the book, "The Fire of Your Life," Maggie Ross recounts the story of Emma, a survivor of the Holocaust, who regularly at 4 PM each day stood outside a Manhattan church and screamed insults at Jesus. Finally, the pastor, Bishop C. Kilmer Myers, went outside and said to Emma, "Why don't you go inside and tell him?" She disappeared into the church. An hour went by, and the bishop, worried, decided to look in on her. He found Emma, prostrate before the cross, absolutely still. Reaching down, he touched her shoulder. She looked up with tears in her eyes and said quietly, "After all, he was a Jew, too."* [Diane Karay Rantoul in *Leadership* - Vol. 5, #3]. Listen, on that cross, He was thirsty too! He was wounded too! He knew pain and not being able to breathe too! He knew shame and derision and mockery too! He was single and lonely too! All things that He may lead you to endure, He has first endured for you. He is touched with the feeling of your infirmities! And if you throw that Tree into your bitter waters, you'll find that they grow sweet! You enter the fellowship of His sufferings and bear them together with Him! OK, let's skip ahead to v. 27. God does not always lead us to bitter places like Marah:

2. He also leads us into refreshing circumstances (27) Another day or two and they came to Elim where there was an entire oasis with twelve different springs or wells of pure, sweet water shaded by 70 palm trees growing around them. Last year we were with Andrea's in-laws in California. They literally live in the middle of the desert but one day we went to a park which was literally an oasis in the desert with a flowing stream and pools of water shaded by huge old palm trees just like this and I remember how cool it was down there in the shade and thinking what a welcome rest that oasis must have been to the early pioneers traveling through the region. Some places in life are like that, cool and refreshing, where our needs are supplied and everything is just good. Thank the Lord that He leads us to those too; in fact, His "Marahs" in our lives are often temporary stops on the way to better "Elims" He's planned for us to enjoy awhile as we keep traveling through life. But **The Point** of this whole section is that GOD, not the land, is their real source of water in life and that reminds me of what Jesus said in **Jn. 7:37-39**. Check that out yourself. **Christ is our Water of Life**. Today we carry our own oasis right with us. His Spirit now lives in our inmost beings and from Him flow out entire rivers of living water through our lives. There is inside us a source of spiritual nurture and refreshment and energy that never runs dry, if we will but learn to stop and drink of Him each day! Now as we move to Ch. 16, we see a second act of God's provision for His people:

II. God Provided A Continual Miracle Of Daily Bread (Ch. 16) Once again you see:

1. the continual need and complaining of God's people (1-3) It took 3 days to run out of water. It took about 30 days to run out of food. 2 million people eat A LOT! Every day! After the first month of travel, they had long since eaten everything they had carried with them and probably a good many of their livestock as well. I'm sure they rationed carefully what little they had, but it was rapidly becoming apparent that starvation was on the horizon, yet again, instead of asking God for their need, they complained about Him. It's funny how their memories of Egypt were suddenly embellished, "If God's going to starve us, at least He could have killed us all back in Egypt where our bellies were full, and

it's all your fault, Moses!" It's amazing how we tend to convince ourselves that our past was better than it was, when we don't like the present! But graciously God hears their complaining and speaks to Moses before he can even pray and in vs. 4-11, we have:

2. God's commitment to provide for His people (4-11) [read 4-5] God took it upon His own shoulders that He was going to provide for daily food that all His people would need directly; He was going to rain down bread from heaven in the desert for them to eat. Of course, you know, don't you, that He has made that same commitment to us! - **Mt. 6:31-33** The world runs around saying, "Where are we going to get what we need?" But we're to live with a confidence that our Father knows what we need and if we seek Him first, He will provide it. There are several principles we can take directly from the story. Just as He was going to do for Israel:

a. He will supply what we need each day by grace (4a) He will rain us down bread from heaven each day too. He will make a way for us to have what we need. It will be from Him, however, just as the Israelites had to go out each day and pick it up off the ground:

b. we must go out to gather it (4b) God didn't just have it delivered each morning in a basket by their fire. He didn't let them roll out of bed, spread their arms and get hit with a falling loaf to eat and then go back to bed. They had to get up early and gather what they needed while there was opportunity. That taught them the lesson Paul gave us in **2 Thes. 3:10** *...when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."* God is not into laziness. He is willing to supply all you need, but He expects you to get out and work for it. Neither the world nor God owe us a living. He gives it by grace, but He expects us to participate in the process. Then, He gave one more instruction: on Friday they were to gather twice as much because on Saturday there wasn't gonna be any to gather! So:

c. His supply becomes a test of our trust (4c-5) If we obey Him and do life His way, we'll have all we need; if we don't, He's not responsible for our lack. How we go about the procuring of our daily bread is always a test of whether we trust God and believe that He's the source of everything we get or not. Now here's something we may not like:

d. we are to accept what He provides without complaint (6-10) When you grumble and complain about what you have or don't have and why you don't have all you want or what everybody else has, guess Who you grumble against! It's not the boss or the company or the government or the church, but the Lord! He is the source of your supply; He has committed Himself to meet your daily needs and when you moan and act ungrateful, you're complaining that He's not doing His job! Instead, God's desire is this:

e. He expects us to see His glory through His daily provision (11-12) Just like the Israelites, when He provides for us every day, He expects us to see it as His marvelous provision for us, a daily miracle of His love and grace which He lavishes on us. That's why we say "Thanks" before we eat! We recognize that today another miracle has been given to us, His hand has given what we need, as He so faithfully does every day. Now in the case of Israel, here's how He did it:

3. God's miraculous provision for Israel: quail and manna (13-16) That night a huge flight of quail came in flying down low and landing all over the area of their camp. It was a quail hunt to beat all quail hunts. Two million Israelites running around batting and catching quail and roasting them on their open fires! Now God didn't do this every evening. This wasn't their daily fare, but a bonus blessing of meat to eat that night. He did it one other time later on in Numbers 11. Their real surprise came in the morning. When the dew evaporated on the ground there was this flaky, powdery white substance that looked like frost on the ground. They'd never seen it before so they said, "Manna?" "What is it?" and that became its name. It was their bread from heaven, straight from God. And every morning for 40 years it "rained" bread just like this and their daily work was to go out and gather 2 quarts of it each to eat. Now not only was this God's means of feeding 2 million people in the wilderness but we read later that: **it was intended to teach lessons to the generations to come (31-34)** After the Tabernacle was built, they were to put a jar of it in the ark so that future generations who didn't get to see the actual miracle would still remember the lessons from this experience! So, it's not too crazy to think that we can learn some things about gathering what God gives us every day. Like the Israelites:

a. we are to share what we gather so all have enough (17-18) Everyone went out and gathered. Some were old and slow while others picked up a whole bunch quickly but Paul explained in 2 Cor. 8:14-15 that evidently, they pooled it and made sure that everyone had enough. Those who had a lot that day contributed some to those who didn't have enough and, in the end, everyone had all they needed. And Paul says the church is to do the same. God didn't give you all you get each day so you can hoard it up for yourself and let some brother starve; God wants to meet his need by giving through your hands. We are to share with each other so all will have enough! Second:

b. we are to depend on the Lord daily, not yesterday's provision (19-21) Sooner or later somebody would get the bright idea that I could work hard all day one day and gather enough for a whole week and then slack off and do

nothing the rest of the time. Well, God made sure that wasn't going to happen; He made the manna so it melted away about 10 in the morning when the sun got hot so you couldn't wait and gather it whenever you felt like it and, if you kept any of it inside until the next day, it went bad. You couldn't store it up. So, every day you had to get out there and work to gather it and enjoy it and then do it again tomorrow. That's how God provided and that's how we're to depend on Him. Jesus taught us to pray: *Give us this day our DAILY bread - Mt. 6:11*. Literally, *Give us today the bread of today...* One day at a time. While He does allow us to save our money, the principle is that we are to depend directly on Him each day to provide what we need each day, not to rest on what we've accumulated and depend on it. And if we do that, we'll find that:

c. He will provide enough to give us a day of rest (22-30) The Sabbath was a command and a sign given to Israel. They were not to do ANY work at all on Saturday. So, every Friday God increased His miracle. He gave twice as much and made it last twice as long so they could eat for an extra day. Now we are not under that same command in a legalistic sense, but you can still trust God to provide enough in 6 days that you can give a day to Him for worship and rest on 1. When you get so wrapped up in your job that you're working 7 days a week and never resting, thinking you have to do that to make it, you're not trusting God as your source. He will give you enough so you have a day of rest also! and finally, note this:

d. God's provision will last until we reach the promised land (35) It lasted 40 years for them. For you it will last a lifetime. God will provide for you every day until you reach the land He's promised you also. You see:

The Point is that man didn't live by the bread alone, but by God whose word gives him his bread. He sustains us every day: **Christ is our Bread of Life** and Jesus had an interesting time talking to the Jews about that in **Jn. 6:32-33, 48-51** if you want to check it out. Whether we're talking about physical life or about spiritual eternal life, He is the source of both. *The founder of the China Inland Mission, Hudson Taylor, wrote the following words in his journal, "Our Heavenly Father is a very experienced One. He knows very well that His children wake up with a good appetite every morning. He always provides breakfast for them, and He does not send them supperless to bed at night... He sustained 3 million Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years. We do not expect He will send 3 million missionaries to China; but if He did, He would have ample means to sustain them all... Depend on it, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."* Child of God, the lesson from Marah and manna is simply this: if you're following Him daily and living by His principles, you will never lack God's supply!

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

III. God's Preservation Of The Redeemed - 15:22-18:26

He Protects His People - Ch. 17

Israel is now more than a month on her journey out of Egypt. She set out from Elim and crossed the desert or wilderness of Sin, eating her manna every morning. And now she has arrived and encamped at a place called Rephidim which means "resting places". And there, for the first time since leaving Egypt, she is attacked. Now actually Israel faced two battles there, not just one. They are the same two battles that we face on our journey through life. And the lesson God is picturing for us in this chapter is this: He not only PROVIDES for His people; He PROTECTS His people. The first battle they were faced with is not one that is readily visible, but we face it every day:

I. We Face An Internal Battle Against The Flesh (1-7) [Read 1-4] Their water skins were empty again after traveling through the desert and there was no water in this camp for them. And that same old reaction that was just waiting down inside them reared its ugly head again. They began to grumble about their thirst and argue with Moses and demand that He do something about it. You see:

1. when our needs are not being met according to our expectations, when we get really thirsty or tired, for instance, **we are prone to test God**, to demand that He do something about what's bothering us right now. They literally demanded of Moses that he do another miracle like he had done before and give them all water. And Moses said that in doing that they were putting God to the test. **(2c, 7c)** They must have been saying, "Is the Lord among us or not! If the Lord is here, then give us water! If God doesn't do what we want, then we won't believe!" You don't approach God that way; no human being can make God prove Himself. Who do we think we are?! But that pattern of demanding our own way, of judging God and trying to make Him meet our standards is part of what the New Testament calls "the flesh" Turn with me to **Gal. 5:17** (Please note that the NIV mis-translates and has decided to insert the term "sinful nature" instead of using the word "flesh", but that is not really accurate.) *(NASB) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.* The spirit is who you really are, that part of you where Jesus dwells inside, the part that's been made brand new and holy by Christ. Your flesh is what today people often call "your baggage"; it's all that package of wrong ways of thinking and habit patterns of acting driven by emotions, wrong choices and their consequences, all those parts of you that sin has still got hold of. And there's a war on. Your spirit which is like God and loves God and wants to please God is always under attack. Your flesh, all that "yucky" stuff that at its root is driven by sin, is always trying to rise up

and assert its desires and push you to do what IT wants you to do, for instance, to demand God give you water when you're thirsty and put Him to the test! Now:

2. when we yield to our flesh, we quarrel with our leaders (2-3) When they listened to their thirst, they grumbled against Moses. They quarreled with him and made demands of him. And, of course, when we grumble about and quarrel with our leaders, **they grow discouraged!** They've been giving all their energy and pouring out their hearts trying to help us, trying to show us what's best for us and our flesh gets its tail in a knot because we aren't getting what we want and we grumble and complain and blame them! That discourages anyone. No wonder Moses goes back to God and says, "What am I to do with these people!!!" No wonder *Heb. 13:17* says *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Well, in the end:

3. God gave His people water from a rock to meet their thirst [Read 5-7] At God's instruction, Moses took the rod of God which had parted the sea and he struck this rock with it and the rock split open and out gushed a pure spring of fresh water that continued to flow and watered 2 million people! Now that was a major miracle in itself and I don't want to minimize it but the New Testament tells us that there are some lessons God intended for US in the church to learn from this whole experience. It tells us that:

a. that rock pictured what Christ does for us - 1 Cor. 10:4, *[They all] drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.* Now that doesn't mean that Christ literally disguised Himself as a physical rock that followed them around everywhere giving them water. It means that just as they all drank of God's provision of life-giving water at the smitten rock, so Christ, who was smitten on the cross, was the source of their spiritual life AND of ours! Christ is the continual source of the spiritual water of which we drink as we journey through life. Now Jesus Himself explained that principle to His disciples. He told them that:

b. He provides us the Holy Spirit, who is a continual source of living water to us - Jn. 7:37-39 (NASB) *Now on the last day, the great [day] of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet [given,] because Jesus was not yet glorified.* Jesus gave each one of us as His followers His Holy Spirit to literally live inside us in our innermost being. And the Holy Spirit is like a river that never stops flowing, an inexhaustible source of spiritual power and energy for living, one that we carry around with us no matter where we are, no matter what dry desert we pass through. We have all received power through the presence of His Spirit in us. So how do we "drink" of Him? We drink by yielding to Him, by depending on Him, by relying on Him, by looking to Him as the source of all that we do. So:

c. when we drink by yielding to the spirit we live in victory - Gal. 5:16 (NASB) *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.* When you yield yourself to the Spirit and live out of Him, you win the war. And by that, I mean simply this: stopping to pray "Holy Spirit, control me, I'm yours!" every day in every situation. When you do that, your flesh loses; its desires don't get carried out. Instead, you carry out God's desires.

As a boy, F. B. Meyer enjoyed visiting the Polytechnic, a science museum in London. One of the exhibits he liked most was a diving bell. It had no bottom, but there were seats attached to the rim at its base. At various times throughout the day, visitors were allowed to enter the diving bell and occupy those seats. It was then lowered into a deep tank of water. What fascinated Meyer was the fact that no water ever came up into the bell, even though its occupants could have reached out and dipped their fingers into it. How was this possible? The reason it did not fill with water is that air was constantly being pumped into the bell from above. If a vacuum had existed, the water would have rushed in. Meyer then made this application to believers: "If you are full of the Holy Ghost, the flesh-life is underneath you, and though it would surge up, it is kept out." The Holy Spirit is our God-given continual protection in the war against our flesh. His power is there for you, but if you don't access it, if you don't yield to Him, then your flesh will take over whatever part of your life He doesn't control. OK, that's the first battle we face in life, but there is a second:

II. We Face An External Battle Against The World (8-16) Let's read vs. (8) The Amalekites were actually cousins of the Israelites; they were descendants of Esau and they lived as a nomadic tribe in the region south of Canaan, the upper Sinai Peninsula. It was a pretty inhospitable place to live and they lived pretty much by raiding other nearby peoples. In fact, years later in David's day, they raided the town of Ziklag where he was living and captured his family! So as Israel was passing through their territory they laid in wait and attacked them. And there's the point:

1. the world around us will attack us on our journey through life Sometimes it is an outward attack of violence just like this. *On Sept. 8 Hindu extremists laid in wait for Brother Thomas, a 60 yr. old evangelist who had been preaching in his home village of Guttigar, India and had established a small church there. At 7:30 PM he and his wife were driving to a meeting when he came upon a man lying in the road with a motorcycle a few feet away, looking like the victim of an accident. When he got out and went over, the man threw chili powder in his eyes and 15 men hidden in the bushes jumped out and beat him mercilessly with sticks and wooden clubs. They told he and his wife they would suffer a cruel*

death if they continued to preach in the village. This stuff happens. It is not even rare in the world. Sometimes the attack will come through discrimination where we work; sometimes it will be a legal attack against our work or a government trying to snuff it out. Many times, it will be our family or even our own spouse angry with us, perhaps throwing us out and disowning us because we've decided to follow Christ. It could be a neighbor or a coworker or a fellow student who just decides to dislike and hurt us. This shouldn't be unexpected; Jesus warned us that we can expect the world to hate us, simply because we believe in Him. And remember:

a. the attack will come at our point of greatest weakness Here's what upset God when they did this; turn with me to **Deut. 25:17-19**. Israel was weary from their long journey, tired and thirsty having been without water. Their line was strung out for a long distance along the path. And instead of facing them army to army, the Amalekites picked off the stragglers, the ones who were tired and lagged behind, the weakest and most vulnerable. The devil is despicable like that. He loves to prey on children and old folks, anybody that's weak. And he loves to find your greatest point of vulnerability, the area or time where you are weakest and can't protect yourself and send his troops to attack that! But understand this, when the world attacks you because you are a believer:

b. it is a direct affront to God's saving power He says, *They had no fear of God!* The Amalekites knew who they were attacking. They knew their cousins worshipped Jehovah; they were God's people. Word had traveled about what Jehovah had done to the land of Egypt, how He had destroyed it and had defeated their army. But they had no fear of God; they thought *they* could attack His people and He could do nothing about it. And they found themselves fighting against God! God said of Israel, *whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye!*, that is, the pupil, his tenderest spot. Whoever touches the child of God incurs the Father's wrath! If you don't believe it, just read the story of Haman in the book of Esther; it is the story of literally the last "Amalekite" mentioned in the Bible who wanted to wipe out the Jews and ended up hung on his own gallows! Anyway, back to our story. I want you to see:

2. God's means of assuring our victory (9-11) Two men were used to bring about victory over the Amalekites. The first is Joshua, a young man who became Moses' aide and eventual successor.

a. Joshua fought with them in earthly action He led Israel's troops into battle and they fought hand to hand with swords and clubs and whatever they had. It's interesting that the name Joshua is the Hebrew form of the name Jesus, because Joshua is a picture of Jesus. Jesus leads us in our response as we are attacked. He leads us as we engage those who oppose us. But while Joshua was down in the valley with the troops:

b. Moses stood above on the hill and in control of all. When he raised his hands up to God, presumably holding the rod of God up as he had before, then Israel was winning. When he lowered his hands, they began to lose. The outcome of the battle lay literally in His hands. And in that, Moses also pictures Jesus, now seated on high on the throne of God, reigning and ruling. He is in control. The outcome of the battle is literally in His hands, even while we are down here in the middle of it! JESUS is God's means of assuring our victory; He is with us in the battle and He's in control of the battle! The battle is the Lord's! Now in that same double picture, we see a picture of:

3. our means of obtaining the victory If you have ever tried to work on a ceiling you know the problem Moses had. You can't keep your hands up over your head for long without letting them down. So, here's what they did **(12)**. Aaron and Hur assisted Moses in his work of controlling the battle. They held his hands up with him. And that pictures for us that:

a. we participate together with Jesus above in prayer When we lift up our hands to God in prayer and cry out to Him, we participate with Him in the battle, we impact the outcome of the conflict. That's why we emphasize prayer for missions each week. In one sense we live in a continual battle. Jesus is building His church; it is advancing against the gates of hell and they won't stand against it. But it will not advance unless we pray, neither around the world nor in this community right here. That's why we ask you to pray for our Nursery School which is going already, to pray for our Pioneer Clubs which are about to start up, to pray for this flea market outreach event next Saturday that we'll meet and impact community people there. Jerry Falwell used to say that nothing of eternal importance ever happens apart from prayer! We should be praying ALL the time, but especially when an attack comes, whether it is physical or legal or financial or relational. That is our first response. But while Aaron and Hur are holding up hands, look at Joshua **(13)**. Joshua is out there with the troops engaging the enemy and that pictures for us that:

b. we participate together with Jesus below in action When our enemies attack us, Jesus leads us into earthly action! And let me be really clear that, no, we don't literally fight them and kill them as Israel did. Muslim extremists kill their enemies. Any time in history that the church has tried to play by those rules, such as in the Crusades or the Inquisition, it has been a disaster and the church actually *becomes* the enemy! You see, Jesus came and changed the rules of engagement. *Luke 6:27-30, 35 ...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back... But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, be-*

cause he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. When we are attacked, we do take action. We engage our enemies in love, praying for their souls, giving them the word of our testimony and loving not our own lives even to the death! Paul had enemies everywhere he went and here's what he said: *1 Cor. 4:12-13 ...When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.* That's how we fight and that's how we win and the church goes forward, but how do we do that? By grace! Jesus is with us in the battle. Jesus gives us love for our enemies and strength to repay evil with good.

In August 1983, Russell Stendal was taken hostage into the jungle of Colombia, South America, by a band of guerrilla soldiers. For nearly 5 months he learned what it really means to love one's enemies. He wrote a letter home, saying, "I am in danger only of losing my life; they are in danger in losing their souls." Through kindness, Russell befriended his guards. One day the commander told him, "We can't kill you face to face; we like you. So, we will have to kill you in your sleep." God enabled Russell to forgive, but for the next 10 days and nights he couldn't sleep. A submachine gun was repeatedly thrust in his face under his mosquito net, but the guards couldn't bring themselves to pull the trigger. On January 3, 1984, Russell was released. When he said goodbye, tears filled the eyes of some of his captors. Of course, not all such incidents have such a happy ending as we know from the Burnhams whom we prayed for as they were taken captive in the Philippines a few years ago. Gracia was rescued but Martin was killed in the process. There are always casualties in the battle. Martyrs line the entire history of the church, but we are still winning the battle; the church is still advancing today at a greater rate than ever before! More spiritual enemies are being swept into the kingdom of God in the last several decades than in all of previous history combined. The lesson from this story is simple:

4. the lesson to remember (14-15): The LORD is My Banner! Most armies fight under a banner, a flag. Our troops fight under the flag of the United States; they fight for our national cause. As believers we fight under Jehovah's banner; we fight for His cause. And His cause cannot lose! His Kingdom will be established and all enemies put under His feet!

God Redeems A People - Exodus 1-18

III. God's Preservation Of The Redeemed - 15:22-18:26

He Preserves His Leaders - Ch. 18

In the story of the exodus, we've been looking at how God preserves His redeemed people beginning at the end of Ch. 15. We've seen so far how He provides for us and how He protects us. Today we'll complete this section in Ch. 18 where we see how God preserves His leaders. After the battle at Rephidim, Israel is encamped and resting and Moses gets a great surprise. His father-in-law Jethro shows up from Midian to meet him there and brings Moses' wife Zipporah and his two sons with him. This chapter is the record of that visit and what came out of it and it is a great encouragement for leaders in ministry. Whether pastors or elders or teachers or counselors or youth group or small group leaders, anyone that is involved in caring for a flock of people, big or small, God understands the stresses and strains you face in caring for people and, if you will listen to Him, He will preserve you! He wants to preserve you! He doesn't want you to get overloaded and burn out and give up. And He doesn't want the pressure to damage your family. In fact, that's the first thing we see about leaders here. God:

I. He Seeks To Preserve Their Family Relationships (1-12) In vs. 1-6 we see how:

1. Moses is reunited with his wife and children (1-6) *[read]* We learn here something we were not told before, the fact of:

a. their evident separation (2) Moses never took Zipporah and his sons all the way to Egypt with him when he went there. The last we hear of them is **4:24-26**, that unique story where he and Zipporah had an argument at a place along the way about circumcising their youngest son. It seems that at that point Moses must have sent her back to her father in Midian to be cared for while he went to Egypt to bring Israel out. They were apart perhaps 10 months or so. We're not told why. Her anger against what God had commanded might have been a factor. Or maybe Moses realized how badly she didn't want to go or perhaps he thought they might be safer. We can only speculate the reason why they were apart during this time; the one thing that is clear is that her father Jethro has been watching and listening for news of Moses and when it came, he immediately set out to bring her and the kids back to be reunited. We're not told anything about their reunion or their relationship going forward; God leaves all that in the dark. But there is one obvious lesson here:

b. an important lesson about separation Jethro knew that families should not be separated for long, that it is not good, not healthy. Paul obviously taught the same thing in the New Testament. In **1 Cor. 7:5** Paul explained that husbands and wives face sexual temptation when they are separated from each other for a prolonged time in that way. *Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* This would be true whether they are simply abstaining sexually for a time or whether they are physically separated from one another and abstaining because of it. It is not good for husbands and wives to be continually apart, even though

they may have to do it temporarily for the sake of ministry. When your ministry or your job begins to take you away from your wife or vice versa for prolonged periods of time through travel or even for long, late hours at the office or the church, it is absolutely necessary to make deliberate efforts to guard yourself so that you will remain pure and to be reunited as soon as possible. Jethro was wise and knew that and helped Moses in this area by bringing his family back. And that brings us to the next portion where we see how:

2. Moses is reunited with his father-in-law Jethro (7-12) [read 7] Think about this for a moment. Moses never really got to know and be with his Hebrew mother and father; he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter and likely had no real father-figure in the palace. But Jethro took him in in his time of need in Midian. He received him into his family and gave him his daughter. He employed him in his family business as a shepherd. Jethro was the father Moses never had for 40 years. And he was a priest of God, a godly man who taught and encouraged Moses. In fact:

a. Jethro had affirmed Moses in following God When Moses told Jethro that he wanted to leave with his family and go back to Egypt, *Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well."* (4:18) He didn't try to stop him or to hold on to his grandchildren. He sent him away in peace with his blessing. Then when Moses sent them back, he gladly received them and cared for them until he could return them. From their meeting it is clear that:

b. Moses valued Jethro's fellowship in spiritual things (8-11) They both knew the Lord and that was the focus of their relationship. Moses was quick to tell him all that God had done in the 10 plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea and Jethro was quick to return praise, to express what an assurance that was to him about the greatness of God. You know, everybody needs a Jethro, an older, wiser person with whom to share about the things of the Spirit. If it can be your own mother or father, that is a wonderful privilege. But if not, as in Moses' case, everybody needs some kind of a spiritual mother or father figure to go to for encouragement and wisdom. This is another of the key things that God provides to preserve us in ministry, a mentor, a teacher, one who has walked the path before us and can keep us on track. In v. 12 you can see how:

c. they worshipped God together (12) The tabernacle and the law of sacrifices have not been instituted yet so Jethro just does what he's always done to worship God and Moses and his leaders join in. What a phrase; they ate bread in the presence of God! What a refreshing thing it is to talk together of the things of God, to ingest the meaning of the Scriptures together, to pray together about the problems you face. Leaders, if you don't have someone like that in your life, you might want to ask God how to find one! It would be a blessed means by which to preserve you in your leadership and your work. And then notice in the rest of the chapter how much Moses:

d. he valued advice from Jethro's experience (24, 27) Of course nobody is 100% right all the time, but if an older wiser person is walking with God, they are surely worth listening to! You have to value the experience they've had. In this case Jethro noticed one particular thing concerning the way Moses went about his daily ministry and he humbly tried to help him with it. So, God not only seeks to preserve His leaders in their family relationships, but secondly:

II. He Seeks To Preserve Them In Their Ministry (13-27) He wants them to last to the end, to continue on through and finish well. Now just look at:

1. the burden of responsibility Moses carried (13-18) Two plus million people are bound to have a few disputes, particularly when they live in temporary shelters in the wilderness! I'm sure dozens of them would come to Moses each day for help. They saw Moses as representing God so if they wanted to know His will, they would come and ask him what to do. It was overwhelming; all day long it continued. It took a toll on Moses, wore him down and fatigued him. Some folks think it would be great to be a Moses or a Paul, to have some big leadership position. Pastors may dream of pastoring a huge church or others of leading some great organization. People tend to think about all the authority and privilege that leadership seems to have. But the truth is that most leadership positions are a lot of work and the more people you're leading, the heavier the burden you carry. Lots of people mean lots of problems to deal with, lots of demands for your time and lots of long hours on your schedule. Lots of complaints and administrative headaches and logistics too! Not to mention emails and phone calls! Involvement in ministry, particularly a vibrant growing one, can be a wearying thing and nobody seems to understand it! But Jethro did. He knew just what to do and he said to Moses the obvious, *the work is too heavy for you and you cannot handle it alone!* Then he suggested:

2. God's solution: the delegation of responsibility (19-27) Get others to share in the task with you. The best leader is not the one who is simply able to do everything himself or herself like superman. The best leader is the one who knows how to delegate responsibility to others and make them responsible for the portion of the work that they can handle. Much more gets done that way and the leader is preserved to continue. For instance, in Acts 6, the apostles realized that they were overwhelmed with trying to see that all the widows in the church got fed each day and it was eating into their teaching and praying time. So, they chose deacons to carry out that responsibility and delegated it to them. That way both tasks got done. Now let's go back and look again at three of the verses we just read and clarify some key concepts about this. The first one concerns:

a. the people to delegate to (21) Who can you delegate responsibility to? You can't give it to just anybody. There are 4 qualities that Jethro mentions here in choosing people to be judges that really ought to be qualities found in any person that we entrust parts of the ministry to. The most obvious one is that:

(1) they must be capable That is, they must have gifts to do the kind of job you're going to ask them to do. If you need people to settle disputes like Moses did, they have to be fair and wise and patient and listen well to people. If you need people to organize events, they have to be organized detail people. If you need a building maintained or finances handled, you choose a person with those capabilities. If you need a person to preach or teach, they'd better have some aptitude and experience for it. Capability is important but it is of absolutely no value without the second quality:

(2) they must be spiritual *Men who fear God.* All the capability in the world is worthless if the person doesn't love God with all their heart and want to obey and please Him. Too often we give people responsibilities because they're able, but their hearts aren't right and we end up in big trouble. They become our new headache in the ministry, holding back and hindering God's work because their hearts aren't in the right place. Then of course:

(3) they must be trustworthy, literally *men of truth*, people who will not lie to you, who will not tell you only what you want to hear, who will not embellish what is happening to make themselves look good. And:

(4) they must be honest, *hating dishonest gain*. Not willing to take bribes or play favorites for gifts received. Not in it for the money or anything else they can get out of it.

That's step one to relieve stress in ministry: find the right person who is capable, spiritual, trustworthy and honest; it's not all that hard! Then apply:

b. the principle of delegation (22) In other words:

(1) encourage them to do what they can do Give them responsibility for the things that they can handle and LET them handle those things. Don't make them run back and report to you every 5 minutes or look over their shoulder on every minute detail. Let them lead. Trust them to do what they can do. But that doesn't mean that you do nothing. Delegation is not about giving your work to everyone else so you can do as little as possible. It means that while they are doing what they can do, you:

(2) do what only you can do Most leaders are capable of doing a lot of things. They can do most of the things that everybody else can do. But for you to be effective in leading, what God needs is for you to focus on the things you can do that nobody else around you can and delegate the rest. *Professor Peter Drucker, the world famous business consultant, tells about being in high school in the 1920s. His history teacher, who had himself been wounded while fighting in the war, gave his class a challenging assignment. They had to write a term paper about World War I, doing their research in the multitude of books about the war that had recently been published. After they had presented their papers orally in class, one of Drucker's classmates asked an insightful question: "Why is it that every one of these books analyzing the war says that it was a war of total military incompetence?" The teacher didn't even pause to think before he answered: "Because not enough generals were killed. They almost all stayed behind the lines and let others do the fighting and dying." Drucker concludes, "Effective leaders delegate a good many things; they have to or they drown in trivia. But they do not delegate the one thing that only they can do with excellence." Effective leaders are to be found in the thick of the battle, leading by example. [The Leader of the Future ed. by Hesselbein, Goldsmith, and Beckhard. The Drucker Foundation, 1996.] Find the thing that God has called you uniquely to do and concentrate on that thing!*

And if you are able to do that, to find quality people and effectively give them the portion of responsibility they are capable of carrying, you'll see:

c. the results of delegation (23) Two things will happen. First:

(1) the load of responsibility will be bearable You'll be able to stand the strain of ministry without burning out and secondly:

(2) the job will get done The people will get their needs met. They won't have to stand in line all day waiting to see you. Their cry will be heard sooner and they'll be happier.

Moses' father-in-law left him in much better shape as he departed. Re-united with his family, strengthened by their spiritual sharing together and wisely delegating a bunch of things he didn't need to be doing that gave other people a chance at important ministry. Through Jethro's wisdom, God preserved him to last through 40 years in the wilderness and if you'll follow His principles, He will preserve you through many years of ministry also.

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

The Seriousness Of God's Instruction - Ch. 19

I had originally planned to end this series with chapter 18, but somehow it just doesn't feel right to follow Israel all the way out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai and stop there. So, we'll go on over the next few weeks to Ch. 24 where we WILL stop before we get into the instructions for building the Tabernacle. In Chapters 1-18 we saw how God *redeems* a people; in Chapters 19-24 we'll see how God *instructs* a people. God had told Moses when He first spoke to Him out of the burning bush: *Exodus 3:12 ...this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.* And that is exactly where God led them when He brought them out. Chapter 19 is the story of their arrival and their preparation for what God was about to tell them and what you can't miss as you read this chapter is what a serious matter God's instruction is. But before we dive into that, let's just notice:

I. The Circumstances In Which God Instructed Israel (1-2) First of all notice:

1. the time of His instruction: They arrived on the first day of the third month of their year. Now remember the night of the Passover was the 14th day of the first month (and Hebrew months all have 30 days) so there are 16 more days in the first month plus 30 in the second month, meaning they arrived at Sinai on the 47th day. Then vs. 11 says that 3 more days pass until God appears to speak with them, so if I calculate it right God actually gave them His instruction, His law on **the "50th Day"** and that's what Jewish tradition says. Of course, in the Greek language the "50th day" would be called **Pentecost**! Does that ring a bell? There is a tremendous parallel here. Fifty days after the Passover lamb was slain and Israel was redeemed, God gave them His law to guide them; fifty days after Christ our Passover was slain on the cross and we were redeemed, God gave us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us and to write His law upon our hearts and guide us into all truth! So, the giving of the Law is both parallel to and also in direct contrast with the giving of the Holy Spirit and we'll need to keep that in mind as we study the Law in these next chapters. We ought to be looking for the meaning of the Spirit in what is going on! Please keep that in mind for next week. Now secondly notice:

2. the place of His instruction: Mt. Sinai In fact, two names are used to describe this location in various places in Scripture, Horeb and Sinai. It seems to me that in ancient usage Horeb was the name for the entire region where the mountain was located and it means "desolate or wasteland". Moses smote the rock at Horeb back in Ch. 17 and water came out. Sinai was more specifically the name for this particular mountain itself and it means "thorny". So, don't picture Israel coming to a desert of sand, but rather a wilderness of rugged rock formations and crags barren of vegetation and water, nothing growing but the hardiest of plants like thornbushes. And as they pick their way through this "badlands" they come out upon a plain where they camp at the base of a 7,000 foot peak, the highest in the region, and it is there that God has chosen to deliver His word. It is a theatrical stage of stern unmatched grandeur so that Israel would not soon forget what transpired there. Yet what's really important about Mt. Sinai is not the physical location, rather it is:

II. The Covenant Which God Made With Israel Let's read it in vs. (3-8) God called Moses up onto the mountain, gave Him the covenant and its terms and sent him back down to give it to the people and he brought their answer back up again. God says, "You have seen 2 things. First you saw how I destroyed all of Egypt, the mightiest nation on earth to rescue you. You saw My might and my power and my fierce wrath poured out. You KNOW who I am! Then you saw how I carried you all the way through this desert, just the way a mother eagle puts her chick upon her back and carries it on her powerful wings across the wilderness. I carried you here on my strong wings. I provided for you bread from heaven each day and water from the rock. I protected you when you were attacked by enemies and I directed you in a pillar of cloud and fire all the way. I brought you here; you didn't bring yourselves! And now I want to make a covenant, a sacred bond with you!" Now notice that this covenant had both a 3-fold promise and a 3-fold premise.

1. the promise of the covenant is in vs. (5-6): **God would make Israel** 3 things. First:

a. they would be His people: you will be My treasured possession Out of all the people groups, ethnic groups, on earth, He would choose Israel alone to belong to Him, to be claimed by Him, to be HIS people. And they would be His prized possession, His dearest treasure, His unique prize, the thing He valued most in all the earth, even though He owns the whole world. What an awesome privilege! Second:

b. they would enter His presence: they would be **a kingdom of priests** This does not mean that every Israelite would offer sacrifices at their tabernacle; they obviously couldn't. Rather, it means that they would all have the privilege of coming to Him, of approaching Him and knowing Him and, more specifically, of approaching Him and mediating on behalf of all the other peoples of the earth. They would be His priests who would spread the knowledge of Him to the world to bless all the peoples and would be the ones to bring them to God. What an awesome responsibility! Thirdly:

c. they would acquire His purity: He would make them **a holy nation**, a holy people. The Hebrew word is *goy*; the term for the Gentile or non-Jewish peoples of the world is the plural, *goyim*. Although they were one of the peoples just like all the rest, God would set them apart to Himself. He would make them holy. Through the sacrifices they brought their sin would be removed and through His instruction given to them on how to live, His holiness would become theirs. They would be a people living righteous lives, living out and modeling the very life of God in holiness and purity before a watching world. Again, what an awesome responsibility!

What a wonderful promise God made to them. But notice also that unlike the covenant that God made with Abraham which was completely one sided - God said "I will, I will, I will"- this Mosaic covenant also contains a premise, a requirement, an "I will but YOU MUST..." And:

2. the premise of the covenant was obvious: obedience (5a) *You must obey Me fully and keep my covenant!* You see, this covenant:

a. it was conditional "I will if you will." "You will be my people IF you obey fully what I tell you. If you don't, you forfeit the promise; I am released from My obligation." This fact that it was conditional upon obedience was what was wrong with this first covenant. Heb. 8:7 says *For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.* Jesus wouldn't have had to come and make a new covenant with His own blood if they could actually keep the first one! The New Testament teaches us that one of the purposes of the law was simply to teach us that we can't keep it, to show us that our works can't possibly save us. It is our schoolmaster to show us how sinful and flawed we are and how much we need Christ! Secondly, I want you to notice that:

b. it was national (5b-6) It was not about personal salvation for individual Israelites. That has always been by grace through faith. This is a covenant between God and an entire people. God would make Israel special and treat her in a way that was different from every other nation. To break the covenant meant for them as a nation to be set aside from this special place of privilege which is exactly what happened to them many times throughout their history and it happened with finality when they rejected Christ as their Messiah. Israel was set aside from her place of privilege and the church was raised up as a new people to carry out the plan of God to bless all the peoples of the earth. Then lastly:

c. it was mutual This was not forced upon Israel. They were offered the terms and they agreed to it. And notice how Israel was quick to agree to it when Moses told them, how hastily they said, "Sure, that sounds great. Everything you say we will do!" It was an answer of ignorance, a shallow response. What they should have said was, "We can't possibly do that. We know ourselves. We know how we grumble and complain and become unfaithful every time we have a problem. We remember our moaning at Marah and our complaining at Rephidim. If this covenant depends on our obedience, we will certainly default on our end, probably sooner rather than later, and we will bring punishment on ourselves! God, help us only by grace!" But they didn't say that. They said **(8)** *we will do everything the Lord has said!* So, God then had to hold them to it. And He did. But before we move on let's take a quick look at the New Testament and check out:

3. what God has made us to be in Jesus Christ - 1 Pet. 2:9-10 Did you hear that? Everything that Israel was supposed to be, WE ARE. We are His treasured possession, the thing He values most in all the world. Think about this: Chuck Swindoll points out that *even the most ordinary items can become extremely valuable if they belong or belonged to somebody important. Napoleon's toothbrush sold for \$21,000. Hitler's car was sold for more than \$150,000. People will pay thousands to become the owners of a pipe that C. S. Lewis smoked, Winston Churchill's desk, sheet music written in Beethoven's own hand, or a house that Ernest Hemingway once owned. When Sotheby's auctioned off Jackie Kennedy Onassis' personal belongings, somebody shelled out \$211,500 for her fake pearls and a set of JFK's golf clubs were sold for \$772,500! None of these items were that valuable in themselves. They acquired great value because they belonged to somebody important. We fit that bill, too! Think of the value of something owned by God. What incredible worth that bestows on us, what inexpressible dignity! We belong to Him. [Hope Again by Charles Swindoll. Word Publishing, 1996. Page 71.]* We are His chosen people who belong to Him! And we are a kingdom of priests, a royal priesthood who enter His presence and stand before Him on behalf of all the peoples of the earth, and a holy people composed of some from every people, living out His righteous life before a watching world because of His Holy Spirit that He put in each of us! Only our privilege is not conditional! It is not based on how well we perform, though sometimes we perform pretty lousy! These privileges were bought for us at the cross and bestowed on us when we believed! What awesome privileges! Glory in them! But, oh what awesome responsibilities we have! Now quickly let me go over with you in the rest of the chapter:

III. The Setting In Which God Instructed Israel (9-25) because in it we can pick out:

1. the lessons God sought to impress upon Israel at Sinai Let's begin with vs. **(9)** The first lesson is that:

a. God is the source of His Word He appeared to them in a dense cloud, a huge visible manifestation, and spoke to them in an audible voice that every one of them heard so that they would know it was from Him. The law was not something Moses cooked up or invented; it was not some unimportant message. It was the word of Almighty God

Himself and must be treated as such. How lightly we treat this Book sometimes! Yet it is the very Word of God, not the writings of men! The next lesson is that:

b. God must be approached in personal holiness (10-11, 14-15) God gave them 3 days to get clean, to physically wash their clothes and their bodies. But I'm sure his intent was not just for them to show up in clean clothes with dirty hearts! I'm sure He meant for them to ponder their own sinfulness and uncleanness and put away from their lives everything that was displeasing to Him. The lesson is in Ps. 24:3-4: *Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.* How lightly we take our privilege of approaching Him sometimes! The third lesson is one that we already know:

c. God's penalty for sin is death (12-13) God told them to set a boundary somewhere at the base of the mountain so no one would go closer and the penalty for violating that boundary was death. No one was to even rush in and grab the offender and pull him back; he was to be instantly stoned or shot with an arrow or spear! It reinforced the lesson of **Rom. 6:23** *The wages of sin is death!* That is how serious sin is to Him. Because of our privilege in Christ, we take it so lightly; we forget just how serious it is and why He had to die for us! Next, we see that:

d. God's wrath is a fearful thing (16) When God's presence appeared on that third morning everybody trembled in their boots. **Heb. 12:21** tells us *The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."* He showed them visibly what **10:31** says: *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* His wrath is an awful thing and that is what He rescued them from by bringing them to Himself. He taught them that even though they were His people, they ought to remember who it was that loved them and treasured them. Not so they would be constantly afraid of Him, but so that they would give Him the reverence and respect that He deserves. We could use a little more of that ourselves, couldn't we? And finally, He we see Him emphasize here that:

e. man is too foolish to grasp this (20-24) Moses has already been up the mountain, then down with the covenant then back up with their answer and down again to tell them to get ready for the third day. So now he goes up the third time and God tells him to go back down and make double sure that the people don't cross the boundary markers. And Moses says, "Aw God, they can't get up here. We already did like you said and put out markers and warned them. Nobody would be dumb enough to cross them now!" And God says, "God down and warn them again! I know these people better than you do; they need a double warning!" Isn't that something? God knows that even after all of that awesome display and people trembling with fear that they will still be foolish enough to disobey and die for it! Truly God knows what is in man, doesn't He? We are foolish critters. We don't learn from our mistakes. We ignore repeated warnings! But as we close, let's turn to **Heb. 12** and make sure we don't miss:

2. the lessons God seeks to impress upon us through Sinai God takes up the meaning of this whole event and describes it all over again, applying it to us: **(18-24)** We get all impressed at the awesomeness of this setting and what God did there to impact Israel but the real truth is that:

a. we have experienced greater realities than they did They saw a visible, earthly, outward demonstration suited to their miserable spiritual condition. We have a better mountain, Mount Zion, the heavenly city that is our home. We have a better assembly, the church of the firstborn, a new covenant and greater promises bought by the blood of the Redeemer Himself! What we have is better than what they had! Our privileges are greater than theirs by far. Our relationship to God is on a higher plane than theirs! So, his point is that:

b. we bear a greater responsibility than they did! (25-29) Oh, if they should have obeyed and served God after their experience, how much more should we after knowing what we know and having the privileges that we have! We ought to serve Him with all reverence and awe, laying our lives at His feet and expending them in His service. How we ought to dread even the thought of displeasing Him who died for us!

Syndicated columnist Dale Bourke wrote: "Recently I rode home in a taxi with a driver who prominently displayed the Koran. We chatted briefly about his life and beliefs, and finally I asked him a question that had puzzled me for some time. "You seem like a wise and moderate man. Can you explain why the writer Salman Rushdie should be condemned to death for writing what the Muslim world considers blasphemy?" "The driver paused and then said, 'Yes, I do understand, but I'm not sure I can explain it so you will. You see, in America you seem to believe that freedom of speech is more important than the fear of God. If you are truly a Muslim, you know better.' Dale says, "I thought about his words for a long time. As a Christian, I may not agree with pronouncing a death sentence on a man for his writings, but if I believe what I say I believe, the fear of God should be more real in my life than anything else." ["We Have Nothing to Fear But God" by Dale Hanson Bourke. Religion News Service, 1996.] Is it?

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

The Core Of God's Moral Instruction - Ch. 20

In Exodus 20 God gives Israel His Law, the terms of their covenant. We call them the Ten Commandments, literally the Ten *Words*. We memorize them in Sunday School and hang them in our courtrooms. To this day they form the core moral guidelines that undergird all of human society and our laws are based on them. To most of us they are "old hat", old axioms we've heard before and take for granted. But I'd like to take a fresh look at them today, yet before we do, let's look briefly at two facts about:

I. The Law That God Gave To Israel

First of all, you need to notice that:

1. He spoke it directly to all the people (1, 18-23) God spoke to the whole congregation out loud with an audible voice from heaven *before* Moses went back up the mountain. These commands were not delivered by Moses or received first in writing. **Heb. 12:19** says plainly that they heard a voice speaking words that so frightened them that they begged not to have God speak any more. Vs. 22-23 tell us why He did. He says, "You have heard My voice speak to you; you know these are MY commands (then He reinforces the very first thing He spoke to them) DO NOT have any other gods!" It was designed to impress upon them once for all that HE alone is God and that these are HIS commands and they MUST be obeyed! On the other hand, you MUST know this about the Law:

2. He gave it to Israel; NOT to us. Notice the premise in vs. (2) God did not bring US out. He brought THEM out. It was a covenant and a law given to Israel as a nation, not universally to the whole world. We are NOT under the law; we are not bound by it. Listen to *Rom. 6:14 ...you are not under law, but under grace.* And *Gal. 5:18 ...if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.* In fact, *Rom. 10:4 (NASB)* says *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.* This system of relating to God by obeying the Law was given to Israel, not to us and now in Christ it is done and over with. We relate to God by grace and by His Spirit in us.

So why do we study it? Because it does reveal to us the mind of God on moral issues. Many of the things spoken here were already considered wrong even in pagan societies; they are not new. Here God put them down in a concise code of law to be easily remembered. And all of the principles embodied in the ten commandments are repeated in various New Testament scriptures for us and deepened there and we are commanded to keep them there out of love for Christ. Now just as the law was later written on two stone tablets, it appears to divide cleanly into what we call two tables.

II. The First Table Of The Law, the first 4 commandments, has to do with **Our Relationship To God**. The first commandment has to do with:

1. God's person (3): He is not admitting the possibility that other gods exist; what He means is **"I am the only God; do not worship any other!"** *Don't let me see you worship anyone or anything else but ME! I am not one among many gods. You can't add Me to the gods of Egypt or the gods of Canaan. I alone am God; acknowledge NO OTHER!* Paul re-stated this truth nicely for us in **1 Cor. 8:5-6** *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.* Our God is unique, the only One. The god of Islam is an aberration of the true God. The gods of Hinduism and Buddhism and the gods of the tribal peoples are not gods at all, but idols invented by demons. The earth and the sun have often been worshipped, and curiously, our culture ends up back there talking about "Mother Earth" and "Mother Nature" and deifying the world as though it created and evolved itself; But no created thing is God. There is only one God, the God we worship, the Father of our Lord Jesus. When you worship anything else, it's idolatry. And by the way **Eph. 5:5** says that a greedy person is an idolater; a man can worship money or power or sex or anything else. Whatever you give the loyalty of your life to IS your god. The second command has to do with:

2. God's worship (4-6) You might think this command is the same as the first, but what God is really saying is: **"Do not represent Me by an image and worship it!"** What it is forbidding is exactly what Israel did 40 days later. When they figured Moses was not coming back, they made a golden calf and said, "This is your god who brought you up out of Egypt". They weren't electing to worship a new and different god; they were representing God by the statue of a bull and worshipping the statue, breaking the second commandment. Now why God is so adamantly against that you can read for yourself in *Deut. 4:12-19* which basically says the reason God never appeared to them in a definable shape was that they would end up making an image of the shape and worshipping the image rather than the God it represents. We always do. That's why Paul repeats the warning in **1 Cor. 10:7, 14** *Do not be idolaters, as some of them were....my dear friends, flee from idolatry.* Sadly, it happens in Christianity too! How often in history and even today has the church ended up bowing before statues or crucifixes or relics of the saints or other objects instead of the Living God these things should point them to! John warns us appropriately, *Little children, keep yourselves from idols!* The third commandment is about:

3. God's Name (7) "Do not misuse My Name" Do not use it in an empty meaningless fashion. God's Name represents His Person, His Being. It is not merely an identifying word. So, when you misuse it, you reject the Person. Think

about **Acts 4:12** *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* Paul said in **1 Cor. 12:3** *...no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* You don't go around using Jesus' name as a curse word or an exclamation. That Name, the Name of Jesus saved me! It is precious to me! God is my Heavenly Father who loves me and sent His Son to save me. When you mock His Name or use it irreverently, you show disrespect to my Father. The way we treat His Name is a measure of the respect we show His Person and God says if you misuse His Name you are held guilty! The fourth command is about:

4. God's day (8-11) "Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy" The sabbath day is the seventh day that we call Saturday. Now God says plainly that:

a. the Sabbath principle of resting existed from creation God worked 6 days in creating the universe and rested on the seventh. Why? Because He was tired? No, to demonstrate for human beings a universal principle, that man needs a day of rest at the end of every week of work! However here in the Mosaic covenant:

b. the Sabbath day was made a sign to Israel Turn with me to **Ex. 31:12-17**. Just as the sign of circumcision was given to Abraham to indicate that his descendants were God's chosen people, so the sign of keeping the Sabbath day was given to Israel to be an indicator to the world around them that they were His people. While everybody else's shop was open 7 days a week, theirs were closed on Saturday. While everybody else was out in the fields 7 days a week trying to earn their bread, Israelites were home resting on Saturday, just like their God did. It was an indication of their trust and belief in Him and that's why the penalty was so stern for violating it. Now let me be very clear; we are not Israel:

c. we're not obligated to keep the sign (Col. 2:16 says that no one can judge us as to whether we keep the Sabbath day; we are free to keep it or not keep it) **but we still need the rest!** Man has always needed a day of rest; violate that and sooner or later, you'll pay a price. But it is no longer a sign for us; we are not bound by the Sabbath regulations. And, by the way, Sunday is NOT the Sabbath. It is the Lord's Day, the day that was hallowed by Jesus because on that day He rose from the dead, a day we voluntarily set aside every week to worship and honor Him. Yes, you can do some homework on Sunday; you can play some ball or do anything else your heart wants to, but above all your heart ought to remember Whose day it is and set aside a time for worshipping Him! Well, now we come to:

III. The Second Table Of The Law: 6 commandments that deal with **Our Relationship To One Another** And it's interesting that Jesus made comments on the meaning of almost all of these in His teaching. The fifth commandment deals with our relationship to:

1. our parents (12) "Honor your father and mother" The Hebrew word for *honor* means *to make heavy*. We preserve its opposite in our idiom "to make light of" something. It means make them important, respect them, listen to them, value what they teach you. Of course, we do that, don't we? Well listen to:

a. Jesus' comment - Mt. 15:3-6 *...God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it.* In other words, **it is a responsibility issue!** You're responsible for their care, not just to tip your hat and give lip service to respect. Honoring them means committing yourself to caring for them. And then in Ephesians Paul repeats this and makes it:

b. our command - Eph. 6:1-3 - Children obey your parents in the Lord! It's a really a spiritual thing. Take up their faith and value it and follow them in it and if you do, you will not only respect them, you will care for them not only physically but with all your heart! Now it doesn't sound so easy, does it? The sixth commandment is about:

2. our life (13) The Hebrew word here is very specific and can only mean **"Do not commit murder"** God is not a pacifist. He is not saying, "Never kill an enemy in a war" or "Never execute a criminal" or "Never shoot the criminal who broke into your home with a crowbar and is coming for you". This commandment forbids murder, deliberately taking the life of another without valid reason. It establishes the sanctity of life. Well, that's pretty easy to keep, right? But listen to:

a. Jesus' comment - Mt. 5:21-22 *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.* In other words, this command is not simply an issue about physical killing, the spirit of this command **is a love issue!** You break it every time you don't act lovingly toward your neighbor, or get angry with him and swear at him or hate him in your heart. Turn with me to Ephesians 4 and leave one hand there as we continue. God didn't have to tell us not to murder; that's obvious. Any pagan knows that just by conscience. Look at:

b. our command - Eph. 4:29-5:2 - *live a life of love!* That's what God is after! Living out a life filled with love to others, love to other believers, love to our family, love to the people around us at work or school and love to our enemies! Living out the love that God has for us, that Jesus showed us; that is the heart of this command. Now are we breaking that? The seventh commandment deals with our relationship to:

3. our spouse (14) “Do not commit adultery” and the Hebrew word here specifically designates a sexual transgression by a married person. This is not to say that other forms of sexual sin are not wrong, but here God is specifying the sanctity and the permanence of marriage and the holiness with which we are to treat our own spouse and everybody else's spouse. In the pagan world of that day sex was everywhere. Ritual sex was even a part of pagan worship ceremonies. Just like it's everywhere today and affairs abound, not to mention sex without any intention of marriage at all. Still, it would be easy to say, “I keep this one. As long as I don't sleep with someone else's husband or wife, I'm good with God! I can't touch, but I can look!” Well, remember:

a. Jesus' comment - Mt. 5:27-32 *You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.* Jesus said, it's not about the physical act of sex, **it is a faithfulness issue!** Be faithful in heart, soul, mind and body to the woman or the man that you married! Don't imagine sex with someone else in your mind, don't look at pornography. Don't divorce this spouse and find another so you can legally be with someone else. Love this one! Be faithful! Again, Paul gave us:

b. our command in Eph. 5:25 Husbands, *love your wives!* Love them the way Christ loved the church. Lay down your life for them. Cherish them. Nourish them. Cleanse them. Lead them to holiness by being holy. And wives, follow your husbands in that! That's what this command is really all about! Now how are you doing on this one? The eighth commandment deals with:

4. our property (15) “Do not steal” Don't take what belongs to another by force or by deceit. What belongs to a person belongs to them and it is not yours. This is the basis of the concept of private property and the core of a viable work ethic. If you want what you do not have you must work for it or earn it; you can't just take it from somebody else. Well, again, that's pretty simple to keep, right? That is until I start talking about cheating on your taxes or getting paid under the table to avoid having to pay them or taking stuff home from work that belongs to the company.

a. Jesus' comment - Mt. 6:19-21 *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* And v. 24 adds *you cannot serve both God and money!* The fact that a man steals means that material things have a grip on his heart, that he treasures them more than the person he takes them from. You see, **it is a value issue!** What does your heart love? Does it value things so much that it is willing to take them from others. By way of contrast, look at:

b. our command Paul tells us in **Eph. 4:28 - *work hard so you can give to others!*** That's the point, not simply to refrain from taking, but to work hard and love others by giving! That's the life God wants! Be a giver, let generosity pour out of you! That's His life! Now the ninth commandment concerns:

5. our word (16) “Do not give false testimony against others!” Technically this is a courtroom command. Never accuse someone of something they didn't do for your own advantage. Don't perjure yourself; don't be a false witness. Of course, we don't do that. But again, listen to:

a. Jesus' comment - Mt. 5:33-37 *...you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.* In other words, **it is a truth issue!** You shouldn't tell the truth only when you're under an oath. You should ALWAYS tell the truth. Let every word you speak be true; mean what you say. That's what Paul gave us as:

b. our command - Eph. 4:25 Putting away lying is not enough; ***speak truthfully to others!*** Always tell the truth. Always mean what you say. Be a man or a woman of truth the way God is a God of truth! And finally, the tenth commandment concerns:

6. our mind (17) The word *covet* means a strong desire to have for yourself. **“Do not desire for yourself what belongs to others!”** Whether it's someone else's wife or their animal or their house or their car. This is the command that takes all the others to the heart level. It means to not even WANT to steal, not to WANT to commit adultery, not to WANT to lie about them. Now try to keep that one! It's not so easy. Look what Paul said:

Eph. 4:17-24. Don't give in to your old desires, the desires of your flesh that want to pursue all those evil things. Rather **allow God to transform your mind to have new desires!** God made you a new person in Christ; allow Him to transform the way you think, to renew your mind so that you want what HE wants!

It is so easy to think that we're following the Lord and being obedient because we seem to be following the rules. *When he was a teen, Louis Kanopka and a friend were hitchhiking home from school one day. It was a frigid outside and they were cold and discouraged when Louis saw a familiar car. It was his sister-in-law, heading in the same direction they were. "Oh boy!" he said. "We'll get a ride now." So he waved. His sister-in-law smiled and waved back, but to his surprise she kept on driving. The boys ended up walking all the way home. Puzzled, he called his sister-in-law and asked why she didn't pick them up. She explained, "My husband told me to never pick up hitchhikers!" She was following his "law" to the letter, but she did not understand its spirit.* Remember Jesus said that all of the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands. They were His summary of everything God meant in the Law. First, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That's what Table 1 really means. Having no other gods, making no images, honoring His Name and His day - they mean love Him with every fiber of your being! Do you love Him that way? Then He said, love your neighbor as yourself. That's what table 2 really means. Not murdering, not stealing, not lying, these things mean loving the people in your life with all your heart. Do you love the people around you that way? When you think of the Ten Commandments like this, Jesus is the only one comes out spotless!

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

Civil Law Introduced - 21:1-11

Now let's move ahead to chapter 21 where we have:

II. The Civil Law Introduced - 21:1-11 [Read (1)] There is a lot that underlies this simple verse. In reality what happened at Sinai was this:

1. God transformed Israel, the people, into His personal Kingdom In patriarchal times the father governed the extended family. As family groups grew it was only natural that a tribal unit developed where the oldest member of the family group served as patriarch tribal leader. But now God is setting up a new type of rule, a Kingdom. **19:6** is the first occurrence of this word; *you will be for Me a KINGDOM of priests*. Israel will be more than a people; she will be a kingdom and will be ruled by a King. And who would this king be? God! By entering into this Mosaic covenant, God is now their King, their Sovereign, the One in absolute charge of them and Israel is a "theocracy" where God rules directly as King. So:

a. as King, God chose their leaders Other nations had kings but when they were in their land Israel had judges, men and women whom God raised up to lead them on His behalf. That's why it was an evil thing when Israel told Samuel years later, "We want a king like all the other nations!" They were rejecting total control by God to give that authority to a human and it often led to disaster! Then, of course:

b. as King, God decreed their laws In a monarchy the king makes the laws. There is no legislature; the people have no voice in them. The king's word is law. So, in these next 3 chapters we are reading the laws of the Kingdom that God declared Israel must follow as their Sovereign King. Now I'm sure you'd like to know:

2. how we benefit from studying these laws If we are not under the law and these laws were not given for us to keep then what good is it to study them? Well, first of all as we study them:

a. we recognize God as the universal source of righteous law When you take the time to ponder it and look around at all the nations of the world, it is amazing to realize that the majority of these laws or the principles behind them exist today in most of the cultures of the world. How did that come to be? Paul explains it like this: *Indeed, when peoples, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts...* - Rom. 2:14-15. People and cultures everywhere know that kidnapping and rape and theft and bribes and incest and things like these are wrong! How? That comes from God; He wrote it in the hearts, the consciences of men. Of course, humans make many unjust and evil laws, but wherever there is true and righteous law, it comes from God. He is its source! It's in the world because of Him. Second, by looking at these laws:

b. we have a basis for forming and evaluating our own laws Here we have God directly ruling a nation on earth and making its laws; that ought to say a lot about the kinds of laws and the penalties that are wise for any government to make! And if you read over these chapters you find all the principles we consider the basis of our own system of law, principles like being responsible for your actions, like intent (i.e., whether you intended to do harm or it was an accident), like punishment fitting the crime, like criminal negligence or willful neglect, the duty of restitution to those wronged and equality of all persons before the law. The very fabric on which our law rests was given very simply over 3000 years ago by God Himself. When we make laws that get away from this basis, we're in trouble as a society! And thirdly, in these laws:

c. we have God's direct evaluation of particular actions We have God's declarations on moral behavior and social interaction and these haven't changed. Sodomy is no more right today that it was in Sodom or in Israel. Witchcraft and occult practices are still evil. Kidnapping and bribery are still detestable. So even if we are not bound by this particular law code, it can still help us know what is morally right and what is morally wrong and most of the things stated here are restated in the New Testament for us in even broader terms. So, with that in mind, let's put our toe into the water a bit and look at the first section which is:

3. laws about Hebrew servanthood (2-11) I deliberately avoided using the term slavery because of what that means to us from our history. The two are not the same; vs. 2 makes clear that this section is for Hebrews who become servants to Hebrews only. People always ask why the Bible does not condemn slavery outright; what I want you to notice is that:

a. it was not commanded but rather regulated Nowhere do you find a command to make or get servants. It was a practice that was already happening and had been for centuries and it was all around them everywhere. God tolerated it (like He tolerated polygamy), but He strictly regulated it to make it different from way Egyptians and others practiced it! In Israel servanthood:

b. it was entered on an economic basis V. 16 says that forcibly enslaving another person was punishable by death; there was no slave trade in Israel. The four ways to enter servanthood for a Hebrew were (1) to survive poverty one might indenture himself or a son or daughter (Leviticus 25:39), (2) insolvent debtors might be sold as punishment to make restitution to a creditor (2 Kings 4:1), (3) a thief could be sold as punishment to make restitution (22:3-4), and (4) one could be born to parents who were servants. So basically, servanthood was entered much like the way a hired hand would sell his services to an owner and he was treated much the same. The master was buying the services of the servant, not ownership of his body and soul like property! That's why thirdly:

c. it was kept temporary and could be voluntary (2) says that a servant could only be kept 6 years and in the 7th, he went free whether any obligation remained or not. Further there was continual right to be redeemed by a kinsman who might have the money. There was always a way out; it was never meant to be for life. Further, (5) says a man could choose NOT to go free when time was up. That says something about the good treatment received. God must have thought it likely that some servants would have such a good relationship with their master they would want to remain voluntarily in his household! Lastly, servanthood:

d. it involved rights The rights of release and redemption I just mentioned, but (9-10) show us plainly that in the case of female servants it is clear that she is not counted as property but rather as a wife. Evidently a man could only take a Hebrew woman as a servant with the idea of being a wife to himself or his son (7-8). However, she is not to be released lightly like male servants but treated as wife or daughter. V. 8 in the NIV uses the word *selected her*; the KJV says *betrothed her*, that is, he has brought her into this arrangement but if before their marriage is consummated, he decides he doesn't like her, he must see to it that she gets properly redeemed and restored to freedom. And she is never to be regarded as a lesser wife because she came through servanthood.

Clearly Hebrew servanthood was different from all we know of slavery and even it was designed as a perishing institution which would eventually die out. New Testament slavery was largely similar and many of the early believers were actually slaves. So, when Paul addressed the issue, here's what he said, *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.* - Eph. 6:5-9. Now we don't have slaves and masters, but we still have bosses and employees; we have owners and workers and we still have plenty of people who serve us because we pay them. How do you treat those who work under you or those who sell their services to you? How do you treat the waitress who brings your food or the receptionist who handles your call or the plumber who fixes your pipes? We all have a Master in heaven to whom we answer as His servants! Does your treatment of those you lead or those you serve reflect that?

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

Civil Laws: Personal Injury - 21:12-35

How many times do we as believers commiserate about the steps that our lawmakers and judges take? We have for years, of course, lamented the Roe vs. Wade decision that annually allows thousands of babies to be aborted. the latest wave of decisions has to do with trying to introduce homosexual marriage as a legality. We're thankful that in the recent election 7 more states adopted a Marriage Protection Amendment. However, recently a New Jersey court ruled to allow benefits for homosexual couples in that state. Up and down we go; laws punishing evil; laws permitting evil. Have you ever wondered what the United States would be like if God Himself wrote our laws directly? Well, that's exactly what He did for the nation of Israel as they were gathered at Mount Sinai. He directly gave them a code of civil laws that would govern

their nation through Moses. This code was never meant to be a bunch of rules to follow in order to get to heaven. It was a set of rules intended to teach a human society how to live in a day when kings made whatever laws they wanted. So, it's useful and helpful for us to study because it teaches us principles to apply in our own society and indeed many of the principles that form the basis of our own legal system come from biblical passages like the one we'll study today in Exodus 21. The laws in the majority of this chapter concern personal injury, where one person hurts or harms another. The first thing we find is a list of:

I. Some Offenses Punishable By Death In Israel (12-17) In fact there were many offenses punishable by death including idolatry, witchcraft and being a false prophet, all things people have a right to under our laws because our country is NOT a Theocracy where God is king and serving other gods is not high treason here - though in actuality it is the highest treason! But here three capital crimes are mentioned. First:

1. murder was punishable by death (12-14) In spite of the fact that twelve of our states plus the District of Columbia have abolished the death penalty at this time, God has always taught us that the principle of taking the life of the person who takes a life is foundational to human society. When Noah got off the ark to re-populate the earth God laid down the rule that was meant to keep the world from ever falling into moral chaos again: *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.* - Gen. 9:6. Human beings are God's highest creation; like Him they live forever. Human life is God's life and is to be held sacred under all circumstances. I'm not so sure we believe that any more. Have you heard that the leadership of the Church of England just last week came out publicly with the position that severely disabled babies should be allowed to die after birth and that the cost of treatment is one of the reasons for their position? Well, when God was literally running His own country on earth, He made it clear that:

a. an accidental slayer must be protected, no matter what What does that phrase *but God lets it happen* mean? Cp. Deut. 19:4-6 There it is. Death that was not intended. It was an accident beyond the person's control. The axe-head flew off and hit the other. The car had a blowout and the driver couldn't control it and hit another car or a pedestrian. That person has killed another but doesn't deserve to die. It was unintentional and unpreventable. He must be protected. That's why in Israel 6 cities of refuge were appointed where he could go and live under official protection. Society must protect him, no matter how angry and upset the dead man's relatives are. However, God makes it clear that:

b. an intentional slayer must be executed, no matter what He deserves to die. And no matter where he hides, even if it's in God's sanctuary, or what he offers to pay, he must be put to death: Num. 35:31 *Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death.* That's not popular, but that's how God sees it. And what's really been developed here is our modern legal:

c. the concept of malice aforethought: that's the difference between **murder and manslaughter**. If it is known that a person had malice toward the other beforehand, hated him and deliberately killed him, he is guilty of premeditated murder. If there is NO malice beforehand, no intent to kill, it is true that he has taken a life but it is not murder and should not be punishable by the taking of his own life. By the way, there's a personal lesson to apply here, isn't there? There's a difference in someone doing something to you intentionally and doing something accidentally. There's a difference between your child doing something intentionally and doing something accidentally. How do you respond to either of those situations? Do you treat them the same? When your teenager wrecks the car, do you stop to discern whether it was truly accidental or if it was brought about because of some wrong intent? Or do you just react? Now in addition to murder, in Israel:

2. kidnapping was punishable by death (16) Kidnapping is the stealing of a life and was punishable by the taking of your own. Here in the US it is, but only if it results in the death of the person. I wonder how many children's faces would appear on milk cartons if we outright executed convicted kidnappers swiftly? Then in Israel, it may surprise you to learn that:

3. striking or cursing parents was punishable by death (15, 17) The blow doesn't have to be fatal; in fact, it can be simply a blow with words, pronouncing a curse. God singled out parents in the 5th commandment and said "Honor them that your days may be long!" Here He says, "Curse them and your days will be short!" God intended to instill in each of his people a valuing of parents that was as deep as life itself. Godly parents were God's means of preserving faith and holiness from one generation to the next. In Israel parents could bring a rebellious son who would not listen and lived immorally to the elders and he would be stoned! I think God's point is that spiritual life as well as physical life is to be passed from one generation to the next and that process itself is so vital, so necessary to the preservation of human society that it must be guarded with the death penalty! Now why the death penalty for these crimes? Why not life in prison? Well Scripture is pretty clear that:

4. enforcing the death penalty acts as a deterrent Go back to: Deut. 19:20. When you know you can kill somebody and know that it will take years before your trial is over and the worst thing that can happen is that you'll be jailed for life and that you could get out on parole early for good behavior, if you're angry enough, you just might do it. Only

1,076 persons have actually been executed in the US since 1976! Even though 6,807 persons were sentenced to death! There's a 6 to 1 chance that even if convicted and sentenced you still won't die! But if you knew you would be tried immediately and the moment you were convicted you would be taken out and executed, you might just think twice and stop yourself before taking ANY life unless you had a death wish! God said, *the rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid!* Don't get brainwashed by all the liberal hype the media and the education system are feeding you about this subject! Now let's move on to:

II. Principles For Dealing With Assault And Battery (18-27) Assault is when you threaten someone with harm and battery is when you do the harm, when you hit them and hurt them. Now the rule that God laid down for Israel here is that:

1. a person is responsible for physical harm done to another (18-19) Now if you hit him and he dies, you're back under the statute for murder in v. 12, but if you simply injure him so that he takes a long time to recover the use of his body, he doesn't need insurance. He's got YOU! You have to pay him the income he needs to live while he's laid up and you have to cover the cost of his care all the way until he's fully recovered. You hit him, you did the damage, you provide for him until he's over it! You are responsible for your actions and must do whatever you can to repair what you have done. Now Israel was unusual among the nations of that day in that there this principle:

a. it applies even to the treatment of slaves (20-21) By the way, I don't happen to think this is referring to Hebrew servants because Leviticus 25:39-46 makes it very clear that they must never be treated harshly. But God did tolerate Israel holding slaves from the nations around her and evidently, they could be disciplined with a rod by being beaten. But they could not be killed at will like they could in Egypt. That put the owner under the law of murder. And if they were seriously injured, look at **(26-27)**. If you hurt them seriously you have to release them; you lose your investment entirely. So, the effect of this law was really to elevate the position of slaves in Israel and ensure them humane treatment because a master is responsible for the harm he does to them. This same rule also:

b. it applies to injured bystanders (22) In the process of your rage, if you hurt an onlooker, you are responsible for what you do to them. If it's a pregnant woman and she gives birth normally, you get fined. If the baby dies, you die. If you damage property you pay for it. You did it; YOU bear the consequences. Now here's the basic:

2. the principle of punishment: do to the offender what he has done (23-25) If you kill a person, you should be killed. If you deliberately cause a permanent injury to someone, what you did to them should be done to you. If you blind them, you should be blinded. If you cripple them, you should be crippled. If you knock their teeth out, your teeth ought to be knocked out. The punishment should be according to the offense. Now please note that this is not teaching that you should go around doing back to others everything that they do to you. It is not teaching personal retaliation, living life by getting even with everyone for what they do. Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek, forgive, love your enemies" and lots more. This is a principle given for judges, for people in authority to operate on in meeting out penalties for crimes. Now often, as in the case of the slave, it would be of little value to put out the offender's eye or smash his foot. I suspect that if a slave could be set free instead that perhaps other equivalent penalties were used for serious injuries. By the way did you ever notice that Israel had no jails? Nobody was ever locked up or put in prison. If you kill you die; if you steal you pay back; if you hurt someone you provide their care, you work on their behalf. The punishment is always determined by the nature of the offense; it is not some huge "time out" from life, the way we do it. But the point is that:

3. punishment according to offense acts as a deterrent Look again at **Deut. 19:18-21** Show no pity! That's not a personal command. That's for judges. A person must experience the direct consequence of what they have done; they must be punished according to their offense. Justice must be served, even if you feel sad for the offender who must pay the price.

And there's another good personal lesson right here. People need to face the consequences of their actions. So many times, we want to rescue the people that we love, especially our kids or our spouse. They do wrong and we want to cover it up or bail them out. A person who doesn't experience the pain of the consequences of what he does will do it again! When you keep them from that, you end up enabling their behavior and the lesson takes longer. *Dale Robbins tells about the day he was sitting in a fast-food place eating lunch: "A mother and two small children sat down at a distant booth in the restaurant. As the mom left briefly, probably to the ladies' room, the boy and girl, maybe about eight and six, went into action. They were apparently arguing over possession of the onion rings, when the boy went into a fit of anger and began throwing food! The splat of hamburger patties could be heard slapping the face of his sister; the spray of mustard and ketchup hung ominously in the air before raining over the floor and nearby tables. Not to be outdone, the little girl, with every ounce of her strength, heaved the tray along with the coveted onion rings down his shirt. And to top it off, she poured the full 20 ounces of her Dr. Pepper on his pants. Her face beamed with pride, as though awaiting the applause of the spectators. By this time, the entire dining room had stopped in mid-bite, forks in hand, awaiting round two. But then the real drama began as the mother had returned to the scene of the crime. The dining room was still--every eye and ear was open. Surprisingly, there was no reprimand. 'Could we have another order of sandwiches over here,' she said calmly while wiping the faces of her fast-food gladiators. Soda and condiments dripped steadily down the kids' hair and clothing. Food and splatterings were on the walls and at least ten feet in every direction from the impact zone. The manager emerged with a frown on his face. 'Lady, I'm not gonna tell you how to raise your kids, but don't you think a little discipline*

is in order here?' "If you mean a spanking, I'm afraid we just don't believe in that. The children are just a bit grumpy to-day,' she said. "There was seemingly a simultaneous gasp from all the diners. [Pulpit Helps, Jan 1995] I wonder if those kids had to apologize to the manager and get down on their hands and knees and scrub up the mess and go home and wash their own clothes whether they would think twice before doing that again? Well, we end this chapter with some:

III. Principles For Dealing With Indirect Injuries (28-36) Sometimes instead of being directly injured by us, people are injured indirectly as a result of something we have done. I leave your gate open and your dog gets out and gets run over by a truck. Am I responsible? Well, there are 2 principles here:

1. a person is NOT responsible for what happens by accident (28, 35) If your dog who has always been friendly suddenly goes berserk, jumps the fence and bites somebody, or if your dog and another dog get into a fight in the park over a bone they find and one gets hurt, it wasn't under your control. If you loan me your car and the tire blows out and I am hit and killed, that wasn't your fault. You couldn't predict it or prevent it. Things that happen by accident are just that, accidental and while there may be great and deep sadness over what has occurred, there need not be guilt over what is *purely* an accident. However:

2. a person IS responsible for what they SHOULD have done: If another person is hurt or injured in some way through something that I knew about and could have prevented, I AM guilty. This is **the concept of criminal negligence**. I dig a 4 foot hole in the middle of my sidewalk and don't put up any barrier and in the dark, you walk by, fall in and break your neck. That IS my fault; I was negligent and I am responsible for what it caused. Now:

a. when it results in loss of human life, he can be treated either as a murderer or manslayer (29-32) If I knew my dog was vicious and didn't keep my fence repaired and he gets out and kills you, I deserve to die. In Israel I could be treated as a murderer and put to death but the judges could in cases like this lower the penalty to manslaughter and levy a heavy fine as a ransom for my life, simply because I did not do it maliciously. But either way, I am still responsible; I have taken a life by my actions. If I drive drunk and kill somebody, I've still killed somebody, even if I didn't set out to because I chose to do what I did that resulted in death. And when someone is negligent and:

b. when it impacts property, he must bear the loss (33-34, 36) If I dig a hole in the street to fix my water line and don't mark it and your car goes into it and sustains damage, I'm liable for the damage. If I know my dog is vicious and I let him near your dog, I owe you for your dog!

But oh, how we try to deny responsibility when we've been negligent, when we should have done something and didn't, or when we knew better than to do it and we did it anyway. *Most of us have seen the movie Titanic. It was the most luxurious ocean-going vessel of its day. It was said to be unsinkable. On her maiden voyage in 1912, as the ship was proceeding at great speed, the operator in the wireless room received a radio message from another vessel. It warned that icebergs were in the immediate vicinity. The operator wrote the message on a slip of paper, placed it under a weight at his elbow, and continued about his duties. The message never reached the captain. More than 1,500 lives were lost in the icy waters that night.* Is that operator responsible? Yes, and so is the man who decided to put too few lifeboats on board. A number of others probably share it too. James put it like this (4:17): *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

Civil Laws: Property and Morality - Ch. 22

Let me remind you that we've been studying the code of laws that Israel was given at Mt. Sinai. These are the laws by which Israelite society was to function and the basis on which her judges were to make their decisions. We study them not because we want to make our laws exactly the same as theirs but because there are some fundamental principles that we can learn from God about right and wrong in them, principles that apply both in our society and in our personal lives. Chapter 22 focuses on laws that deal with property and with morality or ethical behavior and it divides into 3 sections. The first section is:

I. Israel's Laws About Stealing The Property Of Others (22:1-4) Now the bottom line here is that when you steal something from somebody:

1. the practice of restitution is mandatory A thief **MUST** pay back what he took. But if merely giving back is all he had to do, it might still be tempting to try and get away with it. So, God increased the return amount!

a. if the item that was stolen can't be returned, restitution is 4 or 5 times what was stolen! If you take someone's ox, that ox is like the man's tractor. It plows his field and pulls his wagon. So, an ox is a pretty expensive animal; even today an ordinary cow sells for more than \$1,000 so you get the picture! But if you steal it and sell it or kill it and eat it, you're going to have to come up with 4 oxen to give back so maybe you'll think twice about stealing it! Or if you only steal a sheep, the sheep in that day are the man's investment, his money. In Kyrgyzstan you can still pay a debt in sheep instead of cash! A sheep may only be worth \$100 today (it's a lot smaller than a cow) but if you steal it and eat it you'll have to pay back 5 sheep so maybe you'd better think twice before you do it. I think these rules were specifically meant to stop trafficking in stolen property. However, notice that:

b. if it can be returned, restitution is double what was stolen If you simply keep the animal or the item for yourself, you not only have to give it back but another one like it or of equivalent value! Paying back double acts as a deterrent because under these rules sin literally costs more than it's worth! It's not only unprofitable, but if you don't have enough of your own to make full restitution, you get sold as a servant to the victim and have to work it off! And he might not be a very pleasant master after you stole his stuff! You know, if you think about it, there might even be some principles in here that would work for teaching your kids not to steal! If you make restitution mandatory and make it double or more, it might just break them of the habit quickly. Then we also learn in 2-3 that:

2. economic crimes must be punished monetarily not violently As much as you might feel like it, you can't kill a man for stealing from you. Now at night when it's dark and an intruder breaks in, you don't know what his intentions are and whether your life is in danger but if it's light and you can see that the person is purely intending to rob you, not hurt you, you can't beat him to death or within an inch of his life. Stealing is an economic crime and should be punished with economic loss. Now let's move to the second section of the chapter which is:

II. Israel's Laws About Responsibility For The Property Of Others (22:5-15) There are 3 cases here, 3 basic rules. The first one is:

1. if I damage the property of others... I must replace it (5-6) When I was a kid, we lived on 3 ½ acres that backed up against a small farm and the farmer always had a herd of heifers he was raising in the pasture and the fence was ancient and easily broken by falling limbs or forceful cows. So at least once a year growing up, I'd look back along the creek at our huge vegetable garden and there would be the neighbor's cows trampling it down and munching stuff! Generally, we called him and he simply chased them back, but I remember one fall he was nice enough to bring over a few pounds of one of them after he butchered. However, by this principle, he should have given us all HIS tomatoes or paid the going rate. If I damage your stuff, I pay for it! If I hit your parked car, I pay for it. If I light a fire to burn the stubble in my field (which is a method I saw still being used in Kyrgyzstan this fall) and it spreads into your field and burns up your standing crop, I owe you a whole crop! What I damage, I'm responsible to replace; that's still a good way to live. Now what about:

2. if I take care of the property of others... If they give it to me for safe keeping. **(7-13)** Now all of that essentially boils down to this. When I've been entrusted with something that I'm supposed to keep safe for someone else and something happens to it:

a. I need not replace what is accidentally lost If your car is parked in my garage and there's a terrible storm and the roof caves in on your car, I can't help that. I'm not responsible. If I keep your cow or your sheep (or dog) to take care of it while you're away and it gets out and runs off and is lost or simply dies, I can't help that. I'm not responsible. Now, if you doubt my word, I have to settle it by taking an oath before God that I didn't steal it for myself. That way if I'm lying you can count on God to kill me for taking His Name in vain and you know I wouldn't risk that! But if the loss is not my fault, I don't have to replace it. However:

b. I must replace what is lost through negligence If it is definitely stolen and I could have prevented it, if I didn't lock it up, I left it lay outside, didn't put it away and somebody takes it, then I have to replace it because I was negligent and it was my fault! If I'm doing my job in caring for your stuff, I'm not responsible for what I can't control but I AM responsible to do my job as caretaker! But here's a third scenario. How about:

3. if I borrow the property of others... I must repay any loss (14-15) If I borrow your wrench and I break it, I buy you a new wrench! If I borrow your new dress to wear and get a bad stain on it, I owe you a new one. But if I hire you to bring your truck over to plow my driveway and you break a hydraulic line, you were with it and you broke it; it's not my fault. The cost of repairs should be figured into the price you charge in the first place. And that's not a bad principle for someone in business, to figure in equipment repairs. But if you borrow my computer and drop it and it smashes, you owe me a new one.

These are righteous principles and frankly I'm amazed at how little regard people have in this generation for the property of others; these would make great lessons for teaching our children. Anyway, let's move on to:

III. Israel's Laws About Moral Behavior (22:16-31) Here are some of the ethical standards Gods laid out for Israel. First of all:

1. sexual misconduct was not to be tolerated Here is a man and a woman who are not married to each other who have sex with each other. What's the penalty? Well, if either one of them is married or betrothed (engaged) to someone else, the penalty would be death! So that is not what's in view here, it's just two unmarried people and look at this:

a. the penalty for sex without marriage was marriage (16-17) This was the basis of the old "shotgun wedding" idea: "You had sex with my daughter and now you're gonna marry her!" In fact, some older thinking says, "if you had sex, you're already married in God's eyes!" That's not true. Please notice that if the guy was a real schmuck her father could actually refuse to let her marry, but the guy still has to pay a dowry as though he married her and that would be the equivalent of probably thousands of dollars today. God's real point here is simply this: sex be-

longs in marriage AND NOWHERE ELSE. Because two unmarried people sleep together doesn't mean they ARE married nor that they MUST marry. It means they have sinned and should repent before God and stop their behavior. But we must fight this message that is being drummed into our heads everywhere through television and movies that sex before you're married is a normal and natural and beautiful thing, that marriage can come later. God's standard Old Testament or New is extremely clear: ABSTINENCE! Sex is ONLY for people who have made a lifetime commitment of marriage to one another. Don't become lax on that message. Drum it into your kids. Drum it into yourself! Now on the other hand note in v. 19 that:

b. the penalty for sexual perversion was death (19) This is so bizarre we wouldn't even think of it, but trust me, people did it then and people do it now, even right here in Philadelphia. In Israel's law this was a perversion and was in the same category as homosexuality and voluntary incest (Leviticus 20:12-13). All were punishable by death in Israel. There were no "gay rights" parades in Israel! Now I need to be clear: I am NOT saying that we should hate homosexuals or that violence toward them is OK. They are people, lost people who need a Savior, just like anyone else. The point to grasp is this: none of these things are "alternate lifestyles" as we are told today. One of the biggest lies in our society is that people are "born gay or straight" like there is some gene for it. That is simply not true; usually these folks carry some sort of emotional baggage that has caused them to reject the opposite sex and cling to their own.

All these practices including immorality are perversions of the way God has made us as human beings and when any society begins to tolerate and even endorse them, it is headed for trouble! *Byron Paulus of Life Action Ministries tells of being on a commuter airline flight to Knoxville: "Shortly after I got on the plane, the copilot's voice came over the intercom with an announcement that jolted me: 'When the captain boards the aircraft, please applaud. He just learned that his fiancée is pregnant with twins!' 'I could hardly believe my ears! As the dozen or so other passengers broke out into cheers and applause, I felt a sickening thud in my stomach. 'Has it come to this,' I wondered, 'that we would be encouraged to applaud an act of fornication? Has our society really drifted this far from her spiritual and moral moorings?' 'Something that would have been a shame to mention a generation ago is now flaunted and cheered. I found myself grieving over a society that is practicing and promoting casual sex.' [Revival Report, Nov 1993. Page 1.]* What are we doing, grieving or clapping? Well, along with sexual misconduct in Israel:

2. religious sacrilege was not to be tolerated In Israel God was king and there was no freedom of religion. In fact:

a. the penalty for witchcraft was death (18) A sorceress or witch who dabbled in the occult, who cast spells and consulted spirits and foretold futures was to be killed on the spot in Israel. God knows how devious and dangerous and powerful involvement in occult things is, how it sucks people in and drags them away from God. Yet today we openly promote it. Seances, Ouija boards, astrology readings, tarot cards - you don't have to look far to find them. Just look at the movie previews that scroll by on TV while you're watching a show and how filled they are with images of skulls and gruesome murders, things Jesus would never watch! Our culture is fascinated with it. But in case you're tempted to laugh it off as nothing, just look how seriously God takes it! That's a warning for us. Yet occult practitioners were not singled out alone:

b. the penalty for any idolatry was death (20) Anyone who worshipped any god other than the true God Jehovah was to be utterly destroyed from Israel. Why? So that they would not lead Israel astray into worshipping other gods which is exactly what happened in their history.

Again, let me be clear that I am NOT saying that our society should adopt these laws, that only Christians should live and everyone else be killed. That is the philosophy of radical Islam today. We want everyone else to be saved, to come and worship Christ and find freedom from their sins. What I AM saying is that there is great danger in us falling into the liberal brand of so-called Christianity that is everywhere around us that says Jesus is not the only way, that all religions are roads to the same heaven, that people are free to choose who and how they worship and God will accept them all. That doctrine is a cancer that we must be careful to root out of the church. Next, we read that, along with sexual immorality and religious sacrilege, in Israel:

3. social injustice was not to be tolerated (21-27) If there is one thing that Scripture makes clear everywhere, it is that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. He is the Champion of the orphan and the widow and the stranger. These verses tell us that:

a. God will not tolerate the oppressing of the powerless (21-24) This is more than just a law; it is personal. God says, "When you mistreat someone because they're a poor immigrant who doesn't understand your culture and language, when you foreclose on a poor widow who can't make her mortgage or throw a helpless orphan out into the street who has no parent to meet his needs, I take it personally! They have no one to help them, to stand up for them and when you oppress them I get angry and I will take action against you!" And in like manner:

b. God demands compassion toward the poor (25-27) "Don't loan money to poor desperate people to make money off them through interest. If a man's so poor that the only collateral he has is his cloak, then don't take it; let him have it so he can keep warm at night! The poor are not a nuisance; they are not Scrooge's "excess population"

that needs to be reduced! I have compassion on them and if you are like Me, you will too!" *He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done - Prov 19:17. Even James wrote Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world - James 1:27.*

No society should tolerate these kinds of injustice, but so many do. Just to use one example: Human Rights Watch says, *Street children throughout the world are subjected to physical abuse by police or have been murdered outright, as governments treat them as a blight to be eradicated-rather than as children to be nurtured and protected. They are frequently detained arbitrarily by police simply because they are homeless, or criminally charged with vague offenses such as loitering, vagrancy, or petty theft. They are tortured or beaten by police and often held for long periods in poor conditions. Girls are sometimes sexually abused, coerced into sexual acts, or raped by police. Street children also make up a large proportion of the children who enter criminal justice systems and are committed finally to correctional institutions (prisons) that are euphemistically called schools, often without due process.* There are, the UN says, maybe 150 million of them, not counting millions more child soldiers and child laborers! Do we care about the poor and the oppressed of the world? And the saddest thing is that 2 billion of them still have never heard that there is a Savior who loves them. Does their plight touch our hearts? Well, lastly, we read how in Israel:

4. reverence for God was to be continual (28-31) It was to be part of everything His people did.

a. it was to show in their speaking (28) They were always to speak respectfully of God and of their leaders.

b. it was to show in their giving (29-30) They were to freely give their tithes and their offerings to the Lord from their hearts. They were to set aside and dedicate their firstborn children and sacrifice all their firstborn animals to Him to show their love and allegiance. And:

c. it was to show in their living (31) Israel was His holy people. It was even to show in what they chose to eat. Nothing impure or unclean.

Well, today you're free. You can eat roadkill if you want to. But the principle of continual reverence for God in everything we do is still a good one. Peter said, *Live such good lives among the pagans [literally among the nations] that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us - 1Pet 2:12.* You can only do it through the power of Christ. How close are you living to Him?

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

Civil laws: Final Responsibilities - Ch. 23

We have followed the progress of Israel as God brought them out of Egypt and through the wilderness to Mt. Sinai. On the third day God began to give them His law, starting with announcing the 10 commandments out loud to them, but then proceeding to give an entire digest of civil laws to Moses for Israel to follow as a society. In Ch. 23 we are now approaching the end of those civil laws and God lays out the final responsibilities that He wants Israel to remember and begins to prepare them to go in and conquer the land of Canaan. In the beginning of the chapter, we see clearly that:

I. Israel Was To Reflect The Character Of God In Her Behavior (23:1-9) As you read this list of specific rules, two things become immediately obvious. First:

1. they were to assure true justice for everyone The rules must be the same for all people and everyone must receive punishment alike without preferential treatment. Accepting a bribe or biasing a decision before or against a person because of their economic status or race or allowing a wrong to go unpunished just because many people are involved in it, none of these things are acceptable. There is no room in God's economy for ethics that change according to the situation or are forged by social pressure or societal opinion. God is a God of truth and righteousness. Right is always right and wrong is always wrong; that's how God wants His people to live. They are not to change like the shifting shadows, to send mixed messages to the world; they are to reflect His character and live as just and righteous people in the midst of a very unjust world. But at the same time:

2. they were to show true compassion toward everyone Vs. 4-5 say that if you see even your enemy in need of help, you must give it. To modernize a bit, if his car is stuck in a ditch, you can't drive by rejoicing; you have to stop and pull him out! V. 9 says that you ought to remember how an alien, a foreigner or immigrant, feels; you know what that's like so you ought to have compassion on him and warmly receive him. Don't ignore the plight of the poor; put yourself in their situation and care. You see, that's how God is! He sends His rain on the just and the unjust. He sends His Son to die for His enemies in order to save them. He is filled with compassion on the poor and the needy. And our lives ought to reflect His character in the midst of a cold and uncaring world!

What a healthy balance God displays: a burning desire to see true justice in every situation and a burning love that cares about all people. That balance should be displayed in us. A few years ago, I was watching a 48 Hours news program about the death penalty one night where the cameras followed the last 48 hours of the life of a death row inmate who was executed by lethal injection. This man was a Hispanic who had been involved in a robbery shooting with two other guys when he was young and on drugs, but at this point he'd been in prison so long he had a grown son who had his own chil-

dren. On top of that, he had found Christ in prison. He had become a model inmate and was liked and trusted by the staff and had been restored to his family, his wife, his mother, his children and grandchildren. They loved him and visited him. The warden of the prison was also a believer and became a good friend of this fellow. The two of them spent his last 2 days together, ate a last meal together and said goodbye before the warden had to give the order for the injection in tears and watch him die. To me that warden was displaying the character of God; justice must always be done; but it must be done with full compassion. Outside the gate of the prison where the son was waiting with the family and bawling his eyes out holding his little toddler for word that his dad was dead, right there beside him was an older couple, most likely Christians, camped out in their lawn chairs and with their picnic cooler and blankets, a couple who come to that prison gate for every execution and hold signs that say "We support the death penalty!" And when the son went over to them and in agony said, "But that's my dad they're going to kill..." they ignored him. Not a shred of compassion. To them it was just "one more criminal executed and good riddance." Beloved, that is NOT the character of God; in Him... *Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed [each other]* - Ps. 85:10 KJV. And that's what He wanted in Israel and what He wants in us! Now in the second part of the chapter we read that:

II. Israel Was To Carefully Observe The Sabbath (10-13) The sabbath was invested with the character of a sign between the Lord and Israel (Ex. 31:13); it was a special thing observance that set them apart from all the other peoples of the earth and marked them as His people; that's why v. 13 adds the instruction that the name of no other god is ever to be heard on their lips. Now Israel actually was to have two kinds of sabbath observances. The first is a new concept introduced to them here, the idea of:

1. the sabbath year (10-11) Every seventh year they were not to plow and plant their fields but to give them a year of rest. What an unheard-of custom! Anybody then or even now who depends on the land for income would likely starve (or go bankrupt) if they took a year off and did not plant a crop! In all honesty, I don't think Israel ever actually DID this once they arrived in Canaan, but they were supposed to. Why? Well, first of all:

a. it taught them dependence on God - God answered their primary objection in **Leviticus 25:20-21**, *You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years.* If they would obey Him, God promised to do a perpetual miracle. He would give them such an abundance every 6th year that they could live until the crop was harvested in the 9th year and so they could take a full year off! But to do that meant one thing: you were betting on God coming through! You had to trust Him to do what He said. You literally had to stake your life, your well-being, your daily bread on His word if you obeyed Him and rested. So, it taught them very simply: *man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God!* We live not by the labor of our hands but by His grace; the food we eat, the air we breathe; it is all a gift from His hand. Second:

b. it taught them that God provides for all alike Through God's blessing the poor would have food to eat. Even the wild animals would have something to carry them through. The promise held good for every Israelite, no matter if they had a million dollars in the bank or only the shirt on their back. God provides for all and all have to trust Him. Thirdly:

c. it provided opportunity for spiritual reflection - Deut. 31:10-13 At the end of that 7th year after the harvest when they have seen how abundantly God has provided without their labor, they would all gather in Jerusalem and the Law would be read to them all, young and old alike so they would never forget it. That seventh year was to be a year of reflection on the goodness of God and the necessity of obeying Him. And that same thing was to happen in miniature every week as they rested on:

2. the sabbath day (12) The seventh day, Saturday, like the seventh year was to be a day of rest, to provide a day of refreshment and rejuvenation for people and animals alike. Again, it set them apart from all other nations; every other people worked non-stop 7 days a week, while God's people trusted His provision enough to rest one day each week and reflected on His goodness to them.

How about us? We are not under this law; we don't take every 7th year off (though I'd like to!). We don't celebrate a sabbath day but a Lord's day where we reflect on all that Christ has done for us and worship Him. But are our hearts really resting in complete dependence upon Him? What if God asked you to take a year off to go serve Him on the mission field and trust Him for your income; would you do it? Or if He laid you aside with sickness or some circumstance where you couldn't work for a long period, do you really trust Him? Do you recognize that every nickel you receive, every bite of food you eat comes directly from His hand to you? HE is your provider, not you! Well, in the third section of the chapter we read that:

III. Israel Was To Annually Observe Three Feasts (14-19) Here God introduces them to the 3 great celebrations of the year, each one a week long. Every Israelite got 3 weeks vacation - but they spent it all in Jerusalem! In the spring there was the Passover and the 7 day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Fifty days later there was the feast of harvest or firstfruits, also called the feast of weeks or Pentecost which also lasted a week. Then in the fall after all the crops were in there was the feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles which lasted another week. The details are spelled out later in Leviticus 23 but through these their calendar formed an annual reminder of the 3 great events of their history: the Exodus from Egypt after

the Passover lamb was slain, the giving of the law fifty days later at Sinai and the wilderness journey where they lived in booths or tabernacles. Through these they would never forget what God had done for them. Now just notice here 3 principles:

1. they were to worship with giving (15,19) Nobody is to show up empty-handed but to bring an offering of what God had blessed them with. Not only that, they were to bring the first and the best, not the leftovers with diseases. As He blesses them, God expects His people to give, to give of the first of what they receive and the best of what they receive from Him! That's still true today! Secondly:

2. they were ALL to come and worship (17) Every male had to go to the Tabernacle wherever it was located in Israel. It was not optional; it was required; God expected it. No exceptions and no excuses. It kept Israel unified. It kept her in contact with her priests and taught by her Levites and drew her together in the proper worship of God. Much the way being part of a church family does the same things for us today! Worship together is still for ALL of God's people! *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* - Heb. 10:25. Thirdly:

3. they were to worship in purity (18) They were not to offer ANY yeast. Yeast is a picture or a symbol for sin; we're not to come offering any of it to Him. We're to come in purity and holiness, not with impure thoughts and self-centered motives in our hearts, not out of a begrudging attitude as though fulfilling an obligation, but with hearts that sincerely love God and want to serve Him with our lives.

Well, now God is basically finished with the code of laws and He explains to them how He was going to get them to the Promised land and what they must do in the process. In the last part of the chapter, we read that:

IV. Israel Was To Go from Sinai And Conquer The Land Of Canaan (20-33) Now right up front:

1. God made to them four promises in verses (20-26) First He promised them:

a. His personal Presence with them (20-21) This was not just any angel that God would send with them. This was the angel or messenger who bore HIS NAME; this was Jesus appearing in the Old Testament. He was the one in the cloud and the fire, the one who went before them in all their journeys. His very presence went with them. And what did Jesus say to His disciples as He sent them out with His last command? *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* - Matt 28:20. As we go on our journey of life serving Him, He is ALWAYS with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. In fact, He dwells INSIDE us so that wherever we are, He is; wherever we go, He goes! That should be enough! But secondly, He promised them:

b. His protection and guidance on the journey (20) He would guard them along the way in all the hazards of the wilderness. And He would guide them; he would bring them to the place; He would show them the way and bring them safely there. What a great metaphor for our life! His Spirit will guard us and guide us all the way through our life's journey until we reach heaven, our promised land! Thirdly He promised them:

c. victory over their enemies in the conquest of the land (22-24) He would drive out and wipe out all their enemies that lived in the land so that they would conquer and occupy it for Him. They didn't have to be afraid they weren't strong enough or numerous enough or skilled enough. He would do it for them. What an encouragement as Jesus sends us out to spiritually bring the whole earth under His Lordship by preaching the Gospel and making disciples! The enemies out there are tough and strong and filled with venom and hatred. At every turn they are fighting against the growth of the church. Yet Jesus says, "I WILL build my church and the gates of hell will NOT stand before it!" When we look at the Muslim world and the Buddhist world and the forces that stand against our efforts we could be easily discouraged like Israel, except for the fact that HE will do it. We've read the end of the book and we KNOW that some from every tribe, tongue, people and nation end up in heaven; the victory is ours and is guaranteed! Now here's a fourth thing He promised Israel:

d. prosperity in their personal lives (25-26) God says they will have health and wealth and long life as His people in His land. But I need to be clear that this is where we part company with Israel. These promises are NOT repeated and duplicated for us in the New Testament. In fact, if you read carefully what Jesus said to us, He repeated over and over that we would face tribulation, suffering, hatred and persecution for His sake. He warned us to expect the hatred of the world and to accept these things as normal for a Christian. Israel had earthly promises of an earthly paradise. We have heavenly promises of a heavenly paradise but we are NOT promised health, wealth and long life! And yet so much preaching that is out there today says we are! Sadly, there is a "Gospel of prosperity" that is preached both here and around the world that is doing an incredible amount of damage in leading people astray and then when they come to Jesus and don't find health, wealth and long life they become disillusioned and fall away. And that false gospel is based on texts like this one which was never meant for us. Our citizenship is in Heaven and, like Abraham, we're looking forward that city whose builder and maker is God, not to an earthly reward. But then:

2. God explained to them three processes that He would use to give them the land in verses (27-33) First:

a. He would use a mental process of sheer terror to drive their enemies out (27-28) Have you ever disturbed a hornet's nest or a wasp nest? I remember one time some tree trimmers on our property cut right through a hollow limb with a yellow jacket's nest in it. They came down that tree like greased lightning, sprinted for the creek and dove in clothes and all. There is a sheer terror you get when you know a swarm of bees is about to get you! God was going to put their enemies into that same kind of terror and confusion, not knowing which way to run. But God isn't talking about physical hornets here. The hornet He planned to use is the fear and dread of Himself. When the spies were hiding in Jericho years later, Rahab said to them, *"I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."* - Josh 2:9-11. That fear, that terror of His own reputation, is what He planned to use against their enemies. Who can fight God? Secondly:

b. He would use a physical process of gradual conquest (29-31a) He would not do it all at once so the land would be left empty and fields overgrown. Rather He would drive their enemies out gradually over time until they occupied the land from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, from the desert of Arabia to the Euphrates River, a vast territory. Israel came close to that years later under David and Solomon but never really got it all because they became disobedient. Lastly:

c. He would require a spiritual process of total elimination (31b-33) A clear warning: do not spare the inhabitants of the land. They can leave in terror before you get there, but if they stay and fight, wipe them out. Eliminate them completely. Don't let them stay and live among you! Why? They will lead you to worship their gods. Sadly, Israel proved God right by her history because she didn't and they did.

God gave her great promises but what He required of her was total commitment. I leave you with these words from A. T. Pierson: *Suppose you had a thousand-acre farm and someone offered to buy it. You agree to sell the land except for one acre right in the center which you want to keep for yourself. Did you know that in some areas the law would allow you to have access to that one long spot? And that you would have the right to build a road across the surrounding property in order to get to it? So it is with us as Christians if we make less than a 100-percent surrender to God. We can be sure that the devil will take advantage of any in-road to reach that uncommitted area of our lives. And when this happens, our testimony will be besmirched and our service will become ineffective. Christian, have you given your entire being to the Lord? By a definite act of your will, have you presented yourself to Him for His control and use? If not, do so right now! Just pray, "Lord, I've already given you my heart, but here is my body. I hold nothing back. Use me for your glory!" When you do, your sacrifice will be acceptable, and Satan will have no access to your life!*

God Instructs A People - Exodus 19-24

The Covenant Of Law - Ch. 24

Moses has been up on the mountain with God since 20:21, when he went up to God after the 10 commandments were given, and God has been giving him all these civil laws in the intervening chapters for Israel. Now in Ch. 24, God sends him down the mountain again to the people to read them the laws we've studied and to invite their leaders to come up onto the mountain and ratify a covenant with Him. Now God had already offered this covenant to Israel back in 19:5-7 and they had affirmed it. However, now that they had heard ALL the terms, all the laws they were expected to obey:

I. God Ratified His Covenant With Israel once again in almost exactly the same words **(3-8)** This covenant that God made with Israel He would hold them to for their entire history until Jesus came. It was a covenant of law; God says, "If you do these things, if you obey My laws, then you will be My people and I will bless you above all peoples on earth." It was conditional and it was based on their performance. Now notice 3 things about it:

1. its terms were delineated and written in a book (3-4, 7) Notice how careful God was to make sure that the people understood. First, they heard Him personally give the 10 commandments. Then Moses came down to them in v. 3 and told them verbally all the laws God had given him on the mountain. Then evidently, he wrote them all down in v. 4 and the next day in v. 7 he read this "Book of the Covenant", this set of laws which sets forth the terms of the covenant, to them all over again. God wanted to be sure they knew what they were agreeing to and also to be sure they would never forget it so it was written down. Secondly notice that:

2. its conditions were reaffirmed by the people, not once but twice. In vs. 3 when they heard it, they said *Everything the LORD has said we will do!* Then in v. 7 after he read it to them the next day, they said, *We will do everything the LORD has said. We will obey!* Israel made a vow here. She entered it with her eyes wide open. She KNEW what she was agreeing to. And God held her as a nation to that vow throughout all of her history. Thirdly notice this:

3. the covenant was sealed by blood (4-6, 8) Moses actually finalized the covenant like this: he set up an altar to represent God and 12 pillars to represent the tribes of Israel. Then sacrifices were offered and half the blood was

sprinkled on the altar and the other half directly on the people after they had promised to obey. This blood was the seal of the covenant. Now why is that important? Look with me at **Heb. 9:16-20**. To make a covenant required the shedding of blood; it required death, the giving up of life. Now that says something about:

a. the depth of a covenant A covenant is so much more than a mere contract or agreement. It is the binding of two parties together by a holy vow into a bond and relationship that is as sacred as life itself. Think about marriage as an example. Marriage is not a contract, not a piece of paper, not an agreement. It is a covenant, a sacred vow that takes two parties and binds them into one for life before God. Two become one flesh we're told. Well, that same thing is true of any covenant whether it is the covenant that God made with Abraham that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed or the Mosaic covenant that Israel would be His chosen people or the New Covenant that God made with us through Jesus. These covenants are as deep as life itself and thus we could think about:

b. the guilt of breaking a covenant When Israel a short while later made the golden calf, do you now see how horrible that was? It was not simply a mistake, an error of judgment. It was not simply a failure to live up to the terms of an agreement. It was a violation of the sacred bond between God and His people. They would be His people and He would be their God. A covenant is sealed with blood and is as deep as life itself so breaking it is worthy of death, of instant destruction. Look at **Heb. 10:26-29**. Sinning deliberately when you know better is not just sinning. It is not just a mistake, a failure. It is trampling underfoot the blood of the covenant which was shed to save us, in our case the very blood of Jesus! It is treating His blood, His life, His death, as an unholy thing, as having no meaning or value! And that's a scary thing! If it was scary for them, how much more should it be for us!

*Martinique is a French island in the Caribbean Sea, a few islands south of Puerto Rico. With a beautiful large bay where the waves are almost perfect, and the tropical vegetation creates a paradise, it had become the playground for the rich of Europe who often came to spend their holidays in revelry. In Easter season of 1902 twelve big ships from Europe were docked in its bay, while the passengers were on shore celebrating Lent with all the wickedness that often accompanies Mardi Gras. Two young men from Canada arrived on another boat in Martinique and when the immigration officer asked them what they intended to do while in Martinique, they answered 'Preach the Word of God.' The islanders did not want this because it would interfere with their reveling so the officer told them, 'You will not soil our land by even stepping on it. You stay on your boat, and when it pulls out of the harbor, you pull out with it.' Meanwhile, on land the people were given to drunkenness and gross immorality, with open scoffing and blasphemy against anything religious. It was discovered later that a sow had been sacrificed on Good Friday in a cathedral as a burlesque of the crucifixion of Jesus.... Almost immediately the tall mountain, Pelee, overlooking the bay, started to smoke, as though a volcano was going to erupt. It had been inactive during historic times except for two minor eruptions in 1762 and 1851. They ignored the warning signs for weeks. But the people were frightened and sent a committee up to investigate the possibility of an eruption. They were unanimous, 'It was as cool as ever--there is no danger.' Once again the music and revelry broke loose in full swing. Three days later the Canadian boat pulled out of the harbor with the two evangelists on board. They had just passed the three-mile limit when the whole side of that huge mountain blew out and in 60 seconds covered the entire city with a fog of superheated gases and glowing, incandescent particles. So extraordinary was the intensity of the electrical manifestations associated with the violence of the blast that magnetic disturbances were transmitted as far as the North and South Poles within two minutes. The entire city of St. Pierre, 29,000 people, was instantly annihilated. There were two survivors. Two. [Life's Ultimate Privilege by DeVern Fromke. Pages 81-83.] Do I know for sure that God destroyed that city, like Sodom and Gomorrah, for their sins? No, not for sure, but I do know that it is a striking picture of what God is talking about here, of what a people deserves when they violate the very covenant of God. God was telling Israel, "I want you to be MY people, but if you violate My covenant you will deserve death!" Do you still want in? And yet they said, *All that the LORD has spoken, we will do!* They entered into this covenant knowingly and when they broke it, they broke it knowing the penalty. So, then we move on to read in the second half of the chapter how:*

II. God Revealed His Glory To Israel (9-18) But before we read that, let's back up to vs. 1-2 while Moses is still up on the mountain before he comes down and see:

1. their invitation to behold His glory (1-2) Up on Sinai God told Moses to go down and get Aaron the high priest, and his two sons Nadab and Abihu and 70 of Israel's elders and bring them up on the mountain close to the glory of God. It was an invitation to see Him, to meet him, to behold His glory firsthand. It reminds you of what **Jn. 1:14** says about Jesus: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Just as God revealed Himself in the person of Christ so that we could see Him and know Him, so God invited Israel up into His presence to see and know the One they were entering into covenant with. So, Moses goes down and reads them the law and builds the altars and they ratify the covenant and then we read about:

2. their vision of His glory (9-11) Whoeee! They saw the God of Israel. The description is deliberately left unclear but He apparently has some sort of human-like form; He has feet and hands and appears to be standing. He is more than just a bright glow of light. Now 1 Tim. 6:16 says that no one has seen or can see God. That is, no human can see God in His full essence and glory. So, what were they seeing? Jesus! Christ is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. He was there on the mountaintop in all the splendor of His preincarnate form perhaps just as He stood in John's vision

in Rev. 1 glowing and brilliant in all His glory. And they sat at a table and ate and drank in His Presence to celebrate the joy of the covenant, of being His people. What an experience THAT must have been! The elders of the whole nation, invited into His presence, beholding His glory, seated at His banqueting table, celebrating His joy over them as His redeemed people. Now just hold that thought for a minute and let's quickly look at:

3. their instructions following this revelation (12-18) Moses and Joshua went on further up the mountain and left Aaron and the elders there to wait. They went near the top and stayed 6 days. On the 7th day God called and went alone into the cloud which looked like a consuming fire to the Israelites below. And there he stayed with God 40 days, 5 weeks, almost a month and a half while God gave him the tablets of stone and the vision of and the specific written instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle which follow in chs. 25-31. And it is here that we're going to leave Moses on the mountain and stop our study, but not before we look at:

4. the lessons we can learn from this experience The first one is a lesson about:

a. the sin of unauthorized approach In v. 1 God issued an invitation to Israel to come up into His presence. If you remember they had been told to set boundaries around the base of the mountain and nobody could touch it, not even an animal under pain of death. But now they are invited up and in that list are Aaron's 2 sons, **Nadab and Abihu**. They were next in line for the priesthood. They dined at His table on the mountain. But do you remember what happened to them? **Leviticus 10:1-3**. Somehow their privilege went to their heads. They felt they could approach God any way they chose instead of in simple obedience at His invitation. And they died for it. Yes, they had seen the glory of God, but when they disregarded the Word of God and disobeyed it, judgment fell, none-the-less. No one can simply enter the Presence of God; we must be invited there! And that underscores the tremendous privilege we have:

b. our tremendous privilege of approaching God Look what v. (2) says about Israel. They can't come near! But oh, look with me at **Heb. 10:19-22**. We can come into His presence with confidence, with boldness, openly, freely. He has made a new and living way for us to come into His Presence and that way is Jesus. By His death on the cross, He removed our sins once for all, forever, and now He invites us to come boldly to Him without reservation any time we need His grace or any time our heart desires to worship. We don't need to tremble in fear. We don't need to see worship Him as a far-off distant God. He dwells right inside us and we ARE His very sanctuary. We are ALWAYS in His presence and can freely interact with Him. It's like living in a continual banquet if we simply take the time to eat and drink of Him, to experience Him through prayer and the Word! Then do notice:

c. the backsliding of Aaron and the elders through impatience In v. (14) Moses told Aaron and the elders to wait there on the mountain that whole long month. But where were they? When Moses comes down again in Ch. 32 they are down in the camp. They slid back down the mountain physically and they slid spiritually back down the mountain from eating and drinking in the very presence of God all the way to making an idol. Why did they do it? Cp. **32:1**. Simply, it took too long. They were impatient; they couldn't wait on God's time and forged ahead on their own or rather slid backwards into disobedience. It sounds to me like there's a lesson in there somewhere about how we ought to be willing to wait on God, to be patient with where He has us, to endure wherever HE has asked us to be regardless of how long the time seems to grow!

Now as we close this chapter and this series, let's take a step back and look at this entire scene again and see how:

III. Christ Is Pictured Through This Whole Experience Just as Moses made this covenant of law between Israel and God and sealed it with the blood of sacrifice:

1. Christ has made for us a New Covenant sealed with His own blood - Heb. 9:11-15 He is our mediator, our go-between, who entered into the very presence of God having given His own life for ours. And when He went in there, He took us with Him. He made for us a new covenant, a covenant, not of law but of grace. A covenant that is NOT contingent upon our obedience. Israel would remain God's people IF they obeyed; we will ALWAYS be God's people whether we obey or not. For us obedience is an act of the heart in gratitude. We obey out of love and gratefulness because He has given us freely the salvation we did not deserve. We have ETERNAL REDEMPTION, not simply earthly deliverance like Israel had, and it is guaranteed through HIS blood, not the blood of goats and calves! And that blood was sprinkled upon us, as it were, the moment we trusted Christ. From the moment we believed, we entered into that covenant and our covenant is as deep as the very blood of Christ upon which it rests. Then through that New Covenant, just as Israel was invited to come and enjoy His presence and eat and drink:

2. Christ has secured for us an eternal fellowship at His table Jesus talked about it this way: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come...."* - Matt 22:2-3. That's His description of what all of history in this age is about. God is making a great wedding feast for His Son and inviting people to come. The Kingdom is like a banquet, a great eternal feast, a gathering of all God's people in His Presence to worship, to praise and to enjoy Him and all the good things He has prepared for them. Jesus told His disciples: *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.* - Mt. 8:1. At the Last

Supper He encouraged them to look to the future saying, *I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.*" - Matt 26:29. And He added, *...I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom....* - Luke 22:29-30 So John wrote in Revelation, *...`Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'* - Rev. 19:9. Hallelujah! What Israel got to do only once, only temporarily and at a distance, we will do forever. We will be in His Presence and fellowship at His table throughout all the long ages of eternity!

And yet meanwhile we still have the tremendous privilege of guaranteed access to His presence any time we want right now. *The story is told that back in the 1860's an elderly gentleman sat outside the main gate to the White House in Washington, D.C. one day. His threadbare clothes were covered with dust, and his eyes were filled with tears. A young boy who was passing by stopped and sympathetically asked why he was crying. The man said that his son was in the Army and was condemned to be shot because he had deserted his post. "The guards on the White House grounds will not let me see the President," said the distraught man. "Mr. Lincoln is so kind and generous. If he heard the full details of my son's desertion, I feel sure that he would pardon him." "I can take you to the President," said the boy. "You?" asked the man with surprise. "Yes, he's my father. He lets me come in and talk with him anytime I feel like it." So, the little fellow took the man into the White House; and after Lincoln heard the story, he did indeed pardon the condemned soldier. The Son is continually in the Father's presence and we can go in with Him. He invites us to go in with Him.*

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

Our Worship Of God - Ex. 20:1-3

Today we begin a new study on what is perhaps one of the most well-known and often quoted portions of the Bible, the Ten Commandments. For observant Jews, they have always been the very core of moral teaching and practice and the Ten Commandments have also played a central role in the life of the church. For centuries, every youngster and every Sunday School child has memorized them. Many traditional churches have them posted somewhere in the building. In fact, for years we've had pictorial posters representing each one on our walls, have you noticed? Many of us could quote most of the commandments from memory, though probably few of us could name all ten and in order. We regard them highly and profess to live by them, yet we intentionally break at least one of them repeatedly every week without ever thinking about it. So, before we actually study them, it's important that we understand:

I. The Nature Of The Ten Commandments Look with me at **Ex. 34:27-28** In Hebrew that last phrase is literally the *Ten Words*. In the Greek language it is translated as *Decalogue*, another term by which we often refer to them. But what you should notice in v. 27 is that these Ten Words:

1. they were a covenant that God specifically made with Israel A covenant is a sacred vow, a holy agreement. God vowed that if Israel would keep His Words that they would be His people and He would bless them. Israel, in their turn vowed that they would obey God's Words. Now if you remember the story, you know that:

a. they were first spoken to all the people by the voice of God at Mt. Sinai Moses said in **Deut. 5:22**, *These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.* So, all the people heard them spoken by the very voice of God Himself. Of course, when Moses came down and saw the people worshipping a golden calf, he broke those original tablets and was told to bring two other tablets when he went back up to the mountain, so by his own hand:

b. they were then written on tablets of stone and placed in the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies where God's very Presence dwelt. God's voice showed everyone how deadly serious God was about them. Engraving in stone showed their permanence and their placement in the ark showed the holiness with which they were to be regarded. So, these Ten Words, first given in Ex. 20, together:

c. with the judgments and ordinances that follow in Exodus and Leviticus **became Israel's law**. In the US we have a constitution that forms the basis of our law code which all citizens are bound to obey. Likewise, God gave Israel these commands and the ordinances and the sacrificial system as a law code that all Israelites were bound to follow. God prescribed for them a way of life, a way to act and behave that would be beneficial to them all and result in His blessing, not only them, but all the peoples of the earth. However, the Scripture says clearly that:

2. they could not impart eternal life or true righteousness *...if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.* - **Gal. 3:21**. Keeping these commandments was never intended to be a means of giving eternal life to anyone. Yet one of the replies you get, even today, when you ask people why they expect to go to heaven is: "Well, I'm a good person; I keep the Ten Commandments!" A couple weeks ago we had a church-going electrician here working and in the process of conversation, he said something like, "Ten simple rules; I don't know why people make it so hard!" The rich, young ruler who came to Jesus was counting on that when He asked, "What must I DO to inherit eternal life?" When Jesus mentioned the Commandments, he quickly said, "All these have I kept from my youth!" So, Jesus gave him a quick test on the very first one, "Go give away everything you own and come follow ME!" And he went away sad, because he loved his possessions more than he loved Jesus. They had become the god that he truly worshipped. None of us can keep even one of these perfectly once we understand what they truly mean. So, they could not give us life and they were never intended to. Rather:

3. they fulfilled the function of a guardian until Christ came - **Gal. 3:19** says, *[The law] was added [after God's promise to Abraham] because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made...and vs. 24 concludes, So then, the law was our guardian [our school teacher, our instructor, our tutor] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.* You see, these Commands:

a. they imparted the knowledge of sin - **Rom. 3:20** says it clearly, *...through the law comes knowledge of sin.* God's law shows us how sinful we really are. In fact, **7:7** explains, *...if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."* As Phil Williams put it, *The law is the light that reveals how dirty the room is, not the broom that sweeps it clean.* [Dr. Phil Williams, DTS, 1976]. Somebody has to tell us right from wrong. Through these commands God explained to us, He clarified for us what is good and what is evil and:

b. that knowledge showed us our need of a Redeemer The more we try to keep them, the more we fail and the more we realize how sinful we truly are and how much we need forgiveness. That's the great lesson of the whole sacrificial system that followed them: you can't obey God; you need a substitute, a Redeemer to pay the price for your sins! And so, when we realize our sinfulness, we come to Jesus and find forgiveness and eternal life. That's what the law was intended to show us. But now:

c. we who believe are no longer under the law - Gal. 3:25 ...now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. **Rom. 6:14** ...you are not under law but under grace. Now that we have Jesus, we don't need the guardian any more. We are not Israel and we are not under the covenant God made with Israel. He gave us a New Covenant, a covenant of grace paid for with the blood of His Son, rather than that of bulls and rams, complete with a new heart and empowered by His Spirit. We are not bound to keep the law that He gave to Israel.

So, what do we do? Throw the Ten Commandments away? Hardly! Look at what Jesus said in **Mt. 5:17-20**. The scribes and Pharisees were like the rich, young ruler. They kept only the barest, rudimentary understanding of the Commands. Jesus said, "You've got to do better than that! I didn't come to get rid of the Law; I came to fulfill it. I came to show you what it really means and to empower you to live out what God truly intended by the power of My Spirit so that you end up fulfilling each of these in the way that God meant them!" You see, these Commandments:

4. they contain important eternal principles for us ...the commandment is holy and righteous and good, **Rom. 7:12** says. These commands spell out for us the very character of God which should be ours, but not simply at face value:

a. all were meant to be followed at a heart level For example, look at **Mt. 5:21-22**. God meant something deeper than the letter. Anybody could obey "Do not murder". But that command was meant to convey far more, to convey something about our relationships with each other, something about the sanctity of life and the desire to harm others. And it goes still deeper than that. Eight of the commands are negatives, "You shall not..." and the:

b. negatives were meant to cultivate the converse positive Paul said, *For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* - **Rom. 13:9-10**. God is not simply prohibiting things; He is telling us to love our spouses and to love everyone else by valuing their life, respecting their rights, and so on.

There is a deeper, eternal principle in each of these ten commands that we must find and treasure, so that when taken together they embody the essence of God's entire value system for the human race. They are the values that God intended to make human life possible and even beautiful now, the values that exist in heaven and that will exist on earth ultimately when Jesus comes. And not the smallest letter will pass away from them until they are all brought to pass some day! Now let's turn to **Exodus 20** and look at:

II. The First Command (1-3): You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me Simple words, but there is much more here than meets the eye. First of all, in giving this command:

1. God reveals His eternal nature He names Himself here, *I am the LORD your God...you shall have no other gods*. The word LORD in all caps in English represents God's proper name, *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, in Hebrew. Nobody is sure exactly how to translate it because the original Hebrew has no vowels, however its root is the verb "to be". When Moses asked God His Name, God said, *I am that I am. Tell the Israelites 'I AM' has sent me*. In His very Name, God is declaring Himself to be eternal, the One who IS, who ALWAYS IS. Jehovah has no beginning and no end. He is eternal, the eternal God. And that is the first qualification for the position! If anyone or anything else is going to be god, he must be eternal with no beginning and no end or else he is an impostor! The Lord is saying "I am the only ETERNAL GOD, the only TRUE GOD, the only REAL GOD" and on that basis:

2. He demands exclusive allegiance The words *before me* do not mean "ahead of me" as though Jehovah was first in a line of others. The Hebrew literally says "before My face", which is an idiom that means "in My presence". God is saying, "You shall have NO [none, zero] other gods in My presence; I don't want to see or hear of you having ANY other gods, period! I am the only true God; therefore, there is no room for any other." Our God makes an exclusive claim. Jesus made an exclusive claim, *I am the way, the truth and the life!* He demands that we follow Him and no other. And notice this:

3. He demands it of each person individually To whom is He speaking? V. 2 makes clear that it is corporately to those He had brought out of Egypt; to His people Israel. This is not a command He expects the world to understand or follow. It is a demand of allegiance from His own people whom He redeemed, who know and have seen that He is the only true God! He is saying, "You KNOW I am the only true eternal God; you have seen Me redeem you! Don't ever let Me see you give allegiance in any degree to any other god!" And yet, each occurrence of *you* in these commands is singular. The text literally says. "There shall be TO YOU [personally, individually] no other gods!" The command was given corporately to a people but it must be fulfilled individually by each one of them. Now let's try and apply this. Of course:

III. The Important Principle In This Command is that:

1. there is no other God That precept is found all over the Bible. It is part of Israel's great confession, the *Shema*, that they repeated every day from **Deut. 6:4**, *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*. A Jewish Rabbi interpreted that for us in **Mk. 12:32** when Jesus quoted it to him saying, "*Well said, teacher, you are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.*" That's what *the Lord is One* means. The truth is that this universe only has one God. And who is He? *I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God...* - **Is. 45:5**. Jehovah, Yahweh, the God of the Bible, the God who revealed Himself to Abraham and Moses and David and Isaiah and who revealed Himself most fully in Jesus Christ, He is the only God that exists. However, it is obvious that:

2. there are many false gods that seek to claim our worship Look with me at **1 Cor. 8:4-6**. There is only one true God, but there are many other "so-called gods", things that human beings put into the place God should rightfully have in their lives, and there are many of them. Obviously, some are:

a. the "gods" or idols of false religions The Egyptians had a whole catalog of gods. The Canaanites had their Baals and Ashtoreths. The Assyrians and Babylonians had their own gods. The Greeks and the Romans had a whole pantheon of their own. People after people all over the world and down through history have made their own gods to worship. India is said to have 330 million of them and when you go there with our team, they are absolutely everywhere. But all of the other gods who have ever been worshipped are false gods who have taken the place that our one True God should have. The old adage that there is one god who is worshipped in many ways under many names is a detestable lie. And when you see the kind of worship they demand and the practices that go on as part of it, it becomes blatantly obvious that they are not the True God. That's why every people on the earth must be told about the True God and eternal life in Jesus Christ. Another set of false gods that human beings worship are:

b. the demons of the spirit world Look at **1 Cor. 10:20**. Behind every idol is a demon promoting its worship. But in many of the more primitive cultures of the world the spirits themselves are worshipped. The whole goal of life in many jungle and mountain peoples is to appease the spirits, of whom they are deathly afraid. And in many more cultures ancestors are worshipped, which is simply another way of worshipping demons. As Romans puts it, the whole race, it seems, has exchanged the truth of God for a lie! But even here in western culture where we don't tend to do it so blatantly, we worship false gods too. They are:

c. the things we devote our lives to in this world Paul said, *...many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.* - **Phil. 3:18-19**. For many people in this world, their god is their belly, their material possessions or money, their prestige and power or their personal pleasure. Whatever they set their mind to have above all else in this world becomes their god and they devote themselves to the pursuit of it, instead of the True God. And, sadly, their end, like that of all idol-worshippers, is eternal destruction - unless they come to Jesus.

None of these other gods, idols, spirits or earthly pursuits are to have any allegiance from us who know Him:

IV. The Intent Of This Command is expressed in the second half of the *Shema*, **Deut. 6:5**. **I must love the LORD my God with my whole being** Turn with me to one last place, **Mk. 12:28-34**. That's what God really meant in the first and greatest commandment, "I am the only God and because of that you should love me with your whole being, with everything you have and are." That's what worship really is, devoting my whole self to the True God who made me and redeemed me. Yet we violate that principle all the time. J.I. Packer wrote, *What other gods could we have besides the Lord? Plenty. For Israel there were the Canaanite Baals, those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution. For us there are still the great gods Sex, Shekels, and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: self), and the other enslaving trio, Pleasure, Possessions, and Position, whose worship is described as "The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some. Indeed, the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run his life becomes his god and the claimants for this prerogative are legion. In the matter of life's basic loyalty, temptation is a many-headed monster. [James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986]* That's why in the last verse of John's first letter, he concludes by admonishing us, *Little children, keep yourselves from idols*. We have great and constant need of that warning for all of these things tug at us constantly seeking our allegiance, begging us to choose them over our God. G. Campbell Morgan, the great expositor, issued this powerful challenge, *"Let men take five minutes to shut out everything save the great fact that they stand alone with God. If they will, if they dare, let them ask as they stand in the light of that first commandment, "What is my god? To what is my life devoted?" If their answer indicates anything that puts God into the background, then in the name of heaven and of their own safety, let them 'break down every idol, cast out every foe' and let the God Who will be, Who is, and Who was, be their God."* Let's take that challenge. Let's look at our lives honestly and ask, "What is my god? What am I most devoted to?" And if anything rears its ugly head above Jesus, let's determine with all our hearts to cast it down and make Him truly Lord of all.

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

Our Relationship With God - Ex. 20:4-6

At a first reading it would appear that the second of the Ten Commandments is simply a repeat of the first one. The first said "Have no other gods"; the second basically says "Make no idols", which seems the same. By the way, did you know that there are actually THREE different traditions of listing the Ten Commandments? Roman Catholics (and Lutherans following their lead) actually combine what we Protestant and Orthodox churches call the first and second commandments, holding that our second one is actually still an explanation attached to the first one. Thus, in their listing, not taking God's name in vain is the second commandment, but then in order to get ten, they split the last one about coveting into two, not coveting your neighbor's wife and not coveting your neighbor's goods, following the word order of Deut. 5. The Jews actually make the preface in vs. 2 their first command and still combine our #1 and #2 as their second. So, who's right? Well, God never specified how to number them; He just said there were ten and to keep them all! Now why do I tell you this? Maybe so that your Catholic neighbors won't think you're ignorant when you don't know what the second commandment really is! But in reality, their view does have a point: verse 3 focuses on telling us to worship ONLY the True God; verses 4-6 focus on telling us HOW to worship Him. Let's read **(4-5a)**. Condensing those thoughts:

I. The Command is: You Shall Not Worship Any Man-Made Image But why would we ever want to? Well, it seems that ever since our first parents were separated from the direct presence of God by their sin, human beings have always longed for some visible representation of God. Think of this way. Can you imagine Adam and Eve in the garden making a statue of God and bowing down to it in order to worship Him? Of course not! They had God himself; they saw Him with their eyes and talked with Him and heard Him, perhaps even touched Him. But since the fall, mankind has never had that blessedness again. We have not been allowed to walk by sight, yet we long for it; we long to see and to know God. Therefore, we have always been prone to aid ourselves in the worship of God by trying to picture God somehow. This command literally says you shall not make any *carved image*, anything you create with your own hands that looks like any part of creation, like something in heaven or on earth or in the sea to use it to worship God. Very clearly:

1. it does not prohibit the making of statues or pictures in general In the very Tabernacle where God was worshipped, he commanded that there would be pictures of angels woven into the curtains and there would be two statues of angels molded into the very mercy seat where His presence dwelt. He had the shape of almond blossoms molded into the lampstand as a decoration and little cloth pomegranates hanging from the hem of the High Priest's robe. In Solomon's temple, the bronze sea sat upon the backs of the statues of twelve bulls, all facing outward and God didn't mind it. Jewish coins had pictures of various objects on them for centuries and nobody even remotely thought it might violate the second commandment. So, on the window behind me is a lovely stained-glass picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Are we violating this command? Well, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church says we are. They don't put drawings of Jesus in their children's Sunday School materials and I'm quite sure won't support the viewing of the Jesus film, let alone other movies that have been made for theater or TV about the life of Jesus, all because in their view these things violate the command. In my view, Jesus actually did come to us in a human body so it's not wrong to picture Him in that way, even though He probably looked nothing like most of the pictures we use, and the church down through the centuries has agreed with me. For centuries pictures were a great means of helping millions of illiterate people see, understand and remember the stories of the Bible. As I understand it, this command was given to prohibit two things. First of all:

2. it prohibits representing God by an image and worshiping Him through it God later spelled this out explicitly in **Deut. 4:15-18**, if you'll turn there with me. "God was careful not to show you any form when He appeared to you at Mt. Sinai, so be careful not to try to create an image of Him based on anything that you see in the physical world!" So, what was the very first thing they did? God had hardly finished writing the second commandment before Israel broke it in Ex. 32:1-5. While Moses was up on the mountain, Aaron made them a golden calf to worship. Why? Were they changing gods? Were they trying to worship one of the gods of Egypt? No, verses 4-5 say Aaron *...made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ...And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD."* This calf was a representation of Jehovah, the LORD to them. They could not see Him and they thought Moses was dead and gone and they felt they needed that visible representation, so they made this image, then bowed down to it, sacrificed to it and began to celebrate before it the way they used to celebrate before bull statues of the gods in Egypt, with partying and orgies. However, the people had ALL heard God give the second commandment in Ex. 20 out loud with a voice like thunder. They KNEW not to do this, so God was extremely angry and 3,000 of the worst offenders were put to death. Whenever you make a statue or an image to represent God and you actually worship it, no matter how much good intent you may have, very soon the worship becomes worship of the image itself and not of God! All over Latin America, in the Philippines and many other places, every year statues of Jesus are dressed in certain ways and paraded through the streets as part of an older traditionalized Catholicism that was forced upon these peoples centuries ago. Though I'm sure the intent was to increase their worship of Jesus, I'm also quite certain that for thousands of poor villagers it has long since become simply the worship of the statue itself, just as they had worshipped statues of other gods earlier. They also do it with statues of Mary and often people look to the statues to bring healing or perform other miracles in their lives, the same way

Hindus do to their idols. For good reason then, this command clearly prohibits worshipping any statue made to represent God. But it goes further than that:

3. it prohibits worshipping any image as a god Moses continued explaining this command in **Deut. 4:19**. *...the likeness of anything in the heaven above*, then, means not only birds, or perhaps angels, but the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars. Many, many cultures have a sun god and a moon god. Centuries later godly King Josiah was reforming the religious life of Judah and cleaning out the Temple, *And he deposed the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and the moon and the constellations and all the host of the heavens.... he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD... And he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.* - **2 Kings 23:5, 11**. Israel was always prone to worship images. When they were disobedient in the wilderness, God punished the people with a plague of poisonous snakes. So, in mercy God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it up on a pole so that whoever was bitten and looked at it would live. But centuries later King Hezekiah *...broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).* - **2 Kings 18:4**. Invariably Israel made anything that they assumed had power an object of worship, rather than worshipping the True God alone. And it is not just Israel; for all human beings:

4. the tendency is always to worship the image itself as god and that is the history of the entire human race Look with me at **Rom. 1:21-23, 25**. This is a history of what happened to the entire human race. When they got off Noah's ark, all 8 human beings on earth knew God in a personal way, but as they multiplied, soon they didn't worship Him as God and as a result ended up worshipping images of created things. They ended up serving created things rather than the Creator of all things. And within a few generations man was deeply involved in idolatry as he still is today. All over east Asia there are statues of Buddha and people bowing before them in worship, though that was the farthest thing from the Buddha's own mind and teaching in the beginning. All over India there are millions upon millions bowing before statues of elephants and monkeys and the various gods who look like people, offering rice and flowers and coins every day, praying in vain for help that will never come because they are only man-made images. It is so sad. God knows human beings and that's why He prohibited the making of images for worship among His people! Now let's go back to Ex. 20 where God explains:

II. The Reason For This Command (5b-6) God is a *jealous* God. We more often use the word *jealous* in a negative way as an equivalent to the word *envy*; we are jealous or envious that somebody else has or gets something that we don't. But that's not what it means here. God is not simply envious that some other object might get worship and He won't, as though He is some self-absorbed being. In Hebrew *jealousy* also means the rightful passion or zeal to guard what belongs to you. For instance, if another man makes attempts to seduce your wife, you are rightfully jealous for her and will passionately do whatever it takes to stop him and protect her because she is yours alone and rightfully so. In the same way:

1. God rightfully and zealously guards His honor Moses said, *...you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God* - **Ex. 34:14**. Zeal for the guarding of His own honor as God is an essential part of who God is. He Himself says, *I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.* - **Is. 42:8**. God is passionate and zealous that He alone should be worshipped and that is not selfish. He is the only God there is; no other being or object deserves to be worshipped. To share that glory of being worshipped with others would be to embrace a falsehood, a lie; it would be to deny His own nature. So, He passionately and zealously protects it. In fact, verse 5-6 go on to explain that:

2. He deals sternly with multiple generations of those who reject Him This does not mean that He makes 3 or 4 generations of children pay for the sin that their ancestor committed. It means if you hate and reject God by worshipping idols, that awful attitude and practice will be passed on to your children and by them to your children's children and so will the stern judgment of God that goes with it! If you reject worship of the True God, you will suffer for it, but you will not suffer alone; your children for generations to come will pay a heavy price that begins with your foolish choice until one of them dares to turn to God and break the cycle! On the other hand:

3. He deals lovingly with ALL the generations of those who love Him. *A thousand generations* is the poetic Hebrew way of saying an *infinite* number of generations. If we love, worship and obey the True God, we will pass that on to our children and they to their children and we will experience the love, mercy and forgiveness of God and so will they and this process can be passed on down forever as long as each generation chooses to love Him. Our children for generations can be blessed by our wise choice to love God and worship Him rightly! That's what makes the choice so important!

Now I'd like you to turn with me to **Jn. 4:23-24**. Even though this command was given to Israel:

III. The Principle Within This Command is for all time. *[READ]* This is what the command is really meant to convey: **God Must Be Worshipped In Spirit And Truth** God is spirit. He is not a material being; He is a spiritual being and He cannot be worshipped through material means. Now think about:

1. the nature of worship The common Greek word for worship means "to kiss the feet", to literally fall down at someone's feet and kiss them. The best way I know to picture this is the story of the sinful woman that came to Jesus in Lk. 7:38, *...as she stood behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.* THAT is worship. Worship is when we lay ourselves at the feet of God and kiss them as it were. Now that image of worship involves 3 elements. First:

a. it involves an attitude of submission to God It is done in the spirit of humbleness and submission. It is to the kiss the feet as a humble servant, rather than to kiss the face as an equal. Worship means coming to God with a sense of His great worthiness and our own unworthiness apart from Christ, a sense of His perfection and of our failure apart from Christ, of His power and glory and our utter dependence on Him. It is an act of submission, of yielding, an act of handing myself over to God and saying "I'm yours; body, mind, and spirit, I'm yours; do with me what you will." There is no worship without that attitude in your heart. Second:

b. it involves the expression of love to God It is not merely washing the feet as a servant but kissing the feet in love. Worship is adoration; it is being taken up with the One you're worshipping. *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* - **Deut. 6:5**. Worshipping is saying "I love You, I love You, I adore You!". And third:

c. it involves an eagerness to serve God Notice how often the Old Testament says Israel *served* other gods. Worship is service; it is responding to what the One being worshipped wants or needs or commands. The woman did not just say "You are my Lord, I love you." She washed His dusty feet and dried them with her own hair. Worship says "I exist to serve You, what will you have me to do?" And therefore, true worship always results in obedience to God.

So, God wants worshippers; He seeks them. But that worship must occur in the realm of the spirit. In other words:

2. worship happens when our spirit communes with God Worship occurs in the human spirit. Our body is His Temple, the place where He lives, and true worship is a personal communing between our spirit and the Spirit of God. Worship occurs when in the depths of my thought life, my inner self, I consciously come into the presence of God and express my submission to Him and my love for Him and my readiness to obey Him. That may go on during a worship service, during the singing of a hymn or as I pray or as I respond in my heart to a message like this one. Or it may occur at home during my quiet time as I pray or praise God or read His Word. But not all singing or praying or praising or reading or listening is worship. There is one last factor that Jesus mentioned:

3. worship must be true, that is, **genuine or sincere** It is one thing to say with your lips "I love you"; it is another to really mean it. In **Mk. 7** the Pharisees were complaining to Jesus about His disciples not following the tradition of washing their hands before eating and He replied, *...Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."* - **6-7**. God cannot be fooled. He knows our hearts. He knows when we're genuine, when that "I love you; I lay myself before you" is real and when it is just words. Sadly, an awful lot of what is called worship is merely going through the motions of singing or reciting prayers. Real worship is done in your heart and it is done sincerely, genuinely, in truth, not to be seen by others but because you love Him with your whole being. That's what God is trying to teach in the 2nd commandment! "When you worship don't use any material means; come straight to Me with your heart. Bow down in it to Me and love Me and yield to Me. Any other method is unacceptable! I am the only God and there is only one way to worship Me, with your heart. Love Me with your whole being!" So, let's make personal application:

III. The Intent Of This Command is obvious: **I MUST Worship God In Spirit And Truth** And what does that mean? It means that:

1. I must commune with God personally both at home and with others I must have time with God regularly when I am consciously communing with Him in my heart and mind. That's what I was created for and if I'm missing that, I'm missing the whole purpose of my existence. I was created to know God and worship Him. I was redeemed to know God and worship Him. Every day I must do that; every day I must have time when in my heart I go before Him and tell Him of my love and of His greatness and of my submission. Do you? Do you regularly commune with God on a personal basis? And do you love to come together and worship together with us? David prayed a lot personally but he couldn't wait to go to the Temple and worship with others. Coming to church should not be just a religious habit; we should long to be together in the house of God to give Him the worship He deserves! And then, of course this command means that:

2. I must love God sincerely and truly When you spend time with God, is it simply reading Him your list of requests or is there any real worship, any falling down before Him and kissing His feet, any tears of love as you revel in His love in saving you, any expression of your ultimate loyalty to Him and willingness to be used of Him? When you come together here to worship Him, is it genuine? Do you sing from your heart? When we pray, are you praying and agreeing together in your mind? When we study are you listening for the Spirit to show you things from the Word? When you

serve God, when you teach or when you care for the children, do you do it out of a heart full of love for God? Or is more like an obligation, a chore? God knows our hearts. He knows when we're really worshipping Him and when we're just saying words, just going through motions. I must love Him with all my heart and I must worship Him in truth because my heart wants to and not because I have to. Finally, this command means that:

3. I must never let anything usurp the place of worship You know the familiar story about Jesus visiting the home of Mary and Martha. *Mary... sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."* - **Lk. 10:38-42**. We get distracted by so many things. We're anxious and troubled and have so much to do, but only one thing is truly necessary: to sit at the Lord's feet in worship. We must never let anything take the place of that; when we do, it becomes an idol.

A young lady who was asked to explain how to read the Bible devotionally, said: "Yesterday morning I received a letter from a man to whom I have given my heart and devoted my life. I freely confess to you that I have read that letter five times, not because I did not understand it the first time, nor because I expected to commend myself to him by frequent reading of his letter. It was not a question of duty, but simply one of pleasure. I read it because I love him who wrote it. That's how to read the Bible." I would add, that's not only how to read the Bible, it's how to worship God. Love Him as you read, love Him as you pray, love Him as you sing, love Him as you give and love Him as you listen to the Word. Love Him as you do it over and over again. Then you will be worshipping Him in spirit and in truth!

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

Our Respect For God - Ex. 20:7

In the First Commandment God warned us to worship no other gods because there are none, but rather to love Him with all our being. In the Second Commandment God warned us never to represent Him by any man-made image in order to worship, but rather to worship Him in spirit and in truth. In the Third Commandment God tells us about the respect that we should show to Him **(7)**:

I. The Command sounds simple enough: **Do Not Misuse God's Name**. But maybe we ought to start by asking the question my grandkids would ask, "Why not?" It was none other than Shakespeare's Juliet who spoke the famous quote, *"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."* She meant that a name is an artificial and meaningless identifier; it doesn't matter what you call a person but who they actually ARE that matters. Well, it seems that God doesn't share her opinion! He is deeply, deeply concerned about His Name and how it is used. And the reason is that:

1. God's Name is an extension of His Person Today it doesn't seem that names are very important. In our culture it seems so many simply want to pick out unusual or unique or nice-sounding names for their children. In older cultures, however, a person's name was of utmost importance. The name of a person stood for everything about them, for who they were, their entire reputation. The name of Adolf Hitler will live forever in infamy; as soon as I say it the Holocaust is brought to mind, the awful cruelty, the death of 6 million Jews. By contrast, the name of Abraham Lincoln will always be held in reverence by his countrymen for his brave leadership to our nation in the awful civil war to abolish slavery and preserve the union. As a person goes through life, all that they are and do becomes attached to their name. And that is even more true of God:

a. His Name conveys everything that He is and has done. For instance:

(1) His Name is holy Jesus taught us to pray, *Hallowed be Thy Name* in **Mt. 6:9**. God's Name is to be and should be regarded as holy by the entire human race. Why? Because HE is holy and His Name stands for everything that He is! We read in the Psalms that:

(2) His Name is majestic *O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* - **Ps. 8:1, 9**. Why is it majestic? Because His Person is majestic, glorious, matchless. There is nothing like Him in heaven or earth. His name is what He is because it stands for Him. In Proverbs we read that:

(3) His Name is powerful *The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.* - **Pr. 18:10**. Why? Because God is our Refuge and Strength. HE is our strong tower that protects us with His might. His Name is what He is.

Therefore, in a positive sense:

b. using God's Name identifies me with His Person When I use the name of God, whether I speak it or claim it or relate to it in some other way, using it identifies me with His own person. For instance, in the New Testament we read that:

(1) we are saved in His Name *...there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* - **Acts 4:12** It is not the word Jesus that saves me but the Person, Jesus. When I call upon the Name of

Jesus to save me, I'm calling out to the Person. *Whoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved* (Rom. 10:13) means whoever calls out to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins shall be saved. Then, here's something we do all the time:

(2) we ask in His Name Jesus said, *I will do whatever you ask in my name...you may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it.* - **John 14:13-14.** But praying a prayer in Jesus' Name does not mean merely tacking the words "in Jesus' Name" onto it as we finish. When we ask in His Name it means that we realize that the basis of our asking is in Him and not in us. We ask on the basis of what He has done and not on what we have done. And it means coming on His behalf, asking Him for what He wants us to have, asking according to His will. Never assume you are praying in His Name just because you said the words! The use of His Name is an appeal to His person. And here's another concept:

(3) we act in His Name In **Acts 4** Peter and John healed the lame man and when they were questioned, *By what power or what name did you do this?* Peter answered in vs. **7-10**, *It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth... that this man stands before you healed.* In other words, "HE did it; I was just His instrument! I did it in the power and authority of His person." When we act as believers under the direction of the Spirit, we act in Jesus' Name; that is, we act under His authority, by His power as His personal agents.

Do you see what I'm saying? The Name of God is an extension of the Person of God and to use the name of God conveys my connection not simply to the Name but to the Person. **How I regard His Name is how I regard Him!** How I treat the Name of God is how I treat the Person of God! It is far more than just saying words! And that brings us to the second concept in this command:

2. using His Name in vain means using it without any regard for His Person This act is most commonly referred to as **blasphemy** in the Bible and we find examples of people doing it in several ways. For instance:

a. God's enemies actually curse His Name as He sends plagues upon them in **Rev. 16:9, 11, 21.** *They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues... [They] cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores... they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.* Notice that the phrase, *Name of*, is missing in the last two verses, yet all three say the same thing. Cursing His Name is their way of attacking Him, fighting back against Him, rejecting Him. Even today, there are plenty of people on earth who curse the name of God, curse the name of Jesus, because they hate Him, because they're bitter at Him for something they blame Him for, or because they see Him as an enemy who is taking people away from their false religion or belief system. On the internet YouTube actually has a channel called "The Blasphemy Challenge" where young people and others post clips of themselves cursing God and indicating willingness to accept eternal damnation if He is real! Can you believe it? Well, that is one way to use His Name in vain; here's another:

b. His Name is often used with disrespect People use His Name in a way that shows they don't respect His person at all. An Assyrian general stood outside the walls of Jerusalem taunting King Hezekiah, "Who is the Lord? No other god of any other nation has delivered them from my hand and yours won't either!" So, in **Is. 37:6** God told Hezekiah "This man has blasphemed Me". That is, he has treated Me with total disregard, as if I didn't exist, in utter pride. You can blaspheme God:

(1) by intimating that He doesn't exist or is powerless After I was first saved at 15, I had a deep concern for my brother and his family to be saved and even gave them a Bible and a written note about it one Christmas. And I will never forget one day being in their home and hearing his wife jeering at the Name of Jesus, in a mocking voice saying, "Jesus is gonna save me!" How many people taunt believers, saying, "If your God is real, then why doesn't He stop war, why does He allow such awful poverty and natural disasters when He could prevent the suffering of millions?" Our whole educational system is practically geared to declaring that He is not real and challenging any who believe in Him, especially our colleges and universities. The *God's Not Dead* movie made a big point of that. The learned pundits of today who treat His Name disdainfully are no different from that Assyrian general centuries ago (and you know what happened to him and his army - if you don't, just look at the last three verses of Ch. 37!) Another way you can disrespect God is:

(2) by turning His Name itself into a curse How many times do you hear somebody use His Name emphatically to "damn" something or hear someone in anger exclaim the phrase, "Jesus Christ" as an expletive. These have become pretty common in our culture. You guys who work in the trades especially hear this all the time from rough men. They use His Name without any real thought that there is a Divine Being really connected to it who hears what they say and that they are using His name for their own vile intentions. Sadly, you even hear it from the mouths of some who call themselves believers or at least go to church regularly; they have so absorbed the culture that they don't even realize the depth of their offense. Of course, one very obvious way to disrespect God's Name is:

(3) by perjury under an oath taken in His Name For centuries any person testifying in our courts has been asked to swear that what he says is "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me GOD!" In other words, "I swear before God Himself that I am telling the truth and may HE punish me if I am not!" So, if, after that, you lie, you're not only committing the crime of perjury, you're committing the sin of blasphemy! For millennia people regarded oaths as deadly serious business. **Heb. 6:16** says *For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.* A person would never swear before God something untrue out of genuine fear that He would punish them! Now people don't seem to care. His Name being invoked doesn't matter. By the way, yesterday many of you heard Sarah and Brandon take their wedding vows and what did they say? "In the Name of Jesus, I take you to be my wife..." The traditional vows use, "in the Name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Marriage is a vow made before Almighty God, appealing to Him as the witness to the oath! Yet people today so lightly break the vow that they have made without any thought to the Name and the Person before whom they made it. And, of course, the Name of God is commonly disrespected:

(4) by flippant usage such as saying "Oh my God!" or "Jesus..." when we are surprised or shocked. We even have a shortcut for it in text messaging; we type OMG! Sometimes we are flippant by **joking about Him**. I remember a line from the TV show "Last Man Standing" where a girl is bragging about her prowess as a hockey goalie and she says, "Only Jesus saves more than me." I cringe every time I hear a line like that or a joke about God and letting people into heaven. Any time we use the Name of God, we are referring to His person and if He actually IS our God, we should only ever use it with true reverence and respect. These are all ways to use His Name in vain and here's a last one:

c. His Name is often blasphemed because of us David committed his great sin and Nathan came to him in **2 Sam. 12:14** saying, "You have given the enemies of the Lord occasion to blaspheme." That is, they will say "What kind of God is the LORD anyway if his servants go around murdering and committing adultery with others' wives!" Peter points out that we bear the name "Christian" and we should glorify God because of it! When we don't, we bring dishonor to His Name. Jesus prophesied that many would prophesy and cast out demons and do miracles in His Name, people who actually never knew Him! - **Mt. 7:22-3**. I can't think of anything worse than being a religious charlatan, someone who uses the Name of Jesus to get profit for themselves and how many do we know of who have done that!

Well, we often quote the first half of this Commandment but somehow never finish it, ...*the Lord will not hold Him guiltless who takes His Name in vain.*

3. God will surely punish those who misuse His Name Turn over to **Lev. 24:13-16**. Do you remember this? This man misused the Name of God, somehow using it in a curse and they didn't know what to do. God answered, "Stone him to death!" That's how seriously God takes misusing His Name; in Israel it carried the death penalty. The Jews became so impressed by this Command that they would never speak or write the Name of God and orthodox ones still don't today. When they come to His proper name, they say "Lord", meaning "Master" or simply say, "*Ha Shem*, the Name". They even write God as G-d. That's why no one today remembers how His actual Name, in Hebrew YHWH, is to be pronounced! They have such reverence for His Name and a fear of misusing it somehow, a fear almost totally lost on us.

Yet it is not fear that God intended to create by this Command, but rather the exact opposite:

II. The Principle In This Command is that **We Must Hold God Most Precious** to us. It is not really about misusing a Name; it is about honoring the Person whose Name it is and regarding Him as precious, as having the highest, the ultimate value to us. Turn with me to **1 Peter**, will you? Peter says that:

1. Jesus is precious to us above all else (2:4-7a) That last phrase in other translations is, *Now to you who believe, this stone is precious.* Christ is the Living Stone, God's Cornerstone for the church He is building. He is precious to God and to us who believe, He is precious. He is the Person we value most. He is more important to us than anything else in our lives. Of course, we all have people that we feel are precious to us, like our spouse or our child. If I said something bad about your spouse or your child, would it not make you angry? Why? Because they are precious to you! And Christ is more precious to us than anyone! We have a greater love for Him than for anybody and anything else in the world. And:

2. the sacrifice Jesus made for us is precious above all else (1:18-19) We were redeemed by the most costly thing of all, the precious blood of Christ. What Christ did on the cross, shedding His blood and giving His life for mine is the most precious thing, the most important thing, the most valuable thing I know. It is worth more than all the silver and gold in the world. It is my very life. And:

3. our faith in Jesus is precious above all else (1:7) Our faith, our trust in Jesus is more valuable, more precious than gold. Our relationship with Him is worth more than the whole world.

That's what God is trying to teach in the Third Commandment: If there is only one God and the only way to worship Him is in spirit, and if my relationship with Him is the ultimate thing in my life, the thing that matters most, then I would never misuse His Name! I would never treat Him in any fashion with disdain or disregard. Every mention of Him, every thought of Him, every action in His Name would be done with the utmost respect, love and devotion. So, turn with me to **Eph. 5** let's make some personal:

III. The Application: If I am truly a believer, **I Must Value God Above Everything Else** in my life. And if I DO value Him:

1. I will talk in a way that brings honor to God (4) If Christ is the most important thing in my life, I will never speak unkindly about Him. I will never use His name as a curse word, certainly. I will never use it lightly and without reverence. When I say the name of God, I will think of Him and how much He means to me. When I say the Name of Jesus, I will think how precious He is to me. He is the love of my life and when I mention His name, I will mention it only in love. Beyond that, filthy talking, foolish clowning around that makes light of God, crude joking, saying things Jesus would never say - all of that stuff is *out of place*; it's not proper for one who loves Jesus. Our lips should honor Him in everything we say. Secondly, valuing Him means:

2. I will act in a way that brings honor to God (3) I claim the name of Christ, I say that I love Him but then sometimes I deliberately choose to sin. I choose to hate my brother. I act in pride or self-centeredness. I involve myself in things that I know are dishonest in business or in things that are immoral. Those things have no place in the life of a saint, a holy one. When I continue in those things, I'm just pretending that He means everything to me; He really doesn't. If He *does* mean everything to me, I will demonstrate how precious He is in the character of my life every day. My actions will honor His Name. And lastly, valuing Him means:

3. I will love in the way that He has loved me (1-2) If I love Him with my whole being, I'll be like Him. I'll love others the way He has loved me. If I don't, John says, the love of God doesn't dwell in me; I really don't love Him like I profess to do. His Name will be honored in the way that I love.

I've told you before the story of *John Newton*. He was a rough, dirty sailor with a foul mouth and an appetite for rotten living. He hated life and life hated him. He was captain of a slave ship. But he also had the gift of a good mother who told him about the Savior when he was young. On a return voyage to England in 1748 the ship encountered a severe storm off the coast of Donegal, Ireland and almost sank. Newton awoke in the middle of the night and, as the ship filled with water, he called out to God. The cargo shifted and stopped up the hole, and the ship drifted to safety. He immediately began to read the Bible and eventually gave his life fully to Jesus Christ. From his heart and his rescued life came our beloved song, Amazing Grace. He became an ordained minister and served for many years. In old age, he had to have an assistant stand in the pulpit with him on Sundays. He was nearly blind and spoke in whispers, but nothing could keep him from preaching while he still had breath. One Sunday, while delivering his message he repeated over again the sentence: "Jesus Christ is precious." His helper whispered to him: "But you have already said that twice." Newton turned to his helper and said loudly, "Yes, I've said it twice, and I'm going to say it again." The stones in the ancient sanctuary fairly shook as the grand old preacher said with all his force: "Jesus Christ is precious!" Beloved, Jesus Christ IS precious! Honor Him with your lips, with your life and with your love.

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

Work And Rest - Ex. 20:8-11

All of the first four commandments concern man's relationship with God. The First Commandment is to worship no other gods, but rather to love our one True God with all our being. The Second Commandment God is to never to represent Him by any man-made image in order to worship, but rather to worship Him in spirit and in truth. The Third Commandment God is to respect His Name because He is most precious to us. But now we come to the Fourth Commandment, which, at first glance, doesn't sound like it has anything to do with God **(8)**. What's that about? We've been talking about how we relate to God and all of a sudden, we're talking about setting apart the seventh day, Saturday, as a day of rest. Well, what we'll find is that God is teaching us a very deep lesson about our relationship to Him, but that will have to wait until we understand:

I. The Command itself: Keep The Sabbath Day Holy The word *sabbath* itself means *to cease or to rest from labor*. Every good Jew knows that means from sundown Friday to sundown on Saturday, all work must cease! Don't do any work on that day; it is a day of rest, of ceasing labor. But the origin of the concept goes back to the very beginning:

1. it is a principle taught in creation You remember the story from **Gen. 2:2-3** which is summarized in verse **(11)**. God did His work of creating the world in six days and on the seventh He ceased His work of creation and rested because it was finished. Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, so this was something they literally heard God do. He pronounced a blessing on the seventh day and set it apart or made it special. By the way, do you realize that one of the best arguments for the existence of God comes from this very fact? How does the human race count time? From time immemorial almost every human culture that counts time has divided it into 7-day weeks! We know that the early Babylonian peoples who lived in the so-called "cradle of civilization" used it well before the time of Abraham. Why do so many cultures measure time in 7-day weeks? Where did they get the idea? It has no basis in astronomy like the

concept of a "day" or a "year" or even a "season" does. It can be nothing other than the lingering memory of God and His creation rest! But, back to the story. It does not say that mankind could not work on that day nor do we find any biblical record of the seventh day being observed as a day of rest by anyone before Moses. The Hebrew simply says that God set apart the seventh day and made it different by resting on it. Man knew that God rested on it and he counted his time units accordingly, but that seems to be all until:

2. it was a command given to Israel (9-10) In this command, God took that creation rest of His own, which they all knew about, and He said "Now Israel, you're going to do exactly what I did." Why? Well, if we look carefully, we can find three reasons. First of all:

a. it provided them needed physical rest Look at **Ex. 23:12**. God instituted this practice so that the people along with their servants and their animals could rest. God didn't rest on the seventh day because He was tired, but He knew that human beings and all earthly creatures need rest. We still need it. Most people who try working seven days a week don't last very long at it. Our bodies and our minds grow weary. Just on a practical level, we do need at least one day of rest in every seven. But its significance was much deeper than that. In **Deut. 5** where Moses repeated the Commandments, he added this note in vs. **15**, *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

b. it reminded them of deliverance from slavery In Egypt where they were in bondage, there was a non-stop grind of work, day after day without ceasing, making bricks and building cities for Pharaoh. That ceaseless work took its toll on their bodies and depressed their spirits until they cried out to God for mercy. So, in mercy He delivered them and gave them rest. And every Saturday as they rested, they were to remember that God had delivered and rescued them and given them rest. It was a reminder of their national salvation. Then at the same time:

c. it taught them a weekly lesson of trust Even before He gave them the official command to keep the Sabbath day, God taught them an important Sabbath lesson. Look at **Ex. 16:22-23, 29**. From the very first day he did it, God sent them manna for six days, not seven. But He sent enough on the sixth day to last through the seventh. So, each week He proved to them over and over for 40 years that they could trust Him to provide enough for them to rest on that seventh day. When they entered Canaan, the manna stopped falling, but they still had the lesson. God would provide enough in six days for them to rest on the seventh. The sabbath was a powerful reminder that God was the One who provided for all their needs and they could trust Him to do it. You can do the same. If you're walking with the Lord, you can trust Him to provide enough in six days so that you don't have to work on the seventh to make ends meet. You can take a day to worship Him and to rest; He will provide for it. But the meaning of the Sabbath went deeper still:

d. it was a sign that God had set them apart as holy Look at **Ex. 31:12-17**. The Sabbath was more than just a day off each week. God elevated it to the status of a sign to Israel. They were to do what He did in creation, to rest on the seventh day and that set them apart from all the peoples of the earth. That practice said that they alone were God's people. In all the nations round about them, people worked all seven days. Nobody got a day off each week. When people saw Jews not have their shops open and not be out working in their fields, keeping the Sabbath on Saturday, they knew they were worshippers of Jehovah who had commanded this. That's why the penalty for breaking it was so serious. Now the reason why God chose this particular thing to be a sign is in vs. **13**. *I, the LORD, sanctify YOU!* "I am Jehovah who MAKES YOU HOLY!" Resting on the sabbath was an object lesson that their status before God as holy and set apart was HIS doing and not their own. They were to REST because He had chosen them, not to STRIVE to get Him to choose them. All the peoples of the earth strive to be accepted by their gods; the people of God REST because they know He has chosen them. The Sabbath is a powerful symbol and we'll talk more about that in a few moments, but first we have to look at the New Testament and there we find that:

3. its observation as law was cancelled by Christ Of course, the first Christians were all Jews and I'm sure they continued to observe the Sabbath for some time, but as the Holy Spirit sent the Apostles out to the Gentile world and the church began to be made up mostly of non-Jews, they were never forced to observe the Sabbath rule. Paul's statement on the issue is **Col. 2:13-17**. The Sabbath was part of the Law and Christ nailed that law to the cross in Himself by fulfilling it completely. Everything about that law was only a shadow, merely a dim earthly object lesson that pointed to Christ who is Himself the fulfillment of it all. The rule of the Law given to Israel is over for us; we are no longer bound by it and nobody can judge us for not keeping it. Even during His ministry:

a. Christ claimed Lordship over the Sabbath When the Jews were chiding Him because His disciples were picking some grain with their hands and eating it as they walked on the Sabbath (by the way, I admire them for that; I've tried it and, believe me, uncooked grains of wheat are basically inedible!) at any rate, when they chided Him, He said, *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.* - **Mk. 2:27-28**. God gave the Sabbath rule to benefit people, not to enslave them and be some measure of their religious piety and as Lord, Jesus had the right to choose how and whether it should be kept! And when He rested

from completing His mighty work of redemption on that last Sabbath day when His body was in the tomb, that was it! It was fulfilled and over! The thing to which the Sabbath day pointed had come! Therefore:

b. Christians are no longer REQUIRED to observe it Paul says, *Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.* - **Rom. 14:4-6**. If you want to rest on the seventh day in order to honor God, do it! Fine! If you see no need to do that, then honor God every day! But don't judge those who do. And those of you who do, don't judge those who don't! It doesn't matter because whether you rest on Saturday or not is no longer an issue of obedience to God. It may be a health and common sense issue but it is not an issue with God at all! So, what about Sunday? Isn't Sunday NOW the Christian Sabbath as many of our Presbyterian friends have said? No!

c. Christians early on designated Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day on which they would gather to worship him. That term is mentioned for the first and only time by John in **Rev. 1:10**, which shows that it was already in common use. Sunday is the first day, not the seventh. Within weeks of Christ's resurrection from the dead, His disciples began to gather specially on Sunday to celebrate it and worship, not because any command was given, but because they wanted to and they loved Him so much. Sunday is one day in our week that we VOLUNTARILY give to the Lord and say, "Lord, this is your day; today I will worship You specially with my brothers and sisters." That's all. No more and no less. Can you play ball or shop on Sunday afternoon? Do whatever the Lord leads you to do! Nobody can judge you for it. We have no law, but I will say this: if you really love the Lord Jesus, you WILL be excited in your heart to worship Him and to be with other believers whenever they gather, and that's usually on Sunday!

But what's really important for us to understand is:

II. The Principle In This Command. It was an object lesson to teach us that **We Must Rest In God** Look with me at **Heb. 4:9-11**. According to verse 9:

1. the Sabbath pictures a rest that we can experience as believers today. That word *Sabbath rest* in the Greek is a unique word which occurs only here in the New Testament. It means a "state-of-resting". Without looking at all the argument of chapters 3 and 4, let me just say that the Israelites thought when they got into the promised land that they would experience God's rest. But that physical rest was not the real kind of rest. It only pointed to another kind, a special kind of rest that we as Christians experience. We find in the New Testament that there are really two kinds of rest that we experience. First there is:

a. a present resting of our souls that Jesus mentioned in **Mt. 11:28-30** when He said, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... you will find rest for your souls...* He did not promise us rest for the body, that is, peaceful circumstances; He promised rest for our souls. So, when we come to Jesus, we actually find soul rest in two ways. First of all:

(1) we rest in Christ's work for salvation - Rom. 4:4-5 says *When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.* To be saved we stop working. We take an eternal sabbath rest. Christ did all the work at the cross by dying for us and ever after He is resting from that work. It is done, complete! When we trust Him to save us, we quit once and for all trying to save ourselves and REST in what He did for us. What a rest that brings to us, knowing our salvation is complete and sure, knowing there's not a single thing that we have to do to be accepted by God because Christ did it all! Our souls are at rest. Then the second way that we learn to rest is this:

(2) we rest in Christ's power for living How do I live this life I have to live in this body? Paul said in **Gal. 2:20** I don't! I no longer live, but Christ lives in me and through me! I live by faith in the Son of God; I simply trust Him to do in and through me what He wants done. I don't depend on myself to live the Christian life; I learn to rest in His power and His ability. In other words, I quit working; I cease trying to do things on my own. In every circumstance I learn to cry out to the Lord and say, "You do it; not me". So, I rest FROM my striving to live the life and rest IN His doing it through me. And what a rest that is when you discover it! It's an ever-deepening rest that grows daily. But there's still one more type of rest for us:

b. a future rest from our earthly labors - Rev. 14:13 says, *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from here on for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them.* When we die and are in His Presence, we will have a final rest from all of the struggles and problems and difficult circumstances we have had to endure in this life. One day we WILL actually get that external peace we so desire, but for now we only have rest for our souls.

Now let's go back to Heb. 4:10 because there we find the secret of:

2. how we enter into that rest ...*whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his....* How do we do it? It's simple. We enter His rest:

a. by ceasing our work as God did God stopped working on the seventh day. In order to know His rest, we must stop working like He did. We must completely give up working for our salvation. We must quit striving in our own strength to live a holy life. To enter rest means to stop. As long as we're trying to save ourselves or to live a holy life in our own strength, our soul will have no rest, but will rather be in constant turmoil. And the second half of the equation is this. We enter His rest:

b. by believing God to do the work Look back to 4:3. It is by faith. *We who have believed enter that rest...* We trust God to save us. We trust God to live through us. We rest in complete trust that HE will save us, that HE will live through us the life He wants. So now we're ready to make:

III. The Application: I Must Rest In God - Heb. 4:11 *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest...* In other words:

1. I must work hard at resting! Isn't that ironic? We are to make every effort, to work hard, to strive... to do what? Not to achieve salvation, not to live godly, but to what? To rest! Did you know that it's hard to rest! Not physically but spiritually! We are so used to trying harder, striving to do better, that it's difficult for us to simply rest. That's why we have to work hard to learn to do it! Now in practical terms, here's what that means:

2. in every situation I must learn to depend upon Christ You remember what Paul said, *...I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content [that is, to rest]. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* - Phil. 4:11-13. In whatever situation I find myself, I simply stop and pray, "Lord, I'm trusting You. I give this to You. You live through Me. You forgive that person through me. You control my angry feelings. You take care of my problem; I can't fix it." And you may have to stop and pray like that a dozen times in a day, but when you do, when you rest in Him and His power, His power IN you provides the strength to endure and His peace which passes all understanding floods your heart and mind, your soul. You enter into His rest. I have to work hard to develop this habit of resting in Him every day in every circumstance, But the rest of 4:11 is a warning,

3. if I don't, I will fall into disobedience We make every effort, we strive to enter that rest, *so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience* that Israel did in the wilderness. If we don't rest in Him, we end up disobeying Him and often suffer serious consequences.

A local pastor in the Philippines shared this story to help his people understand what we've been talking about: *The driver of a wagon pulled by a carabao [a water buffalo] was on his way to the market when he overtook an old man who was carrying a heavy load. The driver had compassion on him as he struggled, so he invited the old man to get up and ride in the wagon. Gratefully the old man accepted, sat on the wagon and the driver continued. Then after a few minutes, the driver turned around to see how the man was doing and to his surprise, he found him still straining under the heavy weight. He had never taken the burden off his shoulders and placed it in the wagon. [Larry Chell]* It sounds crazy, doesn't it? But that's exactly what we do in life. We climb into the wagon by resting in Jesus to save us, but we still keep holding the heavy burden of our struggles in life on our shoulders instead of laying them down and letting Him carry them. The fourth commandment says to us, "Remember the sabbath rest that Christ has provided. His work is already done and He has provided everything you need. Rest in Him, not just on one day, but every day!"

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

The Value Of Parents - Ex. 20:12

The first four of the Ten Commandments have to do with God and they lay out God's value system for the relationship between Himself and mankind. The remaining six commandments have to do with human behavior and they lay out God's value system for the relationship He intends human beings to have with each other. These six core values form the basis of all human civilization; virtually every culture in the world, including our own, honors them in whatever code of laws or traditions it has. These fundamental precepts are what makes it possible for us to live together in society and not have the world degenerate into the depths of evil that preceded Noah's flood. Without the recognition and reinforcement of these precepts, life degenerates into the sort of revenge-killing, murdering, baby-abandoning, woman-stealing, immoral, lying and deceiving nightmare filled with violence that dozens of isolated tribal peoples like the Sougb or the Yanomami lived for centuries before the missionaries came. The first of these six principles, Commandment #5, is in (12):

I. The Command: Honor Your Father And Mother This is one of the few commandments that is quoted directly and is imported straight into the New Testament by Paul and given to us directly as a command for Christians to keep. So, it is important for us to understand what it means to honor our parents. The Hebrew word literally means to "make them heavy". Obviously, that doesn't mean to literally "fatten them up"; the image is that of weighing something on a two-sided scale as you would in the market. If one pan goes all the way down, the object in it is heavier than what's in the other one and thus of greater value.

1. this command means that we must regard them as having great value to us. In quoting this in the New Testament, Paul used, the Greek word *time*, also translated as *honor* and, again, it means to count something as being of great value. We are to place great value upon our mother and upon our father. But what exactly does that mean? The

answer is that it means different things at different stages in our lives and also in their lives. However, we are not left to speculate because other passages spell out very clearly what it means. For instance:

a. in our childhood it means that we must obey them Look with me at **Eph. 6:1-2**. The connection couldn't be more obvious. When you're a child, honoring or valuing your parents means *obeying* them. Now that word *obey* in the Greek is a military term and it means "to hear under". Any of you who have been in military service understand quite clearly what it means: to listen as one who is underneath authority, that is, to listen and to DO. To honor your parents means that you see them as God-given authorities in your life and when they ask you or tell you to do something, you pay attention to it and say, "Yes, I will" and you do it! When you, as a child, rebel against your parents, you are not simply being lazy or ungrateful or inconsiderate, you are saying, "I don't care very much for you; who you are and what you say is not important to me; I don't honor you!" Kids, I want you to think about that. God Himself wants you to do what your parents tell you to do! He put them in your life to protect you and direct you and train you so that you will know how to do life in a way that pleases Him! That's their job and you make it much easier when you obey! But eventually we grow up and reach adulthood and the way we honor them changes, especially when we get married. God says in Genesis that there is a "leaving" of father and mother that has to occur and the couple is to now cling to one another; they form the nucleus of a new family, a new set of parents-to-be. In adulthood we are no longer supposed to obey everything our parents tell us to do as though we were children; by this time we are supposed to be able to relate directly to God for His guidance. So how should adults honor their parents? **Prov. 23:22** says, *Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.*

b. in our adulthood it means that we must respect them We still listen to what they have to say. We value their opinions and their experience and wisdom. We don't look down on them and say, "They're just old-fashioned and ignorant and don't know what they're talking about!" They may not understand smartphones and Facebook and Twitter and be up with the latest in technology, but they understand something more important; they understand life because they have lived it a lot longer than we have! So, you respect them; you ask their advice; you spend time with them; you do things for them that they may need some help with. You show them you still care, that they're still important to you. And then:

c. in their old age it means that we must care for them Look with me at **Mt. 15:4-6**. Here Jesus denounces the Pharisees because some of them were being "spiritual" and were donating all their possessions to God instead of caring for their parents, vowing to leave them to the Temple (that is, after they died) and using that vow as an excuse not to take care of their parents in the present. In those days there was no social security, of course; there was no government pension fund. The only means available for your care when you could no longer work and your money ran out or you needed someone to physically care for you was that your children took care of you! In much of the world, it's still that way, as it is in many, many people here who will never be able to afford the astronomical cost of their own care in their last years! Jesus said that to not care for the needs of your parents is to break God's command; therefore, honoring them means giving physical help, providing for them, seeing that they are cared for in their old age and their needs are met. Jesus even took time to obey this command as He hung on the cross by asking John to take care of His mother Mary as if she was his own, because He would no longer be there to care for her. Your parents cared for you as a child and if you value them, you will do it for them when they need it!

That's what honoring your father and mother means, pure and simple: obey them when you're a child, respect them when you're an adult and care for them when they are old! Now I want you to notice that:

2. God placed great importance on enforcing this command in Israel. Lev. 20:9 says that:

a. cursing them was punishable by death We just read a loose quote of it in v. 4. *For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him.* Whoa! That's how serious God was about honoring parents! In fact, In Israel:

b. rebelling against them was punishable by death *If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear. - Deut. 21:18-21.* Aren't you glad we live under grace? There are a few of us who might not be here today if we lived under Israel's law, am I right?!

My point is that God is serious enough about this command, about the honoring of parents by their children, to make it an issue of life and death! Why? Because parents teaching their children to love and worship God and modeling for them how to live His way is THE core process He designed for the human race to stay in relationship with Him. By commanding us as children to honor our parents, He was safeguarding that essential process and ensuring the passing down of the faith from generation to generation! And that is the most serious matter there is! Now the other thing I want you to notice is that:

3. God gave a promise along with this command - Eph. 6:2 None of the other commandments had a promise connected to them, but in this case God promised, *...that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.* Paul is quoting the version of the command found in **Deut. 5:16**. And vs. **33** adds, *You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.* Quite clearly, this promise:

a. it meant Israel would remain in her land and prosper It didn't mean that an individual would be guaranteed to live a long life if they honor their parents. God actually meant the same thing to apply to all of the commandments. If Israel would keep these laws, would honor these basic principles, God would prosper her as a nation and she would remain a long time in the land of Canaan that God was giving her. But she didn't keep them and lots of Israelites died and they were conquered by other peoples and eventually they were taken out of their land into captivity. These commands and this one in particular were intended to prevent that; they were intended for Israel's good, to give her a long and prosperous history as a society. The United States would do well to take heed to that; when we stop honoring our older people, stop honoring our parents, our days are numbered. Our growing departure from the values put forth in the Ten Commandments does not bode well for our future as a society! However, as individuals:

b. we may apply the spiritual aspect of the promise God didn't give this command, or any of these commands for that matter, to make life difficult for us and keep us from enjoying ourselves:

(1) keeping it is for our good Verse **3** implies that it will go well with us. Obeying, respecting, and caring for our parents will result in good for us. It will enrich and bless our lives, as many a young person has found out who tried to go their own way and ignored their parents' pleadings. But beyond the personal benefit it has for us:

(2) keeping it is righteous and pleasing to God In verse **1** Paul says *...for this is right.* In **Col. 3:20** Paul gives the same command and says, *...for this pleases the Lord.* It is right because it pleases the Lord. This is a standard God has put into place in the world for human benefit and it is right and good and pleasing to Him! When we honor our parents, we do the right thing and we please Him!

Now I need to inject some thoughts here because I know that some of you are thinking, "But I don't have a godly parent; I have a parent who hurt me deeply." You may come from a broken home where a parent deserted you and ran off with someone else; you may have a parent who abused you or who constantly belittled or berated you; you may have a parent who is an addict or a criminal or who neglects you or urges you to do ungodly things. Maybe you are living in this situation right now. How do you honor a parent who is abusive and ungodly? Well, at any age, obeying God always trumps obeying any human being, even a parent. As a child, you NEVER obey when a parent who tells you to do something God says is wrong, and that includes being quiet about their misbehavior when they are mistreating you. Tell someone safe what is happening! As an adult you may need to set healthy boundaries if a parent continues to try to hurt you. One internet author puts it so helpfully like this, *...honoring a parent does not mean I must accept unrighteousness. Honor will keep me from answering back in kind when someone is treating me inappropriately because, as a person created in God's image, he does not "deserve" that, no matter his behavior... because I respect him as God's creation, I will not and cannot enable him to continue in sin by doing nothing when he has persistent sin against me and against God that he will not address or acknowledge. I respect him enough to attempt to turn a sinner from the error of his ways. In a respectful manner. ...honoring is not:*

- *Staying in relationship with someone who will hurt me or those for whom I am responsible.*
- *Never saying anything to anyone about the other's "faults."*
- *Enabling a sinner to remain in sin by my silence and inaction.*
- *Thinking a person is "wonderful" when they are not.*
- *Having feelings of love. Giving honor is a choice, not a feeling.*

...I can value my parent as a person and as a person who gave me life, without being in any type of relationship with him whatsoever. Honoring a parent is about my attitude toward him – that is all that is required by the Word.

<https://dannimoss.wordpress.com/2009/02/26/how-can-i-honor-an-abusive-parent/> I hope these thoughts are helpful to some of you who have "difficult" parents and I would encourage you to talk to Pastor Jim or myself or Rob or someone if you need to talk about your personal situation.

However, this commandment actually looks well beyond the parent-child relationship. Like of each of the commandments, there is an eternal:

II. The Principle In This Command: It teaches us that **We Must Value ALL Those In Authority Over Us** I want you to turn with me to **Rom. 13:1-5** and while you're doing that, let me explain that:

1. relationship to all human authority is learned in the home The parent-child relationship is the means by which God has planned to teach each one of us that we must submit ourselves to the authority of other people in our lives. If we don't honor our parents, we're not going to honor our teachers in school and we're not going to honor our boss at work and we're not going to honor policemen or the laws of our land or any other kind of authority, except when we are forced to. And we're certainly not going to honor God! Parents are stand-ins for God during those first years of our lives. The ultimate goal of honoring parents is to learn to honor all authority and to honor God Himself. Now read the text in Romans. You see:

2. God has appointed all human authorities to serve His good purpose Human beings in their fallen state, whether saved or unsaved, cannot exist without authorities to govern their lives as they relate to the lives of others.

a. they are His means to control the spread of evil In the times before Noah, there was no governing authority. Everyone was left to fend for themselves and the behavior of the human race fell so low that God found it necessary to destroy it and start over. But after the flood He instituted the rudiments of human government; He clearly told us that we must collectively take responsibility to purge our ranks of evil. Governmental authority, ruling authority is established by God for our good; it is necessary to keep evil in check and we must respect it. Now those IN authority are not always right and not always nice or reasonable; in fact, they may be downright evil themselves. But whatever they are like, remember that:

b. He puts specific people in places of authority and removes them, just as He has given you the parents that you have. Whoever is in authority is His choice and because of the God-given position they hold, we must honor and value them. And that means that:

3. we must submit to all those in authority over us, whether that is our parents, our teachers, our employers, our lawmakers, or our law-enforcers, whoever they may be.

a. if we do not, we can expect to receive the penalty for it Just as our parents disciplined us because that is their God-ordained role and it was good for us, so the other authorities in our lives will do the same. We should expect that. If you drive over the speed limit and get stopped by a policeman, you should not complain when he gives you a ticket. If you cheat on a test, you should expect to be flunked when you are caught. If you refuse to pay your taxes, you should expect the IRS to come after you and garnish your wages. Authority only works to contain evil behavior in society when there is a penalty involved and that penalty is enforced. However, we should respect the authorities not simply because we're afraid of the penalty, but because it is the right thing to do before God. And just like the situation with bad parents:

b. we can only refuse if the authority forces us to disobey God When the Sanhedrin ordered the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus, they said, *We must obey God rather than men.* - **Acts 5:29**. If anyone in authority orders me to disobey God, I have the responsibility to disobey them and I should expect to receive their penalty for it. But in every other case, I am to submit with respect. So, here's:

III. The Application Of This Command: I Must Greatly Value all the **Authority** that God has place in my life. That means:

1. I must respect the authority within my family Kids, that means that to obey God you have to obey your parents. We grown children have to respect and care for our parents. Wives have to respect the authority of their husbands in the home because it is God-given. All that is implied in this command. So, am I doing that? And am I doing that with my heart or simply outwardly because I don't want to get in trouble? Secondly:

2. I must submit to the authority within my society, to my teachers in school, the boss at work, the foreman on the job, the policeman who gives me a ticket, and so on. Am I doing that? Do I obey the rules, the laws that have been set over me at school, at work, by the government? Paul said, *Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.* - **Rom. 13:7**. I must have the highest regard for all authority, because it comes from God. And:

3. I must ultimately recognize and obey the authority of God How I view authority on earth reflects how I view His authority. Do I respect His right to govern my life and humbly submit to Him?

So, value all the authorities God has put into your life, but especially, value your parents. They're God's gift to you. An anonymous author writes, *We had the meanest parents in the whole world! While other kids ate candy for breakfast, we had to have cereal, eggs, and toast. When others had a Pepsi and a Twinkie for lunch, we had to eat sandwiches. And you can guess our parents fixed us a dinner that was different than other kids had too.*

Our parents insisted on knowing where we were at all times. You'd think we were convicts in a prison. They had to know who our friends were, and what we were doing with them. They insisted that if we said we would be gone for an hour, we would be gone for an hour or less. We were ashamed to admit it, but they had the nerve to break the "Child Labor Laws" by making us work. We had to wash the dishes, make the beds, learn to cook, vacuum the floor, do laundry, and all sorts of cruel jobs. I think they would lay awake at night thinking of more things for us to do.

They always insisted on us telling the truth the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. By the time we were teenagers, they could read our minds, and life was really tough. They wouldn't let our friends just honk the horn when they drove up. They had to come up to the door so they could meet them. While everyone else could date at 12 or 13, we had to wait until we were 18.

Because of our parents we missed out on lots of things other kids experienced. None of us have ever been caught shoplifting, vandalizing other's property, or ever arrested for any crime. It was all their fault. We never got drunk, took up

smoking, stayed out all night, or a million other things other kids did. Sundays were reserved for church, and we never missed once. We knew better than to ask to spend the night with a friend on Saturdays.

But now that we have left home, we are all God-fearing, educated, honest adults and we are doing our best to be mean parents just like our parents were. You know, it seems the world just doesn't have enough mean parents anymore. Beloved, your parents are a gift from God, be sure you honor them!

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

The Sanctity Of Life - Ex. 20:13

The six commands that deal with human relationships concern the very bedrock issues of human existence: the value of parents, the sanctity of marriage, the right of personal property, the practice of honesty, and so on. On these things all of human civilization is founded, yet no issue is more basic than the one which the sixth commandment deals with: life itself. God has gone to great lengths in Scripture to show that human life is sacred. It is something that only God can give and something only God should have the right to take away. It belongs exclusively to God. And so, we have this sixth command in God's value system for humanity in verse (13):

I. The Command: Do Not Murder Now a great problem has arisen out of this simple phrase because for hundreds of years the King James Version, which everyone quoted, said *Thou shalt not KILL*. That phrase has been misused by sincere people who become conscientious objectors in wartime or protest the death penalty for criminals, as well as by people who want to protest the killing of animals. In India, Jainism takes this concept to its extreme of not killing any living creature, down to the level of not swatting a fly or stepping on an ant. But there is no hint of that in this commandment. The ESV, NIV and every other modern translation interpret the Hebrew word much more precisely, *You shall not MURDER*. Let me assure you that this command has nothing whatsoever to do with animals. Whether it is killing a domestic animal for the table or hunting a wild one or even putting your aging dog to sleep, the Bible clearly states that man has the right to kill animals, that God Himself has given them to us for food. In fact, the Hebrew word used here is never used of killing animals; there is a different word for that. This command is about taking the lives of human beings. Moreover:

1. this command does not forbid all taking of human life There are ten or more Hebrew words which mean *to kill*. The word *ratsah* used here is only used six other times and it is always with the meaning that we would translate in English as *murder*. Further this command is quoted in the New Testament by Jesus, Paul, and James and in each case, they always use the Greek word *phoneuo* which specifically means to murder. All taking of human life is killing but not all life-taking is murder, the thing God is prohibiting here. Sometimes human life is taken by pure accident; look at **Deut. 19:4-5** which says, *If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past— as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies...* That is not murder. Sometimes life is taken through neglect, even deliberate neglect and the Old Testament law even speaks to that. It commands the building of a railing around your flat rooftop to prevent people from falling off and dying or the penning up of an animal that is known to be dangerous and might gore someone. If someone is killed through neglect it is not murder. The passage that most clearly spells out the difference is **Num. 35:9-25** where God commanded the designating of cities of refuge in the land of Israel where someone who had killed a person by accident could flee and be protected. Let's take time to read this long passage together. Now notice clearly:

a. life-taking becomes murder when two conditions are met First:

(1) the slayer must have the intent to kill V. 23 says *...he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm*. It is the intent to harm, the intent to kill that makes man-slaughter murder. So, we are not to intentionally take a human life, but there's still more to it. If the man WAS a murderer, the avenger of blood (that is, the nearest relative of the victim) was commanded to kill him. There was no refuge designed to hide that type of person. Here the intentional taking of life is actually commanded, just as it is in many other places in the Old Testament. So, there is a second factor involved in murder:

(2) the slayer must have no right to kill the victim. There are times when life can and even must be taken justly, that is, because God says that it is right, because He Himself commands us to do it. One who has murdered another is to be killed. That killing is just; it is right. It makes human existence possible because it keeps life sacred and precious to all.

So, in simplest terms, murder is the *unjust, intentional* taking of life. Then think about what God is really teaching us here:

b. this command teaches the tremendous value of human life Turn back with me to **Gen. 9:5-6**, the clear command that God gave Noah and his family after they left the ark to begin the human race all over again. It was intended as a command to all of the human race from its second inception [READ]. God intended from the very beginning that all human beings should know and understand that human life is sacred and all taking of it that is not legitimate must be punished in turn. Why? Because:

(1) murder is a direct strike against God's image A human being is the image of God, created in His likeness. To kill that image is a direct strike against God Himself and should not be done unless it is commanded by Him.

Under Israel's law, even the accidental manslayer had consequences to face. He had to live in the city of refuge until the high priest died. And that, of course, is a symbol of Jesus, our High Priest dying, and it says to us that even the guilt of unintentional wrongs was paid for at the cross. But the taking of life is never what God intended, even though sometimes it may be necessary. Every human life has value; it is a direct creation of God and it is sacred, holy. That's why the New Testament tells us that:

(2) murder is Satanically motivated Jesus Himself told the Jewish leaders, *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning...* - **Jn. 8:44**. The reason Satan hates people is because they are images of God and from the very beginning he has wanted to destroy them, to murder them, because he hates God and anything attached to him. It was he who incited the very first murder; *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother...* - **1 Jn. 3:12**. It was Satan who whispered in Cain's mind, "Go ahead, kill your brother Abel! He deserves it!" And Cain listened to him instead of to God; he joined forces with Satan and struck at the image of God, with whom he was angry for not accepting his sacrifice, by killing Abel. When you intentionally and unjustly take a human life, any human life, you are motivated by and have entered a league with Satan and are doing his bidding, just as surely as those leaders who plotted to murder Jesus.

Now all that being said, let's think through some of:

2. the implications of the command These are things that many people debate and have strong opinions about but they become clear when you understand the definition of what murder is. First of all:

a. capital punishment is not murder It is governmentally necessary and was directly commanded by God for all human beings for all time long before the law of Moses was ever given. Capital punishment, the taking of the life of one who murders, is God's deterrent to maintain the sacredness of life. Yes, it is unpleasant and it is not to be done arrogantly or lightly or cruelly, but if we in the United States actually DID execute murderers and did it swiftly, there would be a radical change in the crime rate! When you can commit murder and only risk imprisonment, there will always be people willing to make that trade. As we saw earlier:

b. killing someone by accident is not murder If you are involved in a car accident or an industrial accident and someone dies, it is not murder. You had no intent to harm the other person. Moreover:

c. killing someone in self-defense is not murder If a person breaks into your home with the intent of harming you and your family and you have a weapon and kill him in self-defense, that is not murder. You are not his enemy with unjust intent to harm. You are defending your own life and the lives of others. It is not murder. It is terribly serious and you certainly ought to avoid taking an intruder's life if you can, but if there is no other alternative, it is not murder and all 50 states agree with God in that. Now here's the big one; what about war?

d. killing someone in war may or may not be murder For ISIS to make war against Syria and Iraq in an aggressive fashion in order to take over their population and territory and kill people at will is certainly murderous. To defend against an attack by an enemy or to rescue others being unjustly attacked and kill the attackers is certainly not murder. A believer can go to war and fight and kill the enemy, and countless of us through the centuries have, even though it is an awful thing to have to do and many come home severely traumatized by it. And I must quickly add that even in a justified war, there are many unjustified and even murderous acts of taking human life that occur. A state of war itself does not justify unnecessary killing; human life must always be treated as sacred and taken with reluctance and regret. And I can't avoid mentioning this serious application of the command:

e. killing an unborn child is murder A human being is a human being in the womb from the time of conception. Psalm 139 says clearly that God knows and forms together each person in their mother's womb. To intentionally kill an unborn baby is murder and we in the United States have reportedly aborted some 58 million babies since the practice was legalized in 1973. May God have mercy on our nation; we certainly don't deserve it! Of course, in some few cases, the life of the pregnant mother is in great danger and the doctor must take the child to save her life; that is sad but it is not murder. And I must also add that this abortion thing too is not all so cut and dried. In any crowd of this size there will almost certainly be at least some woman who has experienced an abortion in her past and has kept it her secret. Many times, young women have been forced into having an abortion by parents or boy-friends or even husbands who made threatening demands and they were not strong enough to resist at that time even though their hearts did not want it. In fact, ALL women who have had abortions are themselves victims; they pay a heavy price for it, whether they realize that price or not. We must have great compassion for women who have suffered in this way; most are not the blind and callous, "it is my right to do what I want with my own body" type and using the phrase "Abortion is murder" lightly, traumatizes them all over again. Nevertheless, we must tell God's truth about the subject, especially in our society, and hold human life sacred in every way.

We could go on and mention that suicide is murdering your own self and assisted suicide and euthanasia are all forms of murdering someone else, no matter how much it appears that the person would be better off dead. These are all the intentional taking of a life that we have no right to take. *Dr. James Dobson mentions an article by Dr. Leo Alexander in the*

New England Journal of Medicine, written in 1949 which argued that so-called "compassionate killing" of the terminally ill inevitably set the stage for the Holocaust. He wrote: "Whatever proportions these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physicians. It started with the acceptance of the attitude ...that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived. This attitude in its early stages concerned itself merely with the severely and chronically sick. Gradually the sphere of those to be included in this category was enlarged to encompass the socially unproductive, the ideologically unwanted, the racially unwanted and finally all non-Germans. [J. Dobson and G. Bauer, *Children at Risk*, Word, 1990, p. 145]. Whenever we begin to deviate from God's truth that every life is sacred, we head down a slippery slope that justifies murder. However, the bottom line is that God did not give this commandment simply to prohibit murder. The New Testament repeats this command on several occasions and points out that the intent of this command was to teach a far greater eternal principle. Turn with me to **Rom. 13:8-10**:

II. The Principle In This Command is Love Others As Yourself In fact, according to this, all of these six commandments did not simply prohibit something; they were all expressions of one rule that God was trying to teach, that of love toward other human beings. Honor your parents is to teach love for parents. Not committing adultery was to teach love for our spouse. The others taught love for our fellow human being in general and this command leads them all. You are to love the life of every human being and value it. That means:

1. negatively, not to simply not murder anyone, but **we are to do no harm at all to others**. You remember what Jesus taught? *You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. - Mat. 5:21-22.* What is Jesus telling us? It's not just that God doesn't want us to physically murder another person; He doesn't want us to hate them or even to insult them. He doesn't want us to look down on them and scorn them and call them an "empty-head". He doesn't even want us to have a hostile attitude toward them and be angry with them. Those are all smaller degrees of the same sin of which murder is the ultimate expression. He wants us to intend nobody any harm, any ill; that's what God really wants of us! But then:

2. positively, this command is teaching us that **we are to care about others and act to help them**. James said, *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? - James 2:15-16.* And John's comment was, *...we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? - 1 Jn. 3:16-17.* God wants us to love each other, to care about each other's life and the quality of that life. He wants us to care that the other person loses their home in a fire or loses their job because of downsizing, to care that they suffer physical pain or that they are going through a heart-wrenching divorce. He wants us to care that their hearts are hard and they don't know Him and they're going to spend eternity apart from Him. This is the bedrock of all human society. If all human beings care only about themselves and their own life, they cannot exist together. Man must care about his fellow man for human life in this world to work. And how much more is it the bedrock of the church; the New Testament commands us over and over, "Love one another!" So here is:

III. The Application Of This Command: I Must Love Others As I Love Myself I must value their life and everything about it as I value my own. I must treat their life as I treat my own: with love. Now let's just think in the physical realm about:

1. how I naturally love myself Paul said, *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church - Eph. 5:29.* Now I know there are people who actually hate their own bodies and deliberately try to starve them or hurt them or even kill them. But those folks are sick; their experiences in life have made them into something that is not normal or natural. Nobody is born hating their own body; we are born loving our own bodies and there are two things we take great pains to do for them:

a. I always nourish my body by meeting its needs The NIV uses the word *feed* but that's a little limited, though most of us obviously feed our bodies three times and more each day. Nourishing means I see that my body has everything it needs. I clean it; I groom it; I rest it in sleep. Perhaps I exercise it. I do for my body what God does for me; I meet all of its needs. And the other thing I do for my body is that:

b. I always protect my body by shielding it from harm The Greek word for *cherish* comes from the concept of a mother bird gathering its young under its wings for shelter and keeping them warm. I love my body so much that I do that same thing. I protect it from the cold and keep it warm. I go to very great lengths to keep it from experiencing pain. That's how I naturally love myself and that's:

2. how I must love others I must love them AS I love myself. AS is a funny word. When you use it to compare two things, it can indicate either manner or degree and here it probably means both. I must love others:

a. in the same way that I naturally love myself That is, I must nourish and cherish others in the same way that I nourish and cherish ME. I must care that their needs are met and they are protected from harm. Their life is precious just as mine is and I must value their well-being just as I do my own. Furthermore, I must love them:

b. to the same degree that I naturally love myself That's the tough part, isn't it? It's one thing to care but how MUCH should I care. God is teaching me that He wants me to care about the well-being of others, their nurture and their protection as much as I naturally do my own, which is quite a bit! Who is the center of my life? Is it me? Is it my needs, my protection? Or is it the well-being of others? Does their life really matter to me? Is it sacred to me because it is given by God and belongs to Him? And do I care about them even if I don't like them or they are my enemy?

The second most widely recognized genocide in the world after the Holocaust is the extermination of between 800,000 and 1.5 million Armenians who lived in Turkey by the Turkish government during World War I and it led to the brief Turkish-Armenian war in the autumn of 1920. The story is told of an Armenian nurse who had been held as a captive along with her brother by the Turks. Her brother was slain by a Turkish soldier before her very eyes. Somehow, she managed to escape and later became a nurse in an Armenian military hospital. One day she was stunned to find that the same man who had killed her brother had been captured and brought wounded to the hospital where she worked. Something within her cried out "Vengeance". But a stronger voice called for her to love, so she nursed the man back to health. Finally, the recuperating soldier asked her, "Why didn't you let me die?" Her answer was, "I am a follower of Him who said, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you." (Luke 6:27). Impressed with her answer, the young soldier replied, "I never heard such words before. Tell me more. I want this kind of religion." The sixth commandment is not merely about letting a man die by refusing to help him; but it is about nursing him back to health. It's about valuing the life of someone else, anyone else, everyone else, as much as I do my own, and caring for their well-being. It's about love.

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

The Sanctity Of Marriage - Ex. 20:14

I have mentioned previously that the final six commandments form the fundamental bedrock upon which all human civilization is based and the seventh commandment, which concerns marriage, is no exception. Have you ever thought about the fact that every human culture on earth recognizes the permanent bonding of a man and a woman belonging exclusively to each other, which we in English call marriage, and sees violating that as taboo? I wonder why that is? I think it is like the concept of the seven day week; it is evidence of a memory that mankind collectively has that in the very beginning God created one man and one woman and he brought them together in a one flesh relationship that should not be shared with anyone else. From that very first generation it has been passed down over the centuries into every people that there is something about marriage that sets it apart and demands that its boundaries be respected. And so, God gave Israel His seventh commandment, a statement of what the whole world already knew is proper:

I. The Command: Do Not Commit Adultery In English, the root of the word has nothing to do with the word *adult*, but rather comes from the Latin term *adulterare* which means *to add something other*. It has also come down to us in the verb *adulterate* which means *to corrupt, debase or make impure by adding another substance*. So, in essence:

1. this command means to not corrupt or violate the marriage vow by adding another person into the relationship, thus making it impure. Technically, it is something that can only be committed if at least one of the parties is a married person. In plain language, if you are married:

a. it means not being sexually involved with anyone except your spouse and it further means that you (whether married or not) cannot be sexually involved with a person who is the husband or wife of someone else. The marriage bond is exclusive; it is a Divinely instituted boundary that no one is to venture outside of when they are in it and no one from outside is to venture into. But that doesn't seem to mean very much to us in America today. One author in 2011 quoted a then recent George Barna survey saying that *4 out of 10 Americans believe that adultery is morally acceptable. For Christians, that number was 1 out of 10*. He went on to quote research that *over a third of married men will cheat on their wives and nearly a quarter of all married women will cheat on their husbands*. Further, *more than 50% of all marriages will be impacted by one of the spouses being unfaithful*. A University of Chicago study discovered that *a third of all marriages end in divorce because of an affair!* And if you think Christians are different, another study from Christianity Today shows that *45 percent of Christians indicate having done something sexually inappropriate, and 23 percent indicate having extramarital intercourse*. www.kellybonewell.com/adultery-just-the-statistics/ It appears that in America a large percentage of us, Christian or not, have thrown this command right out the window. Marriage as an institution is becoming less and less respected. But hold on a moment. Mankind is great at looking for loopholes. So, if I want to obey this command, how about if I just UN-marry my spouse and marry someone else? That way I'm not breaking the command; I'm only involved with the person I'm married to. That's what was happening widely in Jesus' day and it's why He introduced another level of depth to this commandment. Look with me at **Mt. 19:9**. Not committing adultery also:

b. it means not breaking the marriage to get another spouse Unless there is a serious breach of the relationship by the other person (like them committing adultery or abusing you or deserting you), YOU can't marry some-

one else without committing adultery! Marriage is not some sort of contract or business deal where you can break off your relationship with one partner and choose another because you think you'll get a better deal. But that's exactly what this generation of Americans has come to think it is. Though the actual divorce rate is very difficult to calculate, the Witherspoon Institute says that scholars are able to project that the risk of divorce for those marrying in this current time frame is between 40-50% in the US [<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/12/15983/>]. That's scary! You see, Jesus was teaching us that:

2. this command reveals the sacredness of marriage Go back and read **Mt. 19:3-6**. Marriage is a permanent institution; it is for life and always has been since:

a. God established the relationship of marriage in the very beginning He created human beings to be either male or female, both in his image, and then instituted this relationship of marriage in which:

b. God joins husband and wife in the deepest possible bond of union They become *one flesh*. The very physical union of their bodies joining together is meant as an object lesson to teach us that God has made them one. The prophet Malachi was speaking to Israel against the rampancy of divorce in his day and said this in the ESV, *...the LORD [is] witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?...* - *Mal. 2:14-15*. The Hebrew of that text is very difficult to interpret, so translations vary, but I think the ESV has done a good job of capturing the essence of it. When a man and a woman enter into the sacred covenant of marriage, they make a sacred vow before God Himself and He not only declares that they are now one, a unit together, but the Holy Spirit is also actually involved in that joining in some mysterious way so that it is more than just words; it is the deepest possible bond of union at the spiritual level, not just the physical. God says that husband and wife are actually ONE, that He has joined them together inseparably and Jesus' conclusion is that therefore:

c. human beings have no right to divide what God has joined! In fact, Malachi 2:16 goes on in most translations to say, *I hate divorce, says the LORD God of Israel...* Now please note carefully that God does not say, "I hate divorced people." God loves all kinds of people who do things that are against His commands. If he didn't, none of us could be saved. He is saying, "I hate the ACT of divorce, the breaking up of that sacred marriage bond!" When the Pharisees pulled out Deut. 24 and said to Jesus in v. 7, "Well, why then did Moses say that a man can give his wife a writing of divorce?", look at His reply in vs. 8. It was never God's plan, never His intent that people should be allowed to break the marriage bond. Yet it does happen because human beings are sinful and flawed and have hard hearts. And if it has happened in your life, know that God loves you, that if you are His child, He has forgiven you for anything there may have been to forgive and if you are now married once again, be faithful to the spouse you are NOW married to. But the point is that we must be careful to hold the marriage bond as sacred and inviolable in any sense. In fact:

d. God holds the marriage bond as sacred as life itself - Lev. 20:10 says, *If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.* In Israel adultery carried the death penalty. When they brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus to test Him, He acknowledged that under the law she would normally be stoned, but He forgave her instead. God was saying that adultery is murdering a marriage; it is killing a life-bond and the penalty for it should be death. This is a profound thing. If we would only stop and think, "If I do this thing, if I violate my marriage vow, I am doing something for which I would have been sentenced and killed in Israel.", that would quickly sober us up and keep us chaste!"

So, the commandment forbids cheating; it forbids divorce, but there is still a deeper level of understanding to it:

3. this command was intended to limit all sexual activity to marriage Paul takes that *one flesh* statement and shows how it applies to sexual immorality. Look with me at **1 Cor. 6:13-18**. When God says "two become one flesh in marriage" He meant that's the ONLY time they are to become one flesh! God never meant our bodies for immorality, to have sex randomly at will, as opportunity may arise or for money. We are to flee, to run away from any type of sexual immorality. In the Greek that word is *porneia*, from which of course, we get our word *pornography*, and it refers to any type of sexual activity in which the participants are not married to each other. Jesus Himself told us that this command was meant to:

a. it excludes mental sexual activity You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. - **Mt. 5:27-28**. You'll hear men say something like, "I can look as long as I don't touch!" Jesus said, "No you can't!" Adultery is an act of the heart; it begins there. It begins with the desire to have sexual activity with someone who is not your spouse and that is just as evil as the act itself! Lust is a battle that everyone, especially men, must fight! And the biggest way that happens today with the availability of the internet on our computers and even our phones, is pornography. By 2017, a quarter of a billion people are expected to be accessing mobile adult content from their phones or tablets... 24% of smartphone owners admit to having pornographic material on their mobile handset... And get this: 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women say they watch porn at least once a month. [<http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>] Whether you look at a live person or a picture of a person and desire

them sexually, you are committing immorality before God, just as if you were doing it physically with them. I didn't say that, Jesus did! And once you start, it's a hard addiction to break! If you've become ensnared in it, I'd advise you to seek help, to go to a counselor and work on the things that drive you to it. Further, this command was meant to:

b. it excludes casual sexual activity, whether that is temporary involvement with a boyfriend or girlfriend or full-blown living together over a period of time. Jesus told the woman at the well to go and call her husband, but *The woman answered him, "I have no husband."* Jesus said to her, *"You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true. - Jn. 4:17-18.* Living with somebody, staying with them and cohabiting with them does not make you married; it makes you immoral. And on top of that, everybody thinks if they live together first and get used to each other and THEN marry it will enhance their chances of the marriage lasting, but, *According to statistics gathered by US Attorney Legal Services... A couple who does not live together prior to getting married has a 20 percent chance of being divorced within five years. If the couple has lived together beforehand, that number jumps to 49 percent.* http://divorce.lovetoknow.com/Divorce_Statistics_and_Living_Together God never meant for human beings to pursue sexual activity apart from marriage, period! And finally, this command was meant to:

c. it excludes unnatural sexual activity Look with me at **Rom. 1:26-27**. Look at the words God uses here. The passion of lust for the same sex is *dishonorable*. Women having relations with women is *contrary to nature*. Men having relationship with men is a *shameless act*. Human beings are not created that way. God creates each person male or female and He makes no mistakes. There are no men trapped in a female body nor women trapped in a male body. You don't have to figure out what gender you are; God created you with it and it is obvious, in spite of the fact that the White House directive to public schools issued on May 13 was to allow transgender students to use whatever bathroom matches their gender identity. God's directive is that one man marry one woman and that sexual activity should be confined to that relationship alone.

Listen, in **1 Cor. 6:9-11** God says: *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. But then He adds: And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* Sexual sin is like any other type of sin. It's morally wrong and it separates us from God. But God loves to wash sinners clean and make their lives holy and pardon all their transgressions when they come to His Son Jesus by the power of His Holy Spirit! I dare say there are a great many of us sitting here this morning who could testify, "Yes, there was a season in my life when I was sexually immoral in one form or another, but by His power and His grace, God has washed me clean, taken that out of my life and made me a new person!" Amen? Well, like all the rest of the commandments, this one was not merely meant to be negative, but to teach a positive eternal principle and:

II. The Principle In This Command is simple: **We Must Love Our Spouses Supremely** Paul spells out for us clearly what that passage about becoming one flesh in marriage is supposed to mean. Turn with me now to **Eph. 5:25-33**. In vs. 31-32 he says clearly that:

1. the marriage bond pictures the unity the we have with Christ Just as husband and wife become one in the deep human bond of marriage, so each of us becomes one with Christ when we believe. But what Paul derives from that fact is that:

2. the marriage partners should mirror the love Christ had for His church *Husbands love your wives as Christ loved [YOU], vs. 25.* And it applies in reverse too. **Titus 2:4** says, *...train the young women to love their husbands...* Both husband and wife should love each other supremely, the way that Jesus loved us. Well then, how did He love us? Vs. 25 says He *gave Himself for us*. So:

a. that love involves sacrifice, giving up ourselves for each other, putting the needs of the other ahead of our own and meeting them without regard to what it costs us. It means laying down my life for my spouse, perhaps not literally, but in a million smaller ways throughout my lifetime, giving up what "I want" for her or for him. Then in vs. 26 we see:

b. that love involves purification Jesus' great love purifies us; He washes us clean with the cleansing water of His Word because of His great love for us. So, we must do all that we can to purify our spouse and build them up in our most holy faith, helping them to mature and grow and become the person God intends them to be. Then in vs. 29 we read:

c. that love involves nourishment Jesus loves us and so He nourishes us; He meets all of our needs according to His riches in glory. We don't marry to get our needs met by our spouse; rather, we marry to make our life mission to meet the needs that she or he has. And finally, we see there also:

d. that love involves protection Because He loves us, Jesus cherishes us; He spreads His wings of love over us and folds us safely into His protection. Husband and wife do all they can to protect one another, to shield one another from all the many things that life throws at them.

So how do I apply this command; how do I fulfill it in my life?

III. The Application Of This Command: I Must Love My Spouse Jesus said so. First of all:

1. I must love my spouse exclusively I must be extremely careful to "keep myself only unto him or her", not just physically but in my mind. I must guard my mind against all impure thoughts and desires toward others. I must let no other person intrude upon the relationship that I have with my spouse, develop no emotional attachment, no loyalty, no joy in any other person that even begins to eclipse that which I have with my wife or my husband. And if I am single, I must love that person whom I may someday marry by keeping myself morally pure and saving that full commitment of myself for that special one that God may bring into my life someday. And finally:

2. I must love my spouse well, doing my best to imitate the love of Jesus Himself for him or her and depending on His power to do it. I must do all I can to purify and nourish and protect that one I love, always sacrificing myself and putting him or her first. And if I am single, I should realize that this is what I'm signing up for if I should marry and make sure I'm ready to love in that way.

Dr. E. V. Hill, served as senior pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles for 42 years and was one of the most well-known and dynamic pastors of that generation. In 1987 he lost his wife, Jane, to cancer and as he preached her funeral message, Dr. Hill described some of the ways she had made him a better man. As a struggling young preacher, E. V. had trouble earning a living. E. V. came home one night and found the house dark. When he opened the door, he saw that Jane had prepared a candlelight dinner for two. He thought that was a great idea and went into the bathroom to wash his hands. He tried unsuccessfully to turn on the light. Then he felt his way into the bedroom and flipped another switch. Darkness prevailed. The young pastor went back to the dining room and asked Jane why the electricity was off. She began to cry. 'You work so hard, and we're trying,' said Jane, 'but it's pretty rough. I didn't have enough money to pay the light bill. I didn't want you to know about it, so I thought we would just eat by candlelight.' Dr. Hill described his wife's words with intense emotion: 'She could have said, "I've never been in this situation before. I was reared in the home of Dr. Caruthers, and we never had our lights cut off." She could have broken my spirit; she could have ruined me; she could have demoralized me. But instead, she said, "Somehow or other we'll get these lights back on. But tonight, let's eat by candlelight."' E. V. continued, 'She was my protector. Some years ago, I received quite a few death threats, and one night I received notice that I would be killed the next day. I woke up thankful to be alive, but I noticed that she was gone. I looked out the window and my car was gone. I went outside, and finally, saw her driving up. I said, "Where have you been?" She said, "I...I...it just occurred to me that they could have put a bomb in that car last night, and if you had gotten in there you would have been blown away. So I got up and drove it. It's all right."' [Dr. James Dobson's monthly letter to Focus on the Family supporters, Feb. 1995. Page 3.] What an example! Jane loved her husband well, didn't she? Let's commit to love our spouses exclusively and love them well as God wants us to.

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

Honesty - Ex. 20:15

The eighth commandment, like all of the final six, affirms another piece of the bedrock of human civilization. In the animal kingdom the strongest take whatever they want! The strongest male in the herd gets the rights to all the females or the largest share of meat from the kill. If a lesser animal has something, a stronger one can take it away from him at any time. Animals have no concept that what's mine is mine and what's yours is yours and when any human society begins to function that way, the result is chaos, fighting and lots of suffering. That's why God commanded His people Israel in v. (15):

I. The Command: Do Not Steal That hardly needs to be explained. To steal is to take something that belongs to another person as your own without any right or permission to do so. Therefore, by forbidding it:

1. this command affirms the right of private property ownership. Its underlying principle is that what is mine belongs to me and what is yours belongs to you and no one has the right to simply take it for themselves. By way of contrast, communism says that all property is publicly owned. In other words, what's mine is ours and nothing I have is really mine; it is simply an allotment given to me by the state and I have no private right to it. Suffice it to say that God is not a communist! He says that if I own a field or a house or an animal, it's mine and nobody has the right to take it away from me. That principle just seems basic to human life and the laws of practically every society on earth, including ours, agree. But stealing can assume many forms; God went on to show that this command:

2. it is meant to forbid all types of stealing For instance, look with me at **Lev. 19:11, 13**. These two verses spell out four different types of dishonest interactions, all of which fall under the heading of stealing and all of which were part of what God is forbidding in this command. First of all:

a. it forbids clandestine stealing, that is, **taking others' things secretly**. The common word for stealing carries a secondary sense of taking something away by stealth. When I was a little kid, we lived in the country and we boys played a lot outdoors with toy guns and bows and arrows and those sorts of things. Well, the neighbor boy who

lived up the hill had a nice red fiberglass bow with curves on the end; I had a plain wooden one that was straight and not very powerful, strung with a piece of twine instead of a real bowstring. Well, I wanted his bow and I saw that he kept it on his outside porch, so one day when nobody seemed to be around, I simply snuck over there and took it for myself. That's clandestine stealing. Of course, others steal by shoplifting; some young people even regard it as cool to walk out of a store with merchandise and get away with it. In the adult version, secret stealing can become burglary if you're inclined toward crime or driven by addiction, or maybe just taking company property home for your own use if you're more of a blue-collar employee, or if you're more of a white-collar type, it becomes embezzlement. The bad news is that whether you're a little kid with a bow or an executive with his fingers in the corporate cookie jar, sooner or later you get caught; somebody always figures it out. But vs. 11 mentions that this command goes further:

b. it forbids false dealing, that is, **cheating others**. There's a good example down the page in **Lev. 19:35-36**. All you need to do to steal is to adjust your scale to weigh 15 oz. to the pound instead of a full 16; if you've withheld an ounce from 16 customers you've stolen a full pound worth of whatever to keep for yourself! That's why we have a bureau of weights and measures that inspects and standardizes gas pumps and store scales! God hates when we deal falsely with others, when we lie to them in the deals and transactions that we make. Not long after we arrived here in our bright red Chevy wagon with 2 year old Andrea back about 1980, I took the car to the transmission shop that was on the corner where Sloane Toyota is today to get my fluid changed. They told me there was metal in the pan and that I needed the transmission rebuilt to the tune of \$400, which in those days was a small fortune. We gulped and did it, only to be told a year afterward by a mechanic who used to work there that it was a racket and there was nothing wrong with my car, that they did it to people all the time. It doesn't look like stealing but misrepresenting a product or an item for sale is dealing falsely and stealing just the same. And so is cheating on your taxes, hiding portions of your income from the government so you won't have to pay what you legitimately owe. Recently I heard of two employees working the night shift in a hotel who were caught actually sleeping through most of the night instead, thus cheating their employer out of their services. We definitely don't want people to cheat us but we sometimes find it pretty easy to cheat others, especially if the other is a company or the government. It's dealing falsely, stealing. Then in vs. 13 God indicates that this command:

c. it forbids exploitation, that is, **taking advantage of others** when they are in need or helpless. Flip over a couple pages and look at **Lev. 25:35-37**. Here's a brother who becomes poor for some reason and is struggling to survive. He needs some help, a loan, to make it. Well, people discovered a long time ago that when someone is desperate, they will agree to anything and you can charge them an exorbitant rate, 100% or even 200% for their services. In India poor laborers have been kept in bondage this way for centuries. They need money for a wedding or a funeral and the local money lender "generously" helps them out with a few rupees, for which they must pay back double. When they can't, the debt grows and is even passed down to their children when they die until all hope of ever being free of it is lost. When a man runs out of gas in the middle of nowhere, charging him triple its value because you have it and he needs it is exploitation; it is stealing from him. God says, "Don't lend the poor brother money; instead, take him into your home and let him live with you! Help him! Don't exploit people; be generous to them!" Then, of course 19:13 says this command:

d. it clearly forbids outright robbery, brazenly and openly taking things from others, whether it's the bully at school taking lunch money from smaller kids or the thug demanding that the store clerk empty the cash drawer or the gang that waylaid the man going up to Jerusalem, beat him and stole his money, leaving him lying in the ditch for the Good Samaritan to find.

God says, "Don't take what belongs to someone else, whether you do it behind their back, by cheating them in a deal, by exploiting their need or by outright robbing them! Don't steal!" And in Israel's law:

3. God gave it a penalty to act as a deterrent Listen to **Ex. 22:1, 7**, *If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep... If a man gives to his neighbor money or goods to keep safe, and it is stolen from the man's house, then, if the thief is found, he shall pay double*. Under the law:

a. a thief was to pay back far more than he stole At least double and in some case 5 or 7 times the amount. I don't know if you ever noticed, but Israel had no jails or prisons. The penalty was always directly related to the crime. If you murdered, you were killed. If you stole, you paid back, and not just what you stole but multiple times over. So, you had to work harder than ever and pay off this huge debt you now had or maybe lose everything you had or even be sold into debt slavery to pay it off. That made stealing a very dangerous venture; the risk was not worth the reward. Then here are some very interesting verses, *People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house.* - **Prov. 6:30-31**. We can understand someone being desperate to feed their family or in some other awful position and yielding to the temptation to steal. We feel for their plight and think that we would probably do what they did under the circumstances, yet God says:

b. even if theft is understandable the penalty must stand That right of ownership MUST be respected in all circumstances or the whole system breaks down and right and wrong become relative to circumstances, rather than absolutes based on God's character and Word. God's standard is complete honesty in all our dealing with material things.

Now, like all of the other commands, this one was not simply meant to be a negative prohibition; especially in this case there are multiple eternal:

II. The Principles Inherent In This Command First of all:

1. it warns us against the love of material things The root temptation that drives us to steal is the strong desire to have what we do not have. Paul warned us about that. Turn with me to **1 Tim. 6:6-10**. That desire to be rich, to have more than we have, is a deadly thing. Paul says that:

a. we must learn to be content, satisfied with what God gives us That doesn't mean we can't ever buy a better car or get a bigger house, or that we must always work the same job and never advance ourselves. If God gives us the opportunity and the direction, those things are fine. It means that we must never let that desire to have more, to get more, become a driving force in our lives. Jesus warned us that:

b. whatever we value most is what our heart loves ...where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. - **Mt. 6:21**. Whatever we treasure, whatever we value most, that's what our heart is in love with. If our heart is in love with Him, material things will be secondary. We won't seek after them with a passion. We'll pray and ask for our needs and be content and satisfied with whatever God gives to us. But if we love things, if we love money, Paul says:

c. this wrong love is at the root of all kinds of evil including stealing For the love of money, people kill each other, they hate each other, they hurt each other and they steal from each other. And even mature believers are not immune to it. *In the 1970's a couple of genuine Christians by the name of Jim and Tammy Bakker started a TV show called The PTL Club. It grew rapidly to 100 stations and some 12 million viewers and then they established The PTL Network which eventually delivered programming 24 hours a day by satellite over the entire nation. In the 80's they built Heritage USA in Ft. Mill, SC, the third most popular theme park in the nation and sold time shares for vacations there. Contributions from viewers grew to a million dollars a week. The message they preached did include the message of salvation through Christ but it went on to add that God wants His children to prosper financially, to have health, and so on. They lived a lavish lifestyle. But eventually the love of money caught up with them. Jim was convicted of embezzling several millions of dollars for personal use and sentenced to 45 years in prison. It came out that he had been involved in an affair. Their huge empire of properties went bankrupt and was sold for a portion of its worth. Tammy divorced him. He ended up a broken man with a ruined life. He was paroled in 1993 for good behavior and in 1996 published a book with the title, "I Was Wrong". When God says, "Do not steal!" He is teaching us, "Be very careful not to fall in love with material things! Secondly, this command:*

2. it teaches us that we must work in order to get things Look with me at **Eph. 4:28a**. The point is not just that we ought to stop stealing, but that we should labor, we should work hard with our hands in order to get the things we need in life.

a. this is a principle God ordained from the beginning Right after the fall, he told Adam, *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.* - **Gen. 3:19**. In other words, "In the garden I provided everything for you to simply take and eat, but now in this fallen world you're going to live in, you'll have to earn what you eat. You'll have to work and work hard to meet your needs, all of your life." Laziness will lead to hunger and need, so don't steal; work! Labor with your own hands. Be diligent and hard working.

b. this is the example given to us by Paul When he heard that some of the believers in Thessalonica had quit working and were sitting around depending on others to feed them, and just waiting for Jesus to return, he wrote, *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you... For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* - **2 Thes. 3:6-8, 10**. Paul always worked hard to support himself throughout his ministry and he trained new believers to work hard. God says, "Don't steal; work hard to get what you need.", but this command goes further yet:

3. it encourages generosity Look again at **Eph. 4:28b**. We work hard, not just to accumulate a bunch of wealth for ourselves, but so that we can be generous, **freely sharing the things we have**. We work hard so that we can have more than we need so that God can use us to meet the needs of others who are struggling, so that we can help our neighbors, so that we can help victims of natural disasters, so that we can help the billions who have never heard the Gospel around the world hear of Jesus! In fact, Paul says this command, like all of these last six:

4. it means that we should love others as ourselves For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. - **Rom. 13:9**. If we love our neighbor, we won't steal from him; we'll work hard so we can give to him and help him when he needs it! Saying "Don't steal!" is just another way in which God is telling us to love other people. Work hard and be give freely to meet their needs! Now with all that being said, there are some obvious:

III. The Applications Of This Command The first one is obvious:

1. I must be honest in all dealings with material things When he was delivering the large offering that the Gentile churches had collected for the believers at Jerusalem, Paul was careful to take along with him a number of representatives from those churches and he wrote, *We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.* - **2 Cor. 8:20-21**. He went out of his way not merely to deal honestly, but also to APPEAR to everyone to be dealing honestly. He made himself accountable to others to make sure he could not be seen by anyone as dishonest. That's how important honesty was to him and so it should be to me. I must be honest in all my dealings. Secondly:

2. I must work heartily at whatever God gives me to do Paul told the Colossians, *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.* - **Col. 3:23-24**. In your daily work, you are serving Jesus, whether you're flipping burgers at McDonalds or driving a truck or entering data in a computer or designing a building or helping a patient. Whatever you do, every day you're working for Jesus so do it with all your heart and He'll not only use your work to provide for your needs but He'll use you as a witness for Him while you're working! And lastly:

3. I must be generous and eager to share what I have Paul wrote to Timothy, *As for the rich in this present age, [and that's us, by the way; we have so much more than most of the world!] charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share* - **1 Tim. 6:17-18**. We have so much and we are to use it to do good for Him, to be generous with it and ready to share it so that others can have their needs met and so that those who have never heard of Jesus can have the opportunity to know Him!

John Wesley is a name every believer should know. He led a revival movement that swept through England in the mid-1700's and spilled over into America to become the Methodist Episcopal Church. Thousands of people were brought into the Kingdom through meetings held by circuit riding preachers and molded into genuine disciples through classes that met in those locations. What is not so commonly known is that Wesley eventually began to receive a significant income from the sale of his writings, one year amounting to 1400 pounds (probably the equivalent of several hundred thousand US dollars today). What did he do with it all? He lived humbly on 30 pounds and gave 1370 away! That was the rule he both preached and practiced all his life; he gave away everything above what he needed to live. In a sermon on Luke 16:9 Wesley spelled out his understanding of money: "It is an excellent gift of God" he claimed, "answering the noblest ends. In the hands of his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked: It gives to the traveler and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of an husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We may be a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death! It is therefore of the highest concern that all who fear God know how to employ this valuable talent; that they be instructed how it may answer these glorious ends, and in the highest degree." And how should we handle it? Wesley had three rules. **1) Gain all you can!** Work hard. Be diligent to earn as much as possible in an honest way. Don't be lazy. **2) Save all you can!** Buy what you really need and be sure to pay all your debts, but be careful never to waste money. Live frugally. And **3) GIVE all you can!** Give what you don't need to meet the needs of others. All of your money belongs to God, not just a part. Use it to bless others and the work of God as He directs. In 1744 Wesley wrote, "When I die if I leave behind me ten pounds...you and all mankind can bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber." When he died in 1791, the only money mentioned in his will was the miscellaneous coins to be found in his pockets and dresser drawers. Most of the 30,000 pounds he had earned in his lifetime he had given away. [Sources: Mission Frontiers, Sept.-Oct. 1994; Christian History Newsletter, Nov. 2001]. You may not be called to do exactly what Wesley did, but you can't argue with what he taught. That's what God is really after in the eighth commandment: honesty, hard work and generosity. May He make you to abound in all three!

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

Righteous Speech - Ex. 20:16

Another plank in the bedrock of human civilization is the commitment to truthfulness in communication. If you've ever read the book *Peace Child*, Don Richardson describes the culture of the Savi tribal people of Indonesia in the '60s as one where lying and deception were actually epitomized as virtues. To deceive someone from another village, to "fatten them with friendship" through kindness and invitations to meals over a period of time and then at the right moment kill them was the height of achievement. When Don shared the Gospel with them, they thought Judas was the hero and Jesus was the

fool! No culture like that can long survive. For human beings to live with one another in society they must be able to trust what other people say. And so, in giving His core principles to His people Israel, God gives them this ninth commandment in vs. (16):

I. The Command: Do Not Bear False Witness against your neighbor. And lest that last word seem like a limiting factor, remember that when someone asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?", He told the story of the Good Samaritan, the point of which is that *anyone* and *everyone* is your neighbor. Neighbor simply means your fellow man. God is saying, "Don't bear false witness against anyone!" Now, of course, that command:

1. it specifically forbids perjury. And what is that? Perjury is a court term and as I'm using it here, it means **deliberately accusing another person falsely**. The NLT says, *You must not testify falsely against your neighbor*. It is what happened at Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. *Many false witnesses spoke against him, but they contradicted each other. Finally, some men stood up and gave this false testimony: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.'"* - **Mk. 14:56-58**. Jesus didn't say that and He didn't mean that by what He did say. Those who were giving evidence against Him deliberately twisted and added to His words in order to convict Him and get a sentence passed upon Him. Wicked Queen Jezebel used this same tactic to have Naboth killed and to steal his vineyard for her husband, King Ahab. She hired two false witnesses to testify against Naboth and got him executed for something he never did. Evidently thousands of years ago human beings figured out that you can lie about somebody either to hurt them or to benefit yourself and people still make false accusations today for the same reasons. That's why our criminal justice system operates on the principle that a defendant is always presumed innocent until **PROVEN** guilty. We know that people will lie for their own benefit, sometimes even under oath and even in Israel no one was ever to be put to death on the testimony of a single witness for that reason. However, this command goes far beyond demanding honesty in a court setting:

2. it was intended to forbid all forms of speaking falsely against people Flip over to **Ex. 23:1**. This command:
a. it includes spreading a false report about someone You don't have to be in a legal setting or before some council; you can lie about somebody anywhere. You can do it:

(1) through open slander In **Lev. 19:16** God said, *You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people... I am the LORD*. A slanderer is a **talebearer**, one who goes around telling tales, saying bad things about someone to other people that are not true. Politicians do it all the time; just listen to their campaigns. We call it mud-slinging, twisting the facts in a way to misrepresent and malign your opponent in the eyes of the public. Of course, we'd never do that, would we? Yet how many times do we openly and thoughtlessly repeat and pass on things that have been said to us about someone without really knowing that they are true or bothering to investigate. We don't care; we simply pass it on because slander comes easy. Further, you can spread a false report:

(2) through secret slander which the Scripture calls **whispering or gossip**. You can privately and quietly repeat and pass on disparaging things that are not true about someone. **Prov. 16:28** says, *A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends*. You can ruin a person's reputation or get them labeled in an offensive way simply by making a comment or passing on a rumor.

By the way, written slander is called libel and you can be sued for it. Today libel is even easier because of electronic media! Simply make a negative or derogatory remark about somebody on your Facebook wall or blog and dozens, maybe hundreds, of people see it immediately and believe it to be true because they're your friends! *In Melbourne, Australia, a woman took to social media to share a photo of a man she'd seen taking a picture near some children. On Facebook she labeled him a "creep" and claimed police were investigating. The post was shared 20,000 times, and the following day came to the attention of the man himself. He immediately turned himself in. It turns out that he'd been taking a selfie of himself with a Star Wars poster – to send to his own children.*

[\[http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/think-tweet-can-sued-libelous-tweets/\]](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/think-tweet-can-sued-libelous-tweets/) God wants us to be extremely careful and to make sure that whatever we say about others is true in any context, whether we say it openly or privately, whether we say it in person or write it electronically. Then, on the other hand, you really don't have to say anything to be a false witness because this command:

b. it includes withholding the truth when you know it In **Lev. 5:1** God expounds further, *If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity*. When somebody else says something that is false or wrongly accuses someone and you know the truth, but you don't speak up and tell it, you become a false witness by letting the false accusation stand! And that's not just in court. When somebody tells you a piece of slander or gossip about someone that you know is untrue, you have a responsibility to speak up and defend the person right there on the spot, instead of avoiding conflict by simply being quiet. But there is more. In reality this command was not meant only to encourage us to be truthful concerning other people:

3. it was intended to forbid all forms of lying Last week we read **Lev. 19:11** which says, *You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another*. You don't lie to others about taking things from them, you don't

lie to them in business dealings, you don't lie to other people, period! Now maybe you've never thought about this, but what exactly is lying. You see:

a. lying is not merely speaking what is not true There are lots of people who say things that are not true because they sincerely believe they are true. For instance, the weatherman may say it is going to rain tomorrow and then it doesn't rain. He gave false information but he was not lying. He was doing his best to tell the truth; his predictions simply proved to be inaccurate because the forces of nature are fickle and unpredictable. There are many people who say that there is no God, that He doesn't exist. What they're saying is not true; the statement is a lie, but they themselves are not intentionally *lying* when they say it. Do you see what I mean?

b. lying is speaking something that is not true knowing it is false with intent to deceive, and I'm not talking about misleading somebody to protect a surprise birthday party. It is deliberately telling someone something that you know is not true in order to deceive them. Saying you'll show up to help me tomorrow at 9 AM and then not showing up because you forgot doesn't mean you were lying. But if you told me you'd be there and never actually had any intention of being there, that IS lying.

Deliberate deception is what God is really aiming at eradicating in this command. We are not to deceive one another. Now here's something else you may never have thought about:

4. when we lie, we align ourselves with Satan Jesus told the Jewish leaders, *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* - **John 8:44**. He is the original deceiver. He came to Eve and intentionally lied to her to deceive her into disobeying God and that has been his primary tactic ever since. He and his demons whisper lies into people's minds nonstop, all the time, trying to deceive them into believing things that are not true and acting on them. **Rev. 12:9-10** calls Satan *the deceiver of the whole world* and says that he is *the accuser of our brothers...who accuses them day and night before our God*. So, when we lie, we act like him! We align ourselves with his method of lying and with his purpose of deceiving by becoming little deceivers ourselves. In a sense we make him our father by carrying out his desires instead of acting like children of the true God for whom it is impossible to lie! Jesus also said that:

5. lying stems from a wrong state of the heart *...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.* - **Mt. 15:18-19**. When we set out to lie, to deliberately deceive someone, something is not right in our hearts! Something is not right in our relationship with God. There needs to be true repentance before Him. And if you want to know just:

6. how serious God is about this commandment, remember Ananias and Sapphira, believers in Acts 5 who agreed to lie to the apostles and were both struck dead as a warning to all. And listen to **Rev. 21:8**, *...as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death*. Lying is as wicked as any other sin and unless we find forgiveness in Jesus, it will bring eternal punishment upon us. But the wonderful thing is that when we do come to Jesus, not only are we forgiven for lying (and the Lord knows we've all done our share of it) but His Spirit and nature in us actually transforms us into truth-tellers! It becomes impossible for us to habitually and continually practice lying! But I believe there is still a deeper underlying eternal:

II. The Principle In This Command, which we find as we come to the New Testament. God's desire is not only that we must always speak truthfully but that **We Must Always Speak Righteously**. Turn with me to **Jas. 3:2, 5-8**. To put it mildly:

1. speaking is extremely powerful and difficult to control It is the most difficult of all the things in our lives to control. We sin more often in what we say than in any other way and lying is merely one form of unrighteous speech. Angry harsh words, sarcastic cutting phrases, name calling, it all falls under the category of the wrong use of our tongue which does incredible and sometimes life-long damage in the lives of others. What God is after is the right use, the righteous use of our mouth to speak words that glorify Him. Now turn with me to Ephesians 4 where God has spelled out for us the various aspects of what righteous speech is. First of all, just as the commandment says:

2. we must always speak truthfully to each other - Eph. 4:25 We are members of each other, brothers and sisters who are one in Christ. We should put away all falsehood and deception and always speak the truth. However, vs. **15** qualifies that, *...speaking the truth in love...* You can speak the truth but do it in a mean-spirited or uncaring way that is just as hurtful to the other person as if you had lied! As I mentioned the other week, you can say, "Abortion is murder.", which is the truth, and say it in a condemning way that makes women who have had one feel like they have committed an unpardonable sin and can't ever be forgiven and that you are so much better than they are. Or you can say the same true thing in an attitude that is filled with compassion and caring and wants to bring hope and forgiveness. *Tim Keller said in one of his sermons: "Truth without love is imperious self-righteousness. Love without truth is cowardly self-indulgence." Both are selfish.* Wish I could think of wise sayings like that! Secondly, Paul says that:

3. all of our words should benefit the other person - Eph. 4:29 That word *corrupt* means *rotten* or *putrefied*. Several translations say *unwholesome*. Our words should not be unwholesome; they should not corrupt people; they should not tear them down. As Paul put it back in verse 4, *Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you...* They're out of character; they're not wholesome. We should be careful to only speak words that will *build up* or *edify* the other person, words that will be beneficial to them, good for them, helpful to them. That's a tall order! So much of what we say can be critical, sarcastic, complaining, nagging, and just plain unwholesome; how are we ever going to be able to control our words like this so that they are righteous speech? Well, look what Paul goes on to say in vs. **30**. Evidently:

4. this requires the power and control of the Holy Spirit He is in us and He is wanting to empower us to speak righteously, to speak wholesome things, and we ought not to grieve Him, to make Him sad, by refusing to let Him do it! In every situation we need to learn to stop and silently pray, "Lord, give me Your words; Holy Spirit speak through me; let me say the words You want me to say, words that please You and serve Your purpose." It takes a lot of practice, but if we learn to do that, even if it's 20 or 30 times a day, then look at all that will happen in verse **31**. First of all:

a. He will keep us from words of bitterness, from saying those hateful things that we say because we've been holding something against someone for a long time and we just want to keep on jabbing them because of it. If He's in control, He'll melt that bitterness and keep us from that kind of talk. Further:

b. He will keep us from words of wrath or anger or outbursts All the forms of anger get expressed through our words. From quiet angry words to loud angry words to fits of uncontrolled shouting. When He's in control, so is our temper and we don't speak out of our anger, but rather in truth and love. Thirdly:

c. He will keep us from words of slander and all evil intent That word *malice* in Greek is a general word for all types of evil. The Holy Spirit isn't going to call people names or give them ugly labels or say awful things about them or hurtful things to them. And if He is controlling our mouth, neither will we. Instead:

d. He will help us speak kindly, tenderly and with forgiveness Look at vs. **32**. Those are the sort of words He will speak through us, words that are kind, words that come from a tender heart that cares about the other person, words of forgiveness toward the other instead of condemnation. That's the speech of the Holy Spirit. So:

III. The Application Of This Command is clear: **I Must Always Speak Righteously** On the one hand:

1. I must put away all negative speaking, including lying Turn ahead with me to **Col. 3:8-9**. All those sorts of negative speaking we've mentioned are part of the old me, not the new me in Christ. They must go; I must put them away, like I take off my dirty clothes and put them away from me. Then on the other hand:

2. I must speak graciously and wisely with every individual Look over at **Col. 4:6**. I realize that we have villainized salt in the US and made it a "bad thing" in the diet, but universally for centuries and in much of the world today, salt is the ingredient that makes meat savory and pleasant to the taste. It also preserves it from decaying. It is one of the staples of life; even animals crave it. So, the picture is that all of my speaking should be "seasoned" with grace and wisdom, and I should specially tailor that "seasoning" for the needs of the person I'm speaking to. I must always be thinking, "What will bless this person and be helpful to them; how can I say it so that they will regard it as coming with love and genuine care?" And finally, I'm sure you know **Jas. 1:19**, *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*:

3. I must be slow to speak so I can pray and think before speaking So often I just say the first thing that comes to mind and that's often the wrong thing. The secret to speaking righteously is to stop and ask the Lord what to say before you respond to someone, ask the Spirit to control your tongue and speak His words, words that the other person needs to hear.

No doubt most of you know the name of Nelson Mandela. He is almost universally regarded as a hero who opposed the awful practice of apartheid by the government of South Africa. What I didn't know and what most people don't is that in his younger years he came to see violence as necessary to his cause and cofounded the Umkhonto we Sizwe, (MK), the terrorist wing of the African National Congress which waged a campaign of terrorism against the state. Many innocent people, including women and children, were killed by Nelson Mandela's MK terrorists. Most think he was imprisoned for opposing apartheid, but at his trial, according to Crisis Magazine, he confessed to participation in 156 acts of public violence including mobilizing terrorist bombing campaigns, which planted bombs in public places, including the Johannesburg railway station. For his crimes he was sentenced to life in prison in 1962. After 27 years he was released from prison in 1990 and went on to become the President of South Africa in 1994, serving until 1999, and died in 2013. I tell you this, not to condemn him, but because I want to share something, he said which has value. In addressing an AIDS Conference at Durban in the year 2000, he said this, *It is never my custom to use words lightly. If 27 years in prison have done anything to us, it was to use the silence of solitude to make us understand how precious words are and how real speech is in its impact on the way people live and die.* [Nelson Mandela, Closing Address at the 13th International Aids Conference,

7/14/2000]. Whatever his earlier crimes or later accomplishments, his words on that occasion are worth hearing. May we all understand how precious words are and how powerfully speech impacts the way people live and die. And may we continually ask God to control our speaking, make it righteous and use it for His glory.

Ten Words: God's Principles For Living

Evil Desire - Ex. 20:17

At last, we come to the end of our study of the Ten Commandments and this tenth command is the proof that God never intended any of His commands to be obeyed merely by external compliance. In fact, it is entirely possible for a person to outwardly worship no other god, make no idol, never misuse God's name, do no work on the Sabbath, to respect and take care of his parents, to not murder, commit adultery, steal or lie and yet violate every one of these commands internally in his mind and heart. That's what Jesus was saying when He taught that you commit adultery by lust in your mind and murder by hate in your heart. And that's why in the 10th commandment God prohibits this time, not an outward action, but an inward attitude. Look at vs. (17):

I. The Command: Do Not Covet Covet is an older word and not one which we use much anymore; in the New Testament it is often translated *greed*:

1. to covet means to desire for yourself something which belongs to another, something which you have no right to. It is not merely wishing you had a house LIKE your neighbor has; it is wanting HIS house to be yours, knowing it is his and you have no right to it. It is not wishing you had a wife or a husband LIKE so and so has; it is desiring their wife or husband to be YOURS, knowing you have no right to them. Of course, these are not things we would ever say out loud; coveting:

a. it is an internal act in the mind which occurs in secret It's hidden away where no one can see it; it's a desire which is harbored only in your thought life and no one can know you're doing it, except God Himself. And He was specific to spell out what kinds of things coveting can apply to. For instance, He mentions that:

b. coveting can mean desiring a person who belongs to another, desiring another man's wife or husband or his male or female servant. It is saying in the privacy of your own heart, "I want that person to be mine, not his!" and beginning to think about that person as though they belonged to you. And, of course:

c. coveting can mean desiring a possession that belongs to another, his house or his ox or donkey or anything else he has, maybe his car or his money or even his job. It is saying in the privacy of your own heart, "I want that thing, whatever it is, to be mine, not his, and beginning to think of that thing as though it were yours!"

Now the reason why coveting is such a serious thing is that:

2. coveting is the first step in the process of choosing to sin All outward acts of sin begin with the inward desire first. Look with me at **James 1:14-15**. The root of all temptation is desire. If we have no desire for something, it's not tempting to us. For example, I'm not tempted to bunji jump; I have no desire to do it. All our outward acts begin with inward wants or desires and there is a process by which those internal desires grow into acts of sin:

a. desiring what is forbidden attracts or lures us The idea of it comes to our minds. We begin to feel the want and to think, "*I'd like to have her!*" Or "*I'd like to have him!*" Or "*I'd like to have that!*" And allowing our minds to dwell on that desire is disastrous because:

b. entertaining that desire for what is forbidden grows it and eventually entraps us. The desire grows stronger and begins to morph from an idea which is easily dismissed into more and more of an obsession which says "***I MUST have him or I MUST have her or I MUST have that thing!***" Now coveting has a real hold on us; it begins to exert control. We read about David's son Amnon that he had such a strong desire to have his half-sister Tamar that he made himself sick because of it and he didn't think there was any way he could have her. Every day he moped about and thought and thought and thought about her and the desire grew into more and more of an obsession that controlled his life. But then his friend suggested to him that he pretend to be sick in bed and privately entice her to sleep with him when she came to take care of him. And that idea introduced the element of will. James likens it to pregnancy:

c. when our will concedes or says "Yes" to desire a sinful act is conceived. That's where it begins, when I decide, "***I WILL have him or I will have her or I WILL have this!***" And the fruit of that union between desire and will grows stronger and matures, maybe for a long time, a whole gestation period, but finally:

d. when opportunity presents itself an outward act of sin is born Tamar actually came to Amnon's bedside to feed him and he raped her, as he'd been thinking about doing all along! His coveting grew until it became reality in outward action. So, you see:

3. breaking this last command is the first step to breaking the others Wanting somebody else's husband or wife or simply wanting some other man or woman than your own is the first step to and is the miniature version of adultery. Wanting somebody's money or car or possessions is the first step to and is the miniature version of stealing and lying. Wanting somebody to suffer or to die is the first step to and is the miniature version of murder.

a. God is showing us that the desire or the intent to sin is as evil as the act itself! Now that may not be so in an earthly court of law. A person who "thought about doing it" but didn't actually "do it" will be acquitted and declared innocent here, but not in God's courtroom. The Bible says that He judges the thoughts and the intents of the heart, not just our outward actions. Just "wanting to" is enough to condemn us forever. Revelation says that those who *love and practice* falsehood are barred from the eternal city (22:15). Loving it and doing it are all the same to God! In fact, Paul said that:

b. coveting is actually a form of idolatry Listen to **Eph. 5:3, 5**, *...sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.... For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, **an idolater**), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.* Covetousness is idolatry; it is setting up a false god and worshipping it in your mind. It is loving someone or something more than God who says "No, this is not yours!". It is giving allegiance and commitment and ultimate loyalty to someone or something other than Him!

Leona Mindy Roberts Helmsley was an American businesswoman born in 1920. At the time of her death in 2007 she was worth 8 billion dollars and owned the Empire State Building and a chain of some 23 posh hotels. She was married four times, divorcing the first, then divorcing, remarrying and divorcing the second, and finally getting the last to divorce his wife in order to marry her. She became popularly known as "The Queen of Mean" for her tyrannical and intolerant behavior. She refused to pay contractors who did work for her. When her only child, Jay died in 1982, she sued his widow and was awarded almost all of his comparatively small estate, some \$142,000, leaving his family almost nothing. Despite her wealth, in 1989 she was convicted of 32 counts of money-related crimes including tax evasion, filing false personal documents, assisting in the filing of false corporate tax returns and mail fraud. She was quoted at the trial as saying, "We don't pay taxes; only the little people pay taxes." The jurors were appalled at her naked greed. She was sentenced to 16 years in prison, of which she served 2. When she died, she left \$12 million dollars in a trust to care for her dog and gave separate instructions that the balance of her huge trust be used to care for dogs. Fortunately, a court overturned her wishes and the Helmsley Foundation today supports health, education and human services around the world. [Source: Wikipedia] I share her story because it is an extreme illustration of the degree to which covetousness or greed, the desire to have money or material possessions, can become a person's god and rule their life. The inner desire always leads to outward acts of sin and becomes a controlling force in life. It really IS idolatry and that's why the Scripture warns us so strongly against it! But as with each of the commandments, this last one is not meant to be merely negative. Within it is an eternal principle that God means for us to live by.

II. The Principle In This Command is straightforward: Instead of desiring what you don't have, learn to **Be Content With What God Gives** you. The New Testament talks a lot about this whole concept. One day Jesus was teaching a crowd of people and one man shouted out, *Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!* After refusing, Jesus warned the whole group, *...he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* - Lk. 12:15. There it is:

1. life does not consist of abundant possessions Material things do not satisfy the inner craving of a human being's heart. Wealthy people have testified to this time and time again. Getting more money doesn't bring true happiness. Even getting that other woman or other man doesn't really satisfy the heart. And one primary reason is that:

2. everything we have in this world is temporary Look with me at **1 Tim. 6:7**. As Job so plainly put it after the loss of everything he had, including all his children, *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.* - Job 1:21. Or in modern parlance, you never see a U-Haul behind a hearse. Despite the fact that ancient Egyptian Pharaohs and Chinese Emperors all tried to be buried with possessions and even terra cotta warriors to take with them to the next life, those things always stay behind. They're only temporary. You can only enjoy and use them for a season while you're here. Jesus went on to tell the crowd in **Lk. 12:16-21** the parable of the rich fool, *...The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."'* But God said to him, *'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.* Building bigger barns, accumulating more possessions so that you can relax and eat, drink and be merry, does not satisfy. Sooner or later, you die and in an instant it's all somebody else's. Jesus called the person who thinks like that a fool! They're laboring under a false delusion. The only thing that truly satisfies is, as He put it, being *rich toward God*. The only thing that can fill that gaping hole that is in every human heart is a living, vital relationship with God Himself. A life lived in relationship with Him is truly life. Everything else is temporary and coveting it will not satisfy our hearts, therefore:

3. we must learn to be content with what God gives Now look at **1 Tim. 6:6, 8**. God's goal for us when it comes to material things is the exact opposite of coveting; it is contentment, the sense that I have enough with what I have and I'm thankful that God has provided it. Paul even says that if we have our necessary food and clothing and maybe a place to lay our heads, the basic necessities of life, that should be enough to satisfy us so that we're not always desiring more and more. And the bottom line reason is this: we have Him! I'm sure you remember the last half of **Heb. 13:5** because we quote it all the time, but listen to the whole thing: *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* That verse is saying:

4. the root of our contentment is knowing we have Him We can choose to be content with whatever we have because we have HIM, the very source of all things and He has promised never to leave us! I've had the privilege of traveling to India and to Kyrgyzstan and being with believers there who live in simple one room houses, some of them even in huts with thatched roofs, who eat simple meals of rice, maybe with a little meat, once, maybe twice a day and whose hearts are full of gratitude, who are truly satisfied because now they have HIM and having what we have in the west really doesn't matter! Material things are not what's really important! HE is! And if I have Him, the longing of my heart is satisfied and I can be content with whatever He provides for me. He's a good, good Father! That's why Paul goes on to warn us that:

5. the idolatrous passion for more leads to all kinds of evil You're still in Timothy so look at **1 Tim. 6:9-10**. When we let covetousness, that desire to continually have more, dwell in our minds, look what it leads us into. It leads us into temptation; it makes us tempted to get what we want illegitimately. It snares us; it catches us in a trap from which it is difficult to escape. It becomes an addiction that we can't satisfy or get rid of. It leads us to pursue and run after things that make no sense, but we just have to have them, even things that are harmful to us in the long run, things that will ruin and destroy our lives. We're driven to go after those things and almost always we end up piercing ourselves with pains of our own manufacture. And maybe even throwing aside our faith in the process.

*Russian author Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a novel offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in a day. The only catch in the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Early the next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run, knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost. As the sun began to sink below the horizon, he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was: *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* [Bits and Pieces, November, 1991.] Covetousness makes us do crazy things that make no sense and, in the end, it kills, while contentment gives me time in life for the things that really matter like deepening relationships with people and with God. So, let's ponder:*

III. The Application Of This Command What does it mean TO ME that God says, *Do not covet*? First of all, it means that:

1. it is not enough for me to outwardly abstain from sin Look with me at what Jesus told the Pharisees in **Mt. 23:25-26**. I may not be as insincere as they were, but still there is a strong admonishment here, even for me, that I must always make sure that my inside matches my outside. You wouldn't think of washing the outside of your coffee cup and stopping there, would you? You wouldn't think of washing the outside of your soup bowl and stopping there, would you? Why not? Because the part that's dirty is on the inside! Without cleaning the inside, the cup and the bowl are still dirty! Just cleaning up my act on the outside, doesn't please God. Simply not murdering and not committing adultery and not stealing and not lying are not enough to please Him. He doesn't look on the outside; He looks on the inside, in my heart. He wants me not to WANT all those things, not to desire them, not to secretly covet those forbidden things. But that is a tall order, even an impossible order! That's why the law was never meant to save us; it was meant to show us what sinners we are and how much we truly need Jesus. So even as a believer:

2. I must ask God to search and cleanse my heart Look with me at those familiar verses, **Ps. 139:23-24**. That's what I need to pray, regularly! "God, here's my heart; I open it to you. I know what it's capable of. I know my flesh is capable of loving other things more than You and making idols out of them. So, show me what is in me that YOU would like to see gone and give me YOUR power to let go of it. Cleanse me! Wash me! Take these things out of my life so that I might be a pure vessel for Your service."

And you know, you don't have to be poor for God to do that. You can have a heart that pleases Him and values Him, even if He has chosen to make you rich materially. *John Pierpont Morgan was one of the most important financiers and bankers in the US at the turn of the 20th century. Twice, during the Panic of 1893 and the Panic of 1907, J. P. Morgan personally rescued our country's economy, preventing crashes like the one that occurred later in 1929 which began the Great Depression, through his powerful influence with government leaders and use of his personal assets. When he died, he left an extensive will which contained about 10,000 words and incorporated 37 different articles, all of which were necessary*

because a vast fortune had to be properly disbursed. What Morgan valued most, however, was indicated by Article I of that legal document. It read: "I commit my soul into the hands of my Savior, in full confidence that, having redeemed it and washed it with His most precious blood, He will present it faultless before the throne of my Heavenly Father; and I entreat my children to maintain and defend, at all hazard, and at any cost of personal sacrifice, the blessed doctrine of the complete atonement for sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, once offered, and through that alone." Amid all his money and possessions, covetousness never got a foothold; he remembered what was most important, His relationship with the Savior who would never leave nor forsake Him, and he was content in that. Let us learn, whether rich or poor, to be like him.

LEVITICUS

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LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Introduction

There are large portions of the Old Testament that most people don't like, usually because they're dry and boring and don't seem to have any relationship at all to life! The Book of Leviticus happens to be one of them. For the same reason, you also hear very few sermons based on Leviticus. But there is a principle that I have learned in many years of studying the Bible on a more or less full time basis: the very passages that seem on the surface to have so little life in them are usually gold mines full of truth when you make the effort to dig beneath the surface. Leviticus, for instance, tells me all about my relationship with God. The Book of Genesis tells how God created His people Israel; the Book of Exodus tells how God redeemed His people from bondage; the Book of Leviticus tells how God's redeemed people can now have a relationship with Him. Well, I've been redeemed too. I'm saved. And if I read it right, Leviticus tells me how I as a redeemed person can have a relationship with God. Let me begin with:

I. The Premise of the Book - Leviticus 19:2 *Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy.* You'll find that several times through the Book, in Ch. 11 and again in chs. 20-22. 1 Pet. 1:15-16 quotes this verse and says it applies to us as Christians too. God is a holy God. That means He is absolutely separated from sin. He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. He is of purer eyes than to look on sin and tolerate it. The cherubim before the throne constantly cry out "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty". We forget that. We are so used to being forgiven for our sins that sometimes we begin to think of God as the great Overlooker, that because He forgives our sins so easily that they are easily overlooked, that the matter of sin is not so important to Him. Listen, God is holy, absolutely pure. He dwells in unapproachable light. Nothing unholy can be tolerated in His presence. If you're going to have a relationship with Him, then you have to be holy too. The Bible declares that there is not a righteous or holy human being on earth; there is no man that does good and does not sin. So how can you have a relationship with a holy God? Somehow you must be separated from your sins. That's why you can't go to heaven in this body. This body has a sin principle dwelling in it and the corruptible cannot inherit incorruption. Flesh

and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. That's why we die and at last put off the final traces of sin before going to heaven where we are absolutely holy and without sin forever. But what about here and now? How can a human being born with a bent toward sin and with sin dwelling in his members have a relationship with a holy God? Leviticus answers that question.

The first half of the book tells me the basis on which I can approach God. It talks about my position and what it takes to maintain that position. My ability to approach God and belong to God at all is based on two things. First, I have a once-for-all perfect sacrifice which has been offered for me in the person of Jesus Christ. And if you want to understand all of what that means, then you have to see all the aspects of it which are pictured in the 5 offerings the Israelites offered. That's why we come to the Father in Jesus' name. We come on the basis of His perfect sacrifice or we don't get to the Father at all! Second, I have a Great High Priest who is constantly in heaven to make intercession for me in the person of Jesus Christ. And you can see that as we look at the Israelite priests in chapters 8-10. You see, Christ is our way of approach to a holy God. In Him we are holy. So, the first half deals with our position before God and the second half deals with our walk with God. If we are holy people in relationship with God then we have to live each day in a holy fashion, separating ourselves from sin. And that applies to our morals, our bodies, our relationships, and a whole host of other things, in fact to every area of our lives.

Next week we'll begin a direct study through the book with Ch. 1 (not quite verse by verse or we'll be at it for a long time but in an expository fashion). Right now, I'd like to get you ready to understand the first part of the book so let's talk about:

II. The Purpose of Sacrifices - Leviticus 1:2-6 This is specifically describing the burnt offering but the process is basically the same for all the offerings. Now let's look carefully to see why on earth God ever instituted animal sacrifice anyway. Pagans have always done it. In most cases they have some vague notion that the sacrifices are actually the food of their gods. That may have been the case with the nations round about but it was not the case with Israel and with our God. They had 3 major purposes:

1. they restored fellowship (4:20) When the sacrifice was complete, an atonement had been made for sins and the worshipper was forgiven by God. Now think carefully. Israel was already a redeemed people, a people who had the position of being chosen by God as His people. They did not offer sacrifices to get into that position. God in His sovereign love and mercy chose them as His own. All any individual Israelite had to do was to trust in his heart in Jehovah, the God of His fathers. Sacrifices were offered by people who were already trusting in God but who had sinned and needed restoration of fellowship with a holy God. Isn't that the position we have? We are saved through simply trusting in Christ. We are declared holy and made children of God. But then we still sin and when we do it breaks our fellowship (not our position) with God. And 1 Jn. 1:9 tells us that we need to come and confess our sins as believers and God will forgive us. That's what the Israelite worshipper was doing. He had to bring a sacrifice to accomplish it along with his confession. We don't, because our Sacrifice is already made once for all on the cross. But we can look at his sacrifice and see that it is only on the basis of Jesus Christ that we as believers can be restored to fellowship when we sin!

2. they demonstrated substitution Key is the phrase in vs. 4 "on his behalf" or in his place. Simply put, the animal took the place of the worshipper. The man was to put his hands on the animal's head. 16:21 tells us what this meant. On the Day of Atonement there was a verbal confession of sins and the laying on of hands was a symbol that the sins had been put on the animal; the animal was to take the place of the worshipper. And then the animal was killed. So, God taught them over and over each day of their lives that they couldn't pay for their own sins, that the penalty was death and it had to be taken by another for them to live and walk forgiven with Him. Look at 1 Pet. 2:24 and 2 Cor. 5:21. That's what Jesus did for us; He took our place! And it's only because He took our place on the cross that we can be forgiven and walk with God as a holy people!

3. they demonstrated identification Identification is one step beyond substitution. Identification means simply "that is me". If the animal is my substitute, then what is happening to it is in actuality happening to me and the benefit of what is happening to it is my benefit. Then notice what happens. Who kills the animal? Not the priest! It wasn't a neat little no-pain operation out of sight. The man had to kill the animal, then skin the animal and cut it up into pieces all himself! It was very plain to the worshipper that in order for me to be forgiven, I have to die for my sins or somebody has to die for me. My sin kills them. But when the substitute has died, I have died, my penalty is gone and I am therefore forgiven. When Christ died, my sins put Him on the cross. I killed Him. But when He died, I died in Him and therefore I am now forgiven and can walk with God as a holy person! Do you see how the sacrificial system was just tailor made by God to prepare the way for Christ and when John the Baptist cried "Behold the Lamb..." how it all should have fit together! But we can't stop without pointing out:

III. The Limitations of Sacrifices - Hebrews 10:1-10 It's obvious that the sacrificial system was intended by God to be a temporary thing or we'd all be bringing lambs to church today. It was only a shadow, a picture, a faint outline of the real thing that would come in Jesus Christ. So, the sacrifices commanded in Leviticus had great limitations:

1. they were not all accepted (8-9) That is a quote from Ps. 40 which makes it clear that there were many times when God was not pleased with and did not accept sacrifices. It was the heart of the worshipper which was committed to the will of God, not the sacrifice itself which mattered. In Leviticus 26:31 God clearly warned the Israelites that if they disobeyed His commands, he would take no delight in their sacrifices; they wouldn't matter. But we know our sacrifice was accepted because after the penalty was paid, God raised our Sacrifice from the dead! We have a perfect sacrifice. Our position with God is not based on our ups and downs. I can walk with God because there is a once-for-all perfect sacrifice that has already been accepted in my behalf!

2. they did not cover all sins Now I never looked at this closely before but you check it carefully. There were sacrifices for sins done in ignorance or by accident, carelessness, for ritual defilement, or minor property violations. But there was no personal sacrifice for major sins willfully committed. Compare Num. 15:30-31. Serious matters like murder or adultery carried the death penalty. No sacrifice prevented that. For other things the person was banished from Israel. For less serious transgressions that were willful and intentional, if the person became repentant he could only repent and confess his sin to God. That's why David in Ps. 51 didn't bring God a sacrifice for sin but only a broken and contrite heart. The atonement for that kind of sin had to wait till the fall until the Day of Atonement when the High Priest made atonement for the willful sins of the whole nation! Aren't you glad that Christ's sacrifice covers all your sins, great and small, willful and unintentional? And there is no waiting since your Day of Atonement is already past! Your High Priest has already been to the mercy seat and sprinkled His blood and all your sins are remembered no more.

3. they were limited in extent (1) The deal was this: just like one coupon per customer, one sin per sacrifice. That's why they had to offer them over and over and over, day after day, year after year. Forgiveness was case by case. But v. 12 tells us our Sacrifice was offered one time for all sins. Jesus didn't pay in part; He paid it all. All my sins, past, present, and future were laid on Him!

4. they had no intrinsic value (4) Here's the bottom line. It is not the blood of bulls and goats that takes away sins. Those sacrifices had no real value in themselves. The worshipper got real forgiveness, but not because that animal actually paid for his sins. Compare Rom. 3:25. Here's what God did. Christ was the true sacrifice of atonement. God left the sins committed beforehand go unpunished until the cross. He issued forgiveness based on what He knew Christ was going to accomplish at the cross. It's like buying on a credit card. For example, if I buy this suit on my card, I have the suit the same as if it was paid for on the spot but the payment is delayed until later in good faith that it will be made. So, the Old Testament worshipper had forgiveness and the animal was the symbol pointing out to you and I that payment would be made at the cross later. But, hallelujah, we are forgiven the other way! They had unlimited credit; we have an unlimited bank account! Our sacrifice has already been made and it is sufficient for our sins and not only them but also for the sins of the world! Christ's deposit at the cross was big enough to forgive any sin problem I'll ever have. I'm assured that I can walk with a holy God through Him!

You see, these Old Testament sacrifices remind me that I am not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold or good deeds or human effort. No, I am redeemed by the precious blood of a Lamb without blemish and without spot. *When a large religious service was being conducted at the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco, many people quickly became aware that the minister delivering the main address was not thoroughly orthodox. Although a gifted speaker, he began to direct most of his eloquence against the power of the blood of Christ. Ruth E. Marsden relates that when his fluent oratory ended, a timid, elderly lady stood up in the crowd and softly sang a hymn by William Cowper as a touching rebuttal to the modernist's remarks. A hush fell over the assembly as they heard those familiar words: "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." Before she could begin the second stanza, approximately a hundred people rose to join her. By the time she reached the third verse, nearly a thousand Christians all over the audience were singing that blessed song of faith. The triumphant, thrilling strains rang out loud and clear: "Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its power, till all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more." Many were deeply moved as that humble believer stood up for her Lord and with the light of Heaven upon her face gave testimony that she had found peace through the blood of His cross! [H.G.B.]*

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Burnt Offering - Ch. 1, 6:8-13

Chapters 1-5 of Leviticus are the manual for the offering of the 5 kinds of offerings the Israelites were to bring to God. If a person wanted to know what sacrifice to offer for what purpose or how to offer it, this is where to look. Chapters 6-7 include additional instructions about each type of offering for the priests. In Ch. 1 we learn about the most common kind of offering, the burnt offering.

I. The Facts About the Burnt Offering

1. it was normally voluntary (2) Note first that it is simply an offering, something voluntarily given to God. The offerings fall into two types according to Heb. 5:1. There are gifts and then there are sacrifices for sins. Sacrifices are the sin and guilt offerings of chapters 4-5. When you sinned, you were required to bring them. But the burnt offering you

brought because you wanted to. It was not required of the individual except in certain unusual circumstances. Normally it was something the person gave to God out of love and thanksgiving.

2. it was without defect (3) It had to be inspected to be sure that it had no flaws, no deformities, no sicknesses, no wounds. When the sacrifice was offered, it was, as far as humanly possible, a perfect sacrifice.

3. it was accepted in place of the worshipper (4) We looked at this last week. The worshipper could not provide what God required in himself so the offering was accepted by God in his place. What he could not provide, the perfect sacrifice provided.

4. it was completely burned (9) This is the emphasis of the burnt offering. The entire animal except for the hide was burned entirely on the altar. This was NOT true of the other 4 offerings. Some the priests ate, some the worshipper ate, some were burned outside the camp. This is the only one burned completely on the altar of sacrifice. In fact, you will see the term "whole burnt offerings" sometimes in other parts of the Old Testament. The whole offering would literally go up in smoke to God, leaving only ashes.

5. it was pleasing to God (9, 13, 17) Three times God says it is a pleasing aroma, a sweet savor. This is not said of all the types of offerings. It is acceptable to God; it is pleasing to God. It satisfies God. Really, it fulfills God's desires.

6. it was consumed by perpetual fire (6:8, 12, 13) Again three times, God points out one key thing about this offering. The fire is not to go out. The altar of offering in the Tabernacle takes its name from this offering: the altar of burnt offering. The priest was to offer a lamb as a burnt offering morning and evening every day, but the fire was never to go out; it was to be a perpetual everlasting flame. Now knowing all these facts about the burnt offering might make you a good Hebrew priest, but they will have little value for us unless we consider:

II. The Picture in the Burnt Offering What can God be telling us through this offering? The perfect animal was voluntarily offered, completely given to God, consumed in the eternal flame in the place of the worshipper and God was well pleased! Does that sound familiar? You see the picture:

1. in the offering itself is this: CHRIST WHOLLY DEVOTED TO THE FATHER'S WILL IN MY PLACE First we compare:

a. Eph. 5:2 Christ's death has two aspects: it was both a sacrifice for sins and a sweet-smelling offering to God. Yes, it was a trespass and a guilt offering that paid for my sins. But it was also a burnt offering that gave to God something I have never been able to, a perfect life willingly offered to God. We can see a little more in:

b. Heb. 10:5-7 The animals of the Old Testament weren't good enough. They were only types and shadows of what God really wanted. So God prepared a body for His Son and that Son voluntarily came to earth and there pursued one purpose and one purpose alone: "I have come to do your will, O God!" Christ was perfectly, wholly, completely devoted to the will of God. He said in Jn. 9:28-29, *I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone for I always do what pleases him.* In the garden He wrestled and struggled and sweat great drops of blood, but in the end He said, "Not my will but Thy will; Thy will be done." And Phil. 2 tells us that, *being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death --even death on a cross.* The eternal flames speak of hell, of the eternal judgment of God. And Christ was so devoted to God's will that He gave Himself to become the object of God's eternal wrath and endured it all there on the cross to please the Father. That's the picture we have in the burnt offering but now let's deepen it by looking:

2. in the animals offered. Voluntary offerings were graded. God did not require what the worshipper could not bring. A wealthy Israelite could well afford to bring a young bull from his herd but the poor man probably didn't have a herd or even a flock, yet even he could afford or catch a dove or a young pigeon. 2 Cor. 8:12 says a gift is accepted according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have. God does not expect me to give Him what I don't have but He does expect me to devote to His will all I do have! That's true whether we're talking about money or abilities or whatever! If we look at the animals, we can see what pleased God so much about His Son's devotion to His will. The worshipper could bring:

a. a young bull or ox (3) KJV *bullock*. The chief characteristic of the bull or ox is **ENDURANCE**. Prov. 14:4 says the strength of an ox produces an abundant harvest. An ox or young bull was used for plowing, for his great strength, for his great ability to endure the pressure and the pain of labor and keep going to complete the task the master required. Remember Heb. 12:2? Jesus' devotion to God's will meant enduring the cross, both its shame and its pain. The ox is willing to endure suffering for the Master. Compare Is. 52:13-15. Look what Jesus endured for following the Father's will, yet He did not quit or turn back. But how many times do I quit when the going gets tough, when God's will leads me through some difficult place?

b. a sheep or lamb (10) The chief characteristic of the young sheep or lamb is **SUBMISSION**. In Jn. 1:29 John the Baptist positively identified Jesus as God's Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. In what way was He like a

lamb? Compare Is. 53:7. A sheep doesn't bleat and complain when the master shears it. A lamb doesn't object when the owner grabs it by the neck and slits its throat as a sacrifice. I saw in a documentary on TV a goat about to be sacrificed that was calmly eating beforehand; it didn't know what was about to happen. But Christ did! And still He quietly submitted Himself to the Father's will. Yet how many times do I complain and balk and try to get out of God's will?

c. a goat (10) The symbolic meaning of the goat is harder to identify. However, over in Mt. 25:33, 41, Jesus talked about separating the sheep from the goats. The sheep were those whose sins were forgiven. The goats were those He rejected and they went into the everlasting fire. On the day of atonement, a goat became the scapegoat. The sins of the nation were symbolically laid on him and he was sent away into the wilderness. So the goat seems to picture **REJECTION**. And Jesus' devotion to the will of God meant taking the sins of the world upon Himself and being rejected by the Father. Compare Is. 53:12. He was counted the scapegoat, the bearer of sin, the transgressor. Devotion meant rejection for Him.

d. a turtle dove or pigeon (14) The chief characteristic of the dove is **INNOCENCE**. Jesus said in Mt. 10:16 we are to be harmless or innocent as doves. Doves are the symbol of innocence and purity. Compare Is. 53:9. He was innocent. He knew no sin. He had done not one thing to deserve going to the cross; even the thief beside Him said that to Him. Yet He went! His submission to God's will was so thorough that He never once fell into sin. How contrary to what I'm like! Now we obviously need to make:

III. The Application of the Burnt Offering I can see here clearly two things:

1. God's desire for my total devotion God wants me to do His will. Completely and wholeheartedly. Not just mechanically and grumbling the whole time. He wants my heart to be utterly devoted to serving and pleasing Him of my own accord. And He does not want to get to that place by command but rather by showing me His love and mercy in the hope that I will respond with full devotion. Compare Rom. 12:1. That's what God wants of me, a life wholly and utterly devoted to His will in every aspect and no matter where that might lead. Can you say "I am on this earth to do Your will, O God" and mean it? Is that what you live for? Is that what you are really devoted to? But you know, even if it is, I fall woefully short! Again and again, I just don't do it; I can't make it. Self wins too many times. I do not have an unblemished life of devotion to present to God. That's not to say I should not work at it but there's good news:

2. God's provision and my confession The Israelite knew he could not offer himself as a perfect specimen of devotion to God out of love and thanksgiving. Somebody had to pay the price for him. His burnt offering was his simple acknowledgement of the fact that he could never be enough to please God in himself, but God would be pleased in the sacrifice. So, we will never be enough in ourselves to please God but God already provided for that at the cross! The desire of His heart for me is satisfied in Jesus Christ! When He looks at me, He does not see me faltering and frail but as who I really am in Jesus Christ. And all He expects of me is what He did of the Israelite, that I freely admit that I am not perfectly devoted to Him as He wants and I praise Jesus for being my Substitute!

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Grain Offering - Ch. 2, 6:14-23

Chapter 2 of Leviticus is given to the description of the grain offering. Some translations call it the meal offering. The original KJV said "meat" offering and I always wondered about that as a kid because it was made from flour! It is unique among the offerings in that it is the only one that is not an animal sacrifice. It is simply a meal made of ground wheat or barley which was then most often cooked or baked and the result is probably what we would call an unleavened bread or a cracker, which was then offered to God on the altar. It might easily be called a bread offering. Now last time we saw that the burnt offering pictured Christ wholly devoted to the Father's will, even unto death. Here is:

I. The Picture in the Grain Offering: CHRIST PERFECTLY PLEASING TO THE FATHER IN LIFE The burnt offering emphasizes His devotion unto DEATH. The Grain Offering emphasizes His perfect life lived on earth. How do we know that? Is there anything to confirm it? Compare Jn. 6:51-58. Speaking in symbolic terms, Jesus says "I am the bread of life", the bread which gives life. If that's true, then notice that the bread of life was offered up on the altar which is a symbol for the cross. Christ was our bread offering, our grain offering. He spoke of Himself in a similar analogy when He spoke about the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies! So, Jesus deliberately chose bread as a picture of Himself and therefore this offering is a picture of Him and what we know about it is a picture of His life. We'll look into that more deeply in a moment. But first notice this:

1. no atonement - His perfect life does not SAVE us It is never said anywhere about the grain offering that it makes an atonement for sins like the other offerings do. It is simply offered to God voluntarily in thanksgiving but it in itself does not result in forgiveness. When Christ said "I am the living bread", His death was still future. It was only when He died that atonement could be made. And so please note that Jesus lived a perfect life, but we are not saved by His life on earth. We are saved by His resurrection life, not earthly life. Yet there are a lot of teachers out there who will tell you

that Jesus' earthly life is all there was to it, that that was the real value. Jesus taught us how to live; He gave us the great example. And I believe He did, but that in itself is not enough to save us. A perfect life without an atoning death brings no forgiveness. And that leads me to point out that although the grain offering could be offered by itself, it was normally offered:

2. with other offerings - it accompanies his DEATH It was offered with the animal for the fellowship or peace offering and also for the burnt offering. Num. 15:1-5 tells us that every day when the priest offered the lamb for the burnt offering, there was a grain offering, not by itself, but with it. Now notice something interesting in Jn. 6:51. Somehow this bread has flesh and blood. The bread is a symbol of Jesus' body. Sound familiar? At the Last Supper Jesus spelled out the symbolism. Bread symbolizes His body and wine symbolizes His blood. Num. 15 also tells us that with every burnt offering there was not only to be a grain or bread offering, but also a drink offering of wine poured out to the Lord. Do you know what that means? In almost every voluntary offering, you had Christ's perfect life there represented by the grain or meal, His body by the animal's body, and His blood by the wine poured out. Put another way, you had His perfect life going hand in hand with His devotedness unto death! His perfect life on earth was the necessary and perfect prelude to His atoning death on the cross! Now let's examine that perfect life a little more closely by looking at:

II. The Composition of the Grain Offering (1) The grain offering had 3 elements:

1. fine flour - the perfect BALANCE of His life Now remember in those days there were no big flour mills. Grain was ground rather coarsely between small millstones and for many people by hand with a mortar and pestle kind of thing. There was a Hebrew word for coarse flour or meal, but the word here is a special word meaning finely ground flour with no lumps or bran. To get fine flour of the type we so easily buy in the store was a lot of work and to eat it regularly was a sign of wealth. The flour God wanted to be used had to be like the animals, without defect, every grain perfectly balanced with the rest, with no rough edges or unground kernels. Have you noticed the beautifully balanced life the Lord Jesus had? His priorities were always in order; His emotions were always exercised under perfect control; His thinking was always clear, even in life-threatening circumstances. J. Vernon McGee in his commentary on Leviticus (p. 27) says he once took a class in abnormal psychology and felt that he had some symptoms of every problem they studied. So he went to see the professor and told him. The professor laughed and replied, "We all do!" Rom. 3 tells us that we all fall short of the glory of God. We are all lumpy people. We all have too much of this or too little of that. Jesus was a finely blended mixture of all the perfections of humanity.

2. oil - the HOLY SPIRIT in His Life Oil throughout the Bible is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. As you read through this chapter, you'll find it applied in two ways:

a. mixed in The oil was mixed with the fine flour to form a meal or dough. So, we find that Jesus was UNITED with the Spirit. We read in Matthew and Luke that the Holy Spirit played a role in His conception and we read in Jn. 3:34 that the Spirit was given to Him without measure or limit. Lk. 4:1 says that Jesus was full of the Spirit and led by Him. The Spirit was active in all the works Jesus did, for He accused the Pharisees of blaspheming the Holy Spirit when they said He worked by Satan's power. Heb. 9:14 says that Christ offered Himself to God on the cross through the Spirit and we are told that He was raised from the dead through the Holy Spirit. There is no question that Christ was indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit in every area of His life. And by extension, we like Him as believers are INDWELT by the same Holy Spirit.

b. spread upon In some cases the oil was not only mixed with the meal but was poured or spread on the cooked mixture. So, Jesus was not only indwelt by the Holy Spirit but ANOINTED. Compare Is. 61:1-3. The miracles that Jesus did, were a result of the Spirit's action upon Him so that He did all that He did in the power of the Holy Spirit. In like manner we are not only indwelt but EMPOWERED by the Spirit for works of service to the Lord! Our ability does not come from us. It comes from the Holy Spirit in us!

3. incense, or more properly frankincense, is a gum or resin produced by trees, an expensive imported item. It was not edible but was used for the purpose of fragrance. Note vs. 2 says that all the incense was burned on the altar; it was only put in the part that was burned, not in the whole offering. It was the burned frankincense that created the pleasing aroma of v. 2 and so it symbolizes **the PLEASINGNESS of Christ's life to God**. Of that there can be no doubt because the Father spoke from Heaven even as the Holy Spirit was descending on Him at His baptism and said "I am well pleased!" That same scene was repeated in symbol again with every grain offering, the flour being Christ, the oil the Holy Spirit, and the frankincense the voice from heaven indicating that God was pleased!

III. The Consumption of the Grain Offering This offering was consumed in 2 ways:

1. a handful was burned on the altar (2-3, 8-10) A handful of the dough or bread was taken and incense added and then burned on the altar together with the burnt offering. This pictures Christ's perfect life OFFERED TO THE FATHER upon the cross as we talked about earlier.

2. the remainder was eaten by the priests (6:18, 23) Ch. 6 makes it clear that the remainder became holy and could only be eaten by the priests unless the one who brought the offering was himself a priest, in which case it was all

burned. So, the remainder became their bread and they consumed it; it was inside them. Well, today we are all priests according to the Word; we are a Kingdom of priests and a royal priesthood. We looked earlier at John 6 about consuming Christ the Bread of Life and that is a symbolism that goes beyond just believing. Christ does actually take up residence inside us and so in the grain offering we have a picture of Christ's perfect life NOW IN US. Compare Gal. 2:20. Christ is now in me and living out His perfect life through me. It is no longer I that do the living, but Him! His life is inside me, seeking expression through my life! Now quickly let's note:

IV. The Preparation of the Grain Offering (4-7,14-16) It could be offered as plain dough or meal but was most often prepared by cooking, either by baking in an oven, frying on a griddle or cooking in a pan. Verses 14-16 say that if the grain offering was also an offering of firstfruits, that the heads of grain were to be roasted and crushed. But in every case, the heat was applied and, in some cases, the finished wafer was even crumbled or broken. Something happened to that perfect life before it was offered to the Father; it was prepared through the heat and crushed. So, we see:

1. Christ's preparation in life - Heb. 2:10, 5:8-9 This is a deep and unexplainable truth but Christ was made complete or perfect through suffering. His already perfect life was brought to its final state of proven purity through the fires of suffering and at last being broken like the bread of the Last Supper. I think there's a lesson in that:

2. our preparation through SUFFERING Paul said in Rom. 5 that suffering produces perseverance and character and genuine hope. James 1 says the same thing, that trials grow you in such a way that you are mature and complete, not lacking anything! Sometimes you wonder why God allows suffering to come into your life and why you have to put up with it. God is creating in you the perfect life of His Son and this is His way of bringing you more and more into the image of Jesus. You profit by the things you suffer!

V. The Regulations for the Grain Offering (11-13) Three additional items mentioned here, two to be always excluded, one to be always included. They form for us a final picture of what God saw in Christ that pleased Him and what He wants to see in our lives:

1. no yeast Yeast or leaven is always a symbol of sin (refer to 1 Cor. 5:8). So the grain offering was unleavened, picturing **the PURITY of Christ's life**, absolutely holy and without sin. That's the life Christ wants to produce in you, a holy life, a pure life, a life where sin is excluded. You need to cooperate with Him in that process.

2. no honey Honey is often used as a symbol because of its sweetness, but before that, it is a naturally occurring product. God never accepted things found in the wild as offerings, no game animals, flowers, etc. Only things which the Israelites had to labor and care for and depend on God to bless as He had promised could be offered. Prov. 25:27 says eating too much honey is like seeking one's own honor. I think "no honey" pictures **Christ's DEPENDENCE ON GOD**. He never sought His own honor or tried to do anything independently of the Father on His own. And that's the life God wants to produce in us, a life of total dependence where every step is taken in knowing dependence and collaboration with the Father.

3. always with salt All the offerings were to have salt included. It is called the salt of the covenant of God or the promise of God. The ancients commonly held that salt could not be destroyed by fire and so Num. 18:19 speaks of the EVERLASTING covenant of salt. So, salt pictures the **ETERNALITY of God's promise** of redemption, on which basis all the offerings were brought. It pictures the fact that the value of the offering survived the flames of the altar. So, Christ is still continuing His PERFECT LIFE in heaven and we will have our lives perfected there forever!

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Fellowship Offering - Ch. 3, 7:11-38

The third type of offering the Israelite worshipper could bring was a fellowship offering, also called a peace offering because its root is the Hebrew word *Shalom*. Like the burnt offering and the grain offering, it was a voluntary offering that was brought to God as the worshipper was moved, particularly on occasions of thanksgiving for particular blessings or the keeping of vows made to God or just out of the sheer desire to give something to God. The offering of the animal was followed by the eating of a meal where the family sat down there at the Tabernacle in the presence of God to eat, as it were, with Him. In the Middle East to eat with someone is a sign of acceptance and commitment to one another. For man to eat with God means that he has a bond of fellowship, a bond of peace, an open and free relationship with God. So now let's go to the New Testament and see:

I. The Picture in the Fellowship Offering - CHRIST THROUGH DEATH PROVIDING FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD - Col.

1:19-22 The fellowship offering assured the worshipper that he could commune with God. That was not always possible for us. Before salvation, every human being that comes into the world comes in at enmity with God and grows up an enemy of God, not that all unsaved people intentionally hate God, but they act as enemies of God by sinful behavior. Sin separates man from God. However, by Christ dying in our place and removing that barrier of sin that separated us, we are now brought into a different state. We are reconciled to God. We now have a nature that is capable of and craves fellowship and communion with God. Christ was our peace offering who by shedding His blood procured that for us and so

1 Jn. 1:3 says, *...our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ*. We hardly recognize what a privilege that is. To most of the world, if they have any kind of belief in a god, he is someone up there, separate, unapproachable, somebody you have to placate and manipulate and somehow convince to let you into heaven, not somebody you sit down to eat dinner with as a close intimate friend! Now in Lev. 3 we have:

II. The Description of the Fellowship Offering - Ch. 3 You could outline the chapter by mentioning:

1. the animals of the fellowship offering

a. cattle (1-5)

b. sheep (6-11)

c. goats (12-17)

Each section is basically the same, no matter what animal was offered. Just like the burnt offering, the worshipper brings the animal and kills it and skins it and cuts it up. The priest sprinkles the blood on the altar and places the portion to be burned on the fire. But notice:

2. the distinctions of the fellowship offering There are 2 things remarkably different about this offering:

a. the flesh is eaten (3-4) A careful description is given of where to find the fat on each type of animal and all the fat is burned. What happens to the carcass? We're not told here but it is not burned; it is eaten. The message is: **SACRIFICE PROVIDES FELLOWSHIP**. The emphasis of this offering is not the offering itself but the meal that follows. Yet this meal was not cheap; it required the death of a victim. Jesus Christ gave His very life to provide for us fellowship with God and apart from that we would have none. Then the second distinction is that the animal could be:

b. male or female (1) The burnt offering is always a male without defect. The One who died for us was a male, Christ. But here the animal seems to symbolize the type of worshipper who can come, who can have fellowship. The whole family sat down to have the meal after this sacrifice, male and female alike. It seems to be a symbol of the fact that **FELLOWSHIP IS FOR ALL**. Compare Gal. 3:28. There are no longer distinctions in who God will allow to fellowship with Him. We are all one in Christ and distinctions of male/female, rich/poor, bond/free don't matter. Our fellowship is by the shed blood, not by virtue of our position! Now let's go over to Ch. 7 and discover:

III. The Meaning of the Fellowship Offering - Ch. 7 Here you find the details of the offering of the fellowship or peace offering:

1. the FACT of fellowship: the bread (11-14) The fellowship offering was not usually offered by itself. It was accompanied by a grain or bread offering as we discussed last week. But it forms a unique and beautiful picture for us. The bread offering was of 2 kinds:

a. unleavened (11-12) First there was a regular grain offering with parts of it prepared every way you could prepare a grain offering, raw dough, cakes, and wafers, but all without yeast. We saw last week that this symbolized **CHRIST'S PERFECT LIFE**. It was burned on the altar and eaten by the priest. This part the worshipper never touched; it was given to God. But along with it came bread that was:

b. leavened (13) Loaves of regular leavened bread were also brought. No part of them was burned on the altar, but a portion was given to the priest and no doubt the rest became part of the meal eaten by the worshippers. Leavened bread symbolizes **OUR IMPERFECT LIFE**, a life that is not perfect but fraught with sin. Yet look, it is **UNITED WITH HIS** in this offering! The perfect and the imperfect are able to be along with one another, to have fellowship with one another. Because the blood is shed, the leavened bread can be dedicated to God and accepted by Him as part of the offering. That is the fact of this offering: a HOLY GOD communes with SINFUL MAN because of Jesus Christ! We have fellowship with God! But now see:

2. the CONDITIONS of fellowship: the meal they ate The animal was divided into 2 portions:

a. the priest's portion (28-34) The priest got to keep the breast of the animal and the right thigh, i.e., hindquarter, as his portion to eat. These portions were first waved before the Lord and so symbolically presented to Him. What you have to remember is that a priest is one who goes between man and God. Sometimes he goes to God to act in man's place; other times he goes to man act in God's place. In the grain offering the priest represented the man, eating the grain offering in his place. Here the priest represents God. What was waved to God, he ate, so he was symbolic of God eating and what did the worshipper give him? Let me ask: what part of the chicken do you like best? The breast and right thigh were the best part of the animal. So, the worshipper could not approach God for communion without offering Him the best portion. The meaning is obvious: **OFFERING OUR BEST** as we approach God. Even though Christ has died, you still can't approach God in true fellowship unless you're giving Him your best. You can't be putting Him off on the periphery of your life somewhere and flipping Him some leftovers of your life and expect Him to commune with you. It won't work. Some folks give God a dollar if they have one left, an hour to come to church if they have nothing else to do, 10 minutes to read or pray if there are no other activities. Notice that God got His portion **FIRST** and it was the **BEST** the person had. It's like being married and giving your spouse

no time and no attention and no help and expecting him/her to really be close to you when you want it: it doesn't work that way! Now let's look at:

b. the person's portion (15-27) The worshipper ate the remainder of the carcass and the bread together with his family as a meal. And there were careful regulations even about that. First was:

(1) the time for eating it (15-18) If it was brought for one purpose, it had to be all eaten the same day (that was hard if it was an ox!). If brought for another, it might be eaten on the second day as well but in no case, was it to be eaten the 3rd day; If it was the whole offering was unacceptable. Why is that? Well, the first answer is because God said so! I'm sure the Old Testament worshippers never got to know why; they just had to obey by faith. But does the third day ring a bell for you? This sacrifice is supposed to be a picture of Christ and Christ is no longer dead; on the 3rd day He rose. To continue longer was to ruin the entire symbolism and to essentially presume that this is just another meal where you can keep and eat the leftovers. And this reminds us there can be **NO PRESUMPTION** as we approach God. You can't just fellowship with Him as though it were anytime and anywhere you want to, whenever you get good and ready as though it depends on you. You come in the Name of Jesus Christ. It is not a light thing. It's not something you do as a routine like all the other things in life. It cost a great deal to bring you into fellowship. Always count it a great privilege and never presume upon it!

(2) the conditions for eating it (19-21) There really was only one: the meat and the worshipper had to be clean, free from defilement picked up along the way and not dealt with. And that reminds us there can be **NO UNCLEANNES** as we approach God. You can't have known sins in your life that you've picked up along the way and never dealt with if you want to have real communion with God. You have to apply 1 Jn. 1:9 regularly to maintain close fellowship. And lastly:

(3) the prohibitions for eating it (22-27) There are 2 major prohibitions that apply to this offering and to the Israelite diet in general:

- **NO FAT (23)** They were never to eat fat. Why not? First of all, God knew it was unhealthy! But actually, you have to realize that our culture says fat is bad. In their culture fatness was a sign of blessing! They talked about the "fat of the land" meaning the best of the land. A fattened animal was the best animal. A person with a few extra pounds was a blessed person who had an abundance to eat instead of poverty. The fat was a symbol of blessing and it belonged to God. To eat it was to take the credit for what God had done for yourself. So, you see in this that **God is the source of BLESSING**. If you're going to be in fellowship with God, you have to recognize Him as the source of every blessing you have and acknowledge that all the credit goes to Him! Likewise:

- **NO BLOOD (26)** Scripture makes it clear that blood is a symbol for the life of the person or animal. The life of the flesh is in the blood and that life had to be poured out to God who gave it. To eat blood is to take the credit for life for yourself. So, you see in this that **God is the source of LIFE**. If you're going to be in fellowship with God, you have to recognize Him as your very life, the one in whom you live and move and have your being. In short, you have to come to God in dependence on Him. God does not have fellowship with independents, people who think or act like they are running their own show in life.

You know, we have a neat reminder of the fellowship offering that Christ has given us. It is the Lord's Supper. We eat the bread, the symbol of His body. And we drink the cup, the symbol of His life, something an Israelite could never do, showing that His life is in us. Just as they had to be clean to eat this, so Paul reminds us we must be clean to eat the Lord's Supper. But the bigger picture in it is this, we eat with God! Through Jesus Christ, we are sitting at His table, in fellowship with Him. What a privilege it is to walk with God!

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Sin Offering 4:1-5:13, 6:24-30

I told you before that the five offerings of the Hebrew people were of two types according to Hebrews. The 3 we've studied previously were all gifts, things brought to God by the worshipper on his own initiative. The other 2 are sacrifices for sins or, more exactly, ON ACCOUNT OF sins. The sin offering and the guilt offering were not optional but mandatory. When a person sinned, that sin caused an offering to be brought to effect atonement and forgiveness. Now different ways have been put forth of distinguishing the sin offering from the trespass offering. I myself have made some simplistic distinctions in the past that have a hard time fitting the text. But in studying closer you find:

I. The Purpose of the Sin Offering

1. explained: (4:1-2) The sin offering is only offered for "unintentional sins". The word *unintentional* seems to have a fairly specific meaning in Hebrew. It could simply mean doing something you didn't know was wrong at the time like breaking the speed limit because you missed seeing the sign. But it's more than that. It could mean doing something without intent or by accident such as your axe head flying off and killing your neighbor. But the best distinction is made in Num. 15:27-30. Unintentional is the opposite of defiant in v. 30. A defiant sin is where you set out deliberately to

break the law of God. You say "I'm going to steal, to kill, to commit adultery, etc." Please remember there was no sacrifice for that! You couldn't decide to sin and then decide to go and offer something to get forgiveness. If you broke most of the 10 commandments it was a capital offense; your penalty was death so there was no need to think about what sacrifice to bring! If the offense wasn't capital and you were sorry for it, the atonement had to wait until the fall, until the day of Atonement when forgiveness came once for all the year. That's what Christ did once and for all on the cross. He paid for our defiant sins, our deliberate sins, took our death penalty for us. But that is not the picture in the sin offering. In the Sin Offering we see **CHRIST BY HIS DEATH MAKING ATONEMENT FOR OUR NON-DEFIANT SINS**. Now if you'll permit me the comparison, the Israelite worshipper was very much like us. He was already in a relationship with God. His defiant sins were covered along with the whole nation once and for all on the day of Atonement. But there were still those non-defiant sins that crept in daily for which he had to ask forgiveness by bringing a sacrifice. So, we are saved people, already in a relationship with God. Our sins were paid for once for all at the cross but there are still those sins that creep in because of our humanity and for them we need to come and ask forgiveness. You can see the kind of sins we're talking about:

2. illustrated: (5:1-6) Here God mentions 3 of them specifically:

a. failure to testify (1) Suppose you see a robbery but instead of staying on the scene and rendering information when the police arrive, you're scared to get involved, you don't know what to do. So, you leave. You didn't set out to defy God and break his law. But on the other hand, you don't feel right about it either. At the time it looked OK but now you realize it was wrong. That's the kind of sin we're talking about.

b. failure to purify yourself (2-3) God had given very strict cleanness laws. Maybe you would touch a person with leprosy or who was otherwise unclean but you didn't know he was and then you find out. Or maybe somebody dies and you have to touch them. So, you acquire uncleanness. Normally you would wash and be unclean until evening. But maybe you don't. You forget to purify yourself or something comes up. Again, you haven't set out to defy God but it was wrong by neglect.

c. failure to keep an oath (4) You say something you don't really think about, don't really mean. But you make a promise, take an oath on it. But then it slips your mind or is just not going to work out and you don't keep it. You didn't set out to dishonor God but it turns out that way and it's wrong. I don't suppose you commit any sins like these, do you? I would say most of the sins you and I commit fall into this category, sins that we didn't start out high-handedly to commit but fear gripped us or we forgot or we spoke out of line. The sin offering says to us that those are sins too and they require a sacrifice! Somebody has to die to make atonement for them. Jesus died for these as well as the big sins, the defiant, willful sins! Sin is sin to God and just because it is not high-handed does not mean it is not sin! So, the worshipper had to come and ask forgiveness and so do you. But he had to bring an offering.

II. The Presentation of the Sin Offering This section is most easily outlined in terms of:

1. the animals required Depending on who had committed the sin, a different kind of animal was required as a sin offering.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| a. for a priest: a young bull | 4:3-12 |
| b. for the congregation: a young bull | 4:13-21 |
| c. for a leader: a male goat | 4:22-27 |
| d. for an individual | |
| (1) a female goat or lamb | 4:28-35 |
| (2) two birds | 5:7-10 |
| (3) fine flour | 5:11-13 |

There are two things I want you to notice. First, the sacrifices decrease in value down the list. A bull was much more costly than a male goat, than a female goat, than birds, etc. Second, notice that the difference between the cases is not in the sin committed but in the person's ability to bring a sacrifice. There are accommodations made for the poorest of the people.

2. the lessons illustrated

a. leadership increases the price of sin (4:3a) If the high priest sins, he is the one who represents all the people, the whole nation before God so he brings guilt on all the people. A tribal leader has a sacrifice that applies not only to him as an individual but he pays an additional price for being a leader. I'm reminded of the words of James 3:1, *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly!* It is one thing for an individual to sin but suppose I, a pastor, commit a sin; it affects not only me but all of you and the community. Suppose the president does! Responsibility multiplies the seriousness of even non-defiant or unintentional sins! You parents need to think about that in regard to your children, you teachers and elders and employers should too. But on the other hand:

b. repentance is expected of all, from the High Priest right down to the very poorest person who cannot even afford to buy a pigeon and can only bring a half-gallon of flour. Compare 5:7, 11. Literally it says, "if his hand does not

reach..." God keeps lowering the net until he can reach it but there is still a net. That means no one has any excuse. The poor cannot excuse his sins on the basis that he is poor and underprivileged; he has to repent. The leader cannot excuse his sins on the basis that he is a leader and leaders get leeway or special dispensation to do what others are not allowed. The sin that doth so easily beset us besets us all and God expects all of us to come the same humble way and ask forgiveness when we sin.

III. The Procedure of the Sin Offering The procedure does not differ very much at first from a burnt or fellowship offering. The worshipper brings his animal and lays his hands on it symbolizing that it is taking his place. Then he kills the animal and skins it and cuts it up. The priest burns the fat and the kidneys on the altar just as in the fellowship offering. But I told you that every offering has its distinguishing feature. The burnt offering is all burned on the altar, the fellowship offering has a meal with it for the worshipper. The chief distinction of the sin offering is what the priest did with the blood and the body of the animal. Actually, there were 2 procedures, depending on who the sacrifice was for:

1. for priest or congregation A bull would be brought and its:

a. blood sprinkled in the Holy Place (4:5-7) For the other offerings, the blood was simply poured out in the courtyard of the Tabernacle at the base of the altar of burnt offering. But here the priest takes the blood and enters the private part of the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, where only the priests can go, the Holy Place with the table on one side and the lampstand on the other and the altar of incense right in front before the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies where the ark was. There he would sprinkle the blood 7 times to signify completion and put some on the horns of the incense altar to ascend to God with the fragrant incense! This reminds us that Christ's death was: **A HEAVENLY TRANSACTION** - Heb. 9:6-9. The Tabernacle is an earthly picture of heaven. The earthly priest could not go all the way in to God's presence because Christ had not yet died. But when He died, He went all the way in! He ascended to heaven and presented Himself to the Father as our substitute and is seated in the Holy of Holies. God is satisfied! Listen, as a believer, your sins defiant and non-defiant are paid for. The heavenly transaction has been completed before God. But notice the:

b. body burned outside the camp (4:11-12) The carcass was completely burned in this case outside the camp. Well, just compare Heb. 13:11-12 This action is a symbol to show that Jesus would be crucified outside the city of Jerusalem. You see the transaction that was made in heaven was **ACCOMPLISHED ON THE CROSS!** He shed His blood on earth but the results cleared you and I of sin in heaven! You can see that again if the sin offering was:

2. for individuals In this case the:

a. blood smeared on the altar of burnt offering (4:25,30) The priest simply smeared the blood on the altar in the courtyard. This altar is a symbol for the cross. It is where the victims died and their blood was poured out. Col. 1:20 says Christ made peace by **His blood SHED ON THE CROSS**. It was **AN EARTHLY TRANSACTION**. But notice this time the:

b. body eaten by the priest (6:24-30) Do you notice the word repeated over and again? *Holy..holy..holy*. The blood shed makes the sacrifice holy and then the priest eats it and it makes him holy. The priest in this offering is a stand-in for the people; he represents them. So, the symbolism is this: the blood shed on the cross, when we receive Christ, take Him into us, **MAKES US HOLY**. Compare Heb. 10:10. By His death we are made holy, the sin is removed, we are set apart and belong to God; we are acceptable in His presence!

What sinners we are! We sin even when we don't intend to, when we don't set out to do it! It's in our nature, our very makeup as human beings. We can't get away from it. How could we ever be acceptable to a holy God? Yet Jesus went outside the camp and died on a cross and shed His blood for our sins and then went into heaven and said "There Father, it is finished; the sins are all gone; these who believe in Me are now holy! They can come into your Presence!" What a Savior we have!

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Guilt Offering - 5:14-6:7, 7:1-7

The last type of offering to be brought by the Israelites was the guilt offering or, as it is in the KJV, the trespass offering. The section describing it actually begins in the middle of Ch. 5 at v. 14 and continues through 6:7. The word *penalty* in 5:14 is literally *guilt offering*. The sin offering and the guilt offering are very similar in many respects. But the sin offering was for non-defiant sins, sins that you sort of got into without really meaning to. The guilt offering, however, is for a different kind of sin, the kind that violates somebody else's rights. People put up signs on their property that say, "NO TRESPASSING". When you go on their property, you commit a trespass; you are violating their right of ownership, particularly if you do any damage to the property. The guilt offering has to do with where I have hurt you in a way that has caused visible damage or injury to you or your property.

I. The Occasion of the Guilt Offering Three examples of sins requiring a guilt offering are listed:

1. sins against God's property (5:14-16) "the Lord's holy things" refers to things that rightfully belong to God. E.g., Josh. 7:1. God had said that everything in Jericho was His and was to be burned. Achan literally committed a trespass;

he took something that belonged to God as his own. Malachi chastises the Israelites for robbing God in tithes and offerings. So, if you failed to give God the tithe of your crops, or to give required offerings, or to give to Him something you had vowed, you were guilty and had to bring a guilt offering. I think there might be a lesson in there somewhere: when you are not giving, it is not just failure, it is sin; it is appropriating God's property for yourself, stealing from God!

2. sins against God's commands (5:17-19) God not only has the right to His property but to obedience to His commands. If a man failed to keep the Passover for instance or cultivated his land in the 7th year or didn't go up to Jerusalem for the required feasts or muzzled his ox while treading grain or broke any of the other dozens of commandments that God had given, then he was guilty and had to bring a guilt offering. He had violated God's right of sovereignty over him. Some of the sins we commit are like this. We know what God says but we don't do it, not in high-handed defiant things like murder and adultery but in things like not forgiving our neighbor, in speaking harshly, in failing to gather for worship, things where we just decide to say no to God in a small way.

3. sins against a neighbor's property (6:1-7) Basically when you take something that belongs to somebody else, whether you lose it by carelessness or deliberately appropriate it or find it and lie about it, you sin and become guilty. There are all kinds of subtle ways to take what belongs to somebody else. You can do it by not paying a bill that you've agreed to pay, by making a pirated copy of a video you rent, or by cheating on your taxes. These are all sins which bring damage or injury to someone else, either to God or your neighbor. And they require a guilt offering to make atonement. So, the picture in the guilt offering is **CHRIST BY DEATH MAKING ATONEMENT FOR OUR SINS OF INJURY**. Compare Is. 53:10. Christ was our guilt-offering. He went to the cross not only to pay for our defiant sins that were worthy of death, not only for our non-defiant sins that we sort of fall into by nature, but also for all the sins where we have injured someone and violated their rights. These things are sin too. They are not just little oversights, things everybody does now and then. They are things that are sinful before God, that Christ had to die for! Now let's look at:

II. The Procedure of the Guilt Offering - Numbers 5 This is a simple one-shot overview of the guilt offering in three stages:

1. confession of the sin (5-7a) For the sins covered by the sin offering, the worshipper might be able to say, "I'm sorry; I didn't really mean to, it just sort of happened." For these sins he had to admit "I did it; it was wrong. I have sinned against the Lord." Joshua made Achan confess his trespass and tell what he had done once he was caught. I'm reminded of 1 John 1:9. The word *confess* means to agree with God, to agree with His assessment of the situation, to agree with His viewpoint that what you've done is wrong! Without that attitude the sacrifice is not accepted and fellowship is not restored.

2. restitution of the damage (7b-10) I told you that every offering has its distinguishing feature. This is the mark of the guilt offering. A payment has to be made. The wrong has to be righted. First, there must be a full restoration of the value of what was taken or the cost of the damage done. If I drive recklessly and knock down your fence, I should pay to have it put up! But God required more than that; the sinner had to add 1/5, 20% more, on top of that, presumably to make up for the trouble it had caused the owner. If the owner was dead then restitution was made to a close relative. If there was no close relative, then it was made to the Lord by giving to the priests. But the point is that it had to be made. And then and only then came the:

3. offering of the sacrifice (8b) Lev. 7:1-7 describes it in more detail. The animal was killed and its blood sprinkled at the base of the altar just like a burnt offering. Then its fat was burned on the altar like a fellowship offering but the priest ate the carcass like a sin offering and it was most holy. Nothing new there. What stands out about this offering is that all the other sacrifices were graded. The worshipper could bring different animals according to his ability. But for the guilt offering, only one animal is acceptable (5:15), a ram from the flock. A male sheep, in perfect condition, and worth a given value (tradition says 2 shekels). This is the one animal not used for a sin offering. And of course, it pictures Christ, God's perfect Lamb, fully mature and of full value to meet the penalty required for sin. So, what can we learn from the guilt offering?

III. The Lessons from the Guilt Offering First we can learn something:

1. concerning the nature of sin (6:2)

a. it is always against God You think you're doing it to your neighbor but you are sinning against God. David said in Ps. 51:4 *against Thee, Thee only...*, though his sin was against Uriah and Bathsheba, and so on. When you hurt somebody, take advantage of somebody, do damage to somebody, you're sinning against God! Why? Because:

b. it is the violation of an agreement Israel was a covenant people. God had promised to be their God but they had promised what? To OBEY His law! *All the Lord has said...we will do!* When you come to Jesus Christ, you call Him Lord, confess Him as the LORD Jesus Christ and whether you realize it or not, that means you have made a promise to obey Him. When your mouth said *Lord...*, you entered an obligation. And when you mistreat others or break His commands in any way, you are violating that covenant. And so further:

c. it is unfaithfulness to God It's like breaking your marriage vows. In fact, right after the guilt offering, in Num. 5:12 God says, *If a man's wife has been unfaithful to him...* and it is the same Hebrew phrase as here in 6:2! The wife breaks her promise to her husband and is called unfaithful. The believer who breaks his promise of obedience is unfaithful to the Lord and betrays the Lord in just the same way! So, let's continue thinking:

2. concerning sin as against God

a. even sin in ignorance brings guilt (5:17) To be unfaithful or commit sin makes us guilty before God. And even if we don't know at the time that what we're doing to injure the other is wrong, the injury is still done and it makes us guilty before God. Now what can we do about it?

b. the removal of guilt requires a sacrifice The restitution did not remove the guilt. Going back and fixing the wrong did not remove the guilt of doing the wrong. So many people think that they can be saved by doing good things because they can kind of make up for the bad things. Well, the guilt is actually not toward the other person; it is before God almighty! Only one thing can take it away, a sacrifice!

c. all guilt requires the same sacrifice It all requires a perfect ram of full value to pay the penalty. It requires the death of Jesus Christ! The once for all, only acceptable sacrifice for our guilt before God was made on the cross by the spotless Son of God! And it is His death that pays the penalty for our sins both as an unbeliever before we are saved and as a believer after we are saved. But the big difference for us is that our sacrifice has already been made. It was made before we sinned! All that is left for us as far as our guilt before God is concerned is to come to God in confession. But there is still the other aspect:

3. concerning sin as against man If our sin has done injury to someone this offering demonstrates that:

a. confession is not enough It is not enough just to tell God you're sorry and you won't do it again. That would be awful easy, for example, to rip off something from work and then be sorry and just keep it anyway. That's no good:

b. there must be a restitution You must undo the damage you've done. And we're not living under the Old Testament law so I can't say that you must add exactly 20% or whatever. We're not bound by that. But I can say that you'd better go back and do your best to fix up the damage in such a way that your testimony for Christ is not hindered but is enhanced. A lot of times restitution is not a matter of money; it's a matter of love, of going back and making up for the hurt with kindness and love and consideration. You can make up for the wrong you've done to someone but you can never make up for the guilt of that wrong before God. But you don't have to. Jesus paid it all. "Your guilt and despair Jesus took on Him there and Calvary covered it all."

It is said that Napoleon only showed mercy once. He had conquered Prussia and was spoiling Berlin but a local prince had proved to be a traitor and was sentenced to execution in two days. His wife waited 5 hours in the street to see Napoleon and when he came out, she begged him, "I know my husband is innocent!" Saying nothing, he turned to his aide who gave him a letter and he handed it to her. As she recognized her husband's writing, she let it drop and began to cry. "Is this his writing?" Napoleon asked. She cried and he asked his aide "What other evidence do we have?" "None, sir." he replied. "Well princess, put that letter in the fire over yonder and then we shall have none!" That's how it was with us. There is no forgiveness when we claim innocence. We weren't innocent. We were guilty. But when we admit our guilt Jesus becomes our guilt offering and now there is nothing against us. We have complete pardon. "Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He, full atonement can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Priesthood - Chs. 8-10

How can you have a relationship with some great person, especially when you need forgiveness from them? What does it take? Let's set up a hypothetical situation. Suppose you stole the President's limousine. You haven't been caught yet but you become sorry and realize it was wrong and you want to now have a normalized relationship with the President. What's required? Two things. First, the crime must be dealt with. You probably return the car but that's not enough. The court must be satisfied. You must serve your time or pay the fine so that the guilt of what you've done is paid for. However, you will still probably never get within a mile of the President unless there is someone the President knows and respects who will represent you and plead your case and convince him that you're a sorry and changed person. That's how it is with us and God. We sinned against Him and now we long to know Him and have a personal relationship with God. Leviticus 1-5 told us that there had to be an offering, someone to pay the penalty of our sins for us so there is forgiveness. But chapters 8-10 tell us that more is necessary. There had to be someone to go to God on our behalf, to represent us to God, a priest, a Great High Priest to plead our case before God and usher us into that relationship. And so, as we study the Israelite priesthood in these chapters, we see CHRIST OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST PICTURED IN THE PRIESTS! What the High Priest did for the Israelite, Jesus Christ did for us. Now we're only going to highlight some things from these 3 chapters. The first thing we see is:

I. The Ordination of the High Priest - Ch. 8 The High Priest God chose was Aaron. This is the record of his ordination day, when he began his priesthood. It was nothing like the ordination services we have today. Now let's see what God has Moses do to Aaron to make him a fit high priest.

1. He must be clean (5-6) He can't have dirty feet or any speck of dirt on him. Dirt, of course symbolizes sin. The High Priest must be pure. That's why in the next chapter he has to first offer a sin offering for himself before he can offer one for the people. He can't very well represent us to God to be forgiven for sins if he himself is a sinner before God. Every human priest had that problem. but our High Priest doesn't have that problem. Compare Heb. 7:26. He is holy, blameless, pure, totally set apart from sinners in regard to any participation in their deeds! Who gets to ascend into the hill of the Lord according to Psalms? He that has clean hands and a pure heart! Jesus did. The Scripture says He knew no sin; He was perfectly qualified.

2. He must be clothed (7-9) Now they had made special garments for Aaron (so he would better symbolize Jesus). On his head they put a turban with a gold plate on it that read "Holiness unto the Lord", showing that He was holy and set apart to God. But on his body, they put an ephod, which is like a vest. And on the chest area of the ephod hung a breastplate, a little square pouch of cloth that held the Urim and Thummim, the sacred objects by which God made known His will. Now compare Ex. 28:9-12. When Aaron went into God, he symbolically carried the children of Israel with him on his shoulders! But that's not all, compare verses 17, 21, and 29. He also carried the sons of Israel on His heart in the breast piece! When Aaron was clothed, he put on the Sons of Israel, identified himself with them, took their cause and carried them with him. That's what Jesus did for us! Compare Heb. 2:14a,17-18. You can't really represent somebody's case unless you're identified with him. Jesus clothed himself with humanity so He could represent us to God and here's what that means, compare 4:14-16. Jesus is one of us. He knows and understands our weaknesses and failings and temptations. He has stood where we stand. And He's now in heaven to represent us. That should give us great confidence to come to Him with all our needs and failings!

3. He must be chosen (10, 12) Moses took the special sacred anointing oil and poured it on Aaron to consecrate him, literally to make him holy, to set him apart unto God. Anointing was a sign of chosenness. For example, Saul was anointed, David was anointed. Being High Priest was not a job you signed up for at civil service, something you aspired to be and worked your way up to. The high priest did not volunteer; he was chosen, hand-picked by God! Compare Heb. 5:1-5. Christ was the High Priest that God chose to represent us. This text quotes Ps. 2:7, God's decree "*you are my Son*". Remember, oil in the Bible always symbolizes the Holy Spirit. After Samuel anointed Saul, the Holy Spirit came upon him. Do the words *You are My Son*, ring a bell? At Jesus' baptism two things happened simultaneously, the Holy Spirit came down from heaven upon Him and the Father's voice said *This is my Son*. God was showing to all men, "This is the One, this is the One I choose to represent you to Me, this is the One to make atonement for your sins. No other can do it!" We have a chosen High Priest!

4. He must come with blood (22-23) After a standard sin offering and burnt offering, there was a special offering, a ram of ordination. It actually seems to be a type of fellowship offering but with a special act. The blood was not simply handled by Aaron. It was put ON Aaron, on his ear, his thumb, his toe. He was identified with the blood. Whenever he came before God, he came on the basis that the blood had been put upon him. Compare Heb. 9:22-26. Christ doesn't appear before God with the blood of someone else's sacrifice. He appears with the blood on Him, His own blood, His own once for all sacrifice. So, He has constant access and a continual reminder of the payment He made for us.

5. He must continue in office (33-36) He had to stay in the courtyard of the Tabernacle 7 days, the number of completion. If he left, he would die. There's a symbol in that. It symbolized his continuing, perpetual priesthood. Compare Heb. 7:23-25, 8:1. Our High Priest stayed there; He sat down in the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God. That is why He can save us to the uttermost, completely to the end. He lives forever in the presence of God to represent us. He is a perpetual priest with a sacrifice of perpetual value! That's who I want to plead my case, to go before God for me. Not a man, but Jesus Christ Himself, the only One who can really be my go-between with God. Now let's look at:

II. The Inauguration of the Priesthood - Ch. 9 Here's the record of how Aaron began his priestly work the very same day he was ordained. Three things happened:

1. the offering of the sacrifices The first thing he did was to offer sacrifices for himself, which of course Christ didn't need to do, showing that Aaron was only a man and in need of a Savior too. But then he offered a series of 4 offerings for the people and taken together they picture what Christ our High Priest did on **THE CROSS**. We've already studied them. First was:

a. the sin offering (15) which symbolizes **HIS PERFECT PAYMENT** for our sins. His infinite life was given for ours.

b. the burnt offering (16) which symbolizes **HIS PERFECT DEVOTION** to the will of the Father even unto death. That devotion we never had and can't attain, He displayed for us in dying according to the Father's will.

c. the grain offering (17) which symbolizes **HIS PERFECT LIFE** offered up to God on the cross without any imperfection or sin of any kind, something we could never be.

d. the fellowship offering (18) which symbolizes **THE PERFECT PEACE** He purchased for us with God on the cross, breaking down the barrier of sin that kept us from God so that now we have fellowship. And when Aaron the High Priest had finished his work for the people, atonement had been made and they were forgiven. So, at the Cross our High Priest made full atonement for us but that's not the end:

2. the approval of God (23-24a) The Lord then appeared to all the people in the glory-cloud, the Shekinah glory, and fire from God fell on the sacrificial altar. Aaron stepped out of the Tent in the Glory. That's what showed God's acceptance and approval of the sacrifice. It symbolizes **THE RESURRECTION**. Our High Priest stepped out of the tomb in GLORY, in a glorified resurrection body. It was that resurrection that proved for all time that our sacrifice was accepted and we are forgiven. Atonement has been made on our behalf and God has accepted it! And look at:

3. the reaction of the people (24b) It is not fear but joy, because they know God has forgiven them! Their high priest has done his work well and God has accepted it! Compare Lk. 24:52. When we understand what Christ has done for us, that He has made the eternal atonement for us, we ought to be overcome with joy! A Jew once said concerning a neighboring church that was a little noisy, "If I believed as these Christians do that my Messiah had come, I would shout it from the housetop and on every street in this city with all the enthusiasm I could muster and nobody could stop me!" If a Jew knows when to shout and be full of joy, shouldn't we when we know our High Priest has made full atonement for us!

III. The Desecration of the Priesthood - Ch. 10 A very tragic and sad thing happened on the very same day Aaron was ordained and began his work.

1. the act of disobedience (1) Aaron's two sons Nadab and Abihu took it upon themselves to burn incense in the presence of God. They had no command to do it and they took their own fire and put it in a little pot and put incense on it.

2. the act of discipline (2-3) The same fire that had consumed the sacrifice now consumed the two sons. God says in that way He was displaying His absolute holiness to all the people. It was not a frivolous or unreasonable display. God taught a serious lesson.

3. the lessons displayed Two of them:

a. Lev. 16:12-13 tells us that when the incense was brought before God, the priest was to take a handful of burning coals from the altar of sacrifice and to put the incense on them. Where'd they come from? God started that fire and Ch. 6 told us that that fire must never be let go out. Nadab and Abihu didn't use God's fire, they brought their own. They didn't come God's way, the way of the Sacrifice, the way of the Cross. They tried to please Him another way. But God demonstrated **THERE IS NO OTHER WAY!** And then:

b. Ex. 30:7-8 tells us that Aaron was to be the one who burned the incense. Maybe I'm wrong but I haven't found any reference where any of the other priests were to burn incense. See what God is saying? **THERE IS NO OTHER ONE** who can approach me, who can bring the people into My presence. Only the Rightful One, only Jesus can, John 14:6! My relationship with God is not only built on the cross, although that is the basis of it. It is built on a Living Person, God's Chosen One who is seated in the Holy of Holies in heaven just waiting for me to join Him.

R. Moffatt Gautrey tells the story of an elderly Christian who lay dying in the hospital. She was not afraid of death but looking forward to heaven. A priest, mistaking her for one of his parishioners came into her room. "Madam," he said, "I have come to grant you absolution," And she, in her simplicity, not knowing what the word meant, inquired, "What is that?" "I have come to forgive your sins," was the reply. "May I look into your hand?" she answered. Gazing for a moment at the hand of the priest, she said, "Sir, you are an imposter." "Imposter!" the surprised man exclaimed. "Yes, sir, an imposter. The Man who forgives my sin has a nail print in His palm." My relationship with God is not resting on any human act or any human intercessor. It rests solely on the Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for Me and who now lives to perpetually usher me into God's Presence.

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A Clean Body - Chs. 11-15

At Ch. 11 we move into the second major section of the book. Chapters 1-10 have been concerned with the Way to God through offerings and priests which we know point to Christ's death and His Priesthood representing us to God. That's the Way to God, the basis of my relationship with God. But chapters 11-20 talk about:

II. The Walk With God 11-20

1. personal purity 11-15

2. spiritual purity 16-17

3. moral purity 18-20

Almost everything in chapters 11-15 has to do with your body. When you hit chapter 11, the first words that really strike you are *clean* and *unclean*, and you see them over and over again in the next 5 chapters. Certain persons and things are clean or unclean. What does that mean? The term is not exactly literal. The "unclean" person did not necessarily have a "dirty" body in a literal sense. Nor did it mean that he had sinned, for instance, a mother was "unclean" after having a baby which certainly was not a sin; it was commanded by God! So, let's talk about:

I. The Principle of Personal Purity First:

1. the Old Testament Principle These chapters give us 2 factual clues as to why certain things were unclean:

a. a Holy God dwelt among the people - Lev. 15:31 God's tabernacle, His dwelling place was in the middle of the camp and later on it would be in Jerusalem in the middle of the nation. A holy God lived there; His presence was among them every day. And:

b. His presence demands personal purity - 11:44-45 Because He is holy and is among them, they have to be holy! Their bodies have to be pure in His eyes so that His holiness does not wipe them out in their uncleanness! To walk with God their bodies had to be fit for His Presence. We often use the term ceremonially clean or unclean to describe what these chapters talk about. That's theological jargon for saying that certain things were clean because God said they were and unclean because God said they were. Certain things were forbidden by God for whatever reason and doing those things or contacting those things even by accident or necessity made one's body unfit for God's presence, not because those things were sinful in themselves but because He said so.

2. the New Testament Principle - 1 Cor. 6:12-20 This is the most complete New Testament passage I know on the importance of the body. Christians could easily be accused many times of over-emphasizing the soul, but your body is very important if you're going to walk with God. Here's why:

a. a Holy God dwells in your body (19) The temple is no longer just AMONG you but IN you. The same God who dwelt in the Holy of Holies in unapproachable glory now has taken up personal residence inside your body in the person of the HOLY Spirit. It is His home, His dwelling place. But it's more than that:

b. Holy God owns your body (19b-20) It's not yours anymore. He bought it on Calvary at a great price. Accepting Christ as your Lord means turning over ownership of your body to Him. It is His home and His tool to use to serve His purpose. V. 13 says your body is for the Lord, i.e. His to do with as He pleases. You're simply the steward in charge of upkeep and maintenance and the program director in charge of carrying out instructions for its use! But it's more than that:

c. Holy God identifies with your body (15) Your body is His body so what your body does, He does! If your body commits adultery, it is in effect taking Christ's body and making Him commit adultery. If your body yells and curses, He does it. What you do, He does! That's why it's so important that your body be "clean" or pure and I'm not talking about dirt. Your body must avoid the things He forbids and do the things He commands to make you fit to walk with Him. Otherwise, you are in mutiny, stealing command of His ship, and in that case, you aren't fit for daily fellowship with Him! Now in Leviticus we have:

II. The Practices of Personal Purity First:

1. rules concerning diet - Ch. 11 God made explicit dietary regulations as to what they could and couldn't eat. If you read it, you'll discover they couldn't eat camels and coneys and pigs and eels and vultures and eagles and insects and rodents and animals that died of themselves. And you say, "Wowee, who'd want to eat them?" Well, you've got to realize that we're talking about an entirely different culture and about people who knew nothing about the existence of germs and who sometimes were very poor and had little to eat. So, it's obvious to me that God made these rules in wisdom and they have a:

a. direct value: protection against contaminated food Pigs carry trichinosis; carnivorous animals and birds are notorious germ carriers because they consume rotten food; rodents carry disease and so do insects. In a very practical sense, a wise and benevolent Father was protecting His children against something they didn't understand. Now from that we can make an:

b. application: God cares about diet We are not under the law. We do not have to forgo eating pork. But God still cares what you put into His body! Compare Rom. 14:14-18. He cares about it for two reasons. First He cares because He doesn't want His body to die young because you filled it with tar and nicotine or gluttonized it with fatty foods until it is hard for Him to use. But more importantly, because He doesn't want your eating and drinking to be a source of offense and stumbling to other people. You represent Him! And He wants people to be saved and grow, not to be lost or turned off! But there is another level of interest here. By these rules God also taught a:

c. spiritual lesson: learn to distinguish (47) Having to distinguish what they could and couldn't eat at every meal taught them that everything in life was like that. There were the things God permitted, that were fit for His presence, and the things He did not. You can't just float merrily along doing to this body whatever you will or what feels good. Everything that comes your way, you must distinguish, you must evaluate: Is this pleasing to God, fit for His presence, will it bring glory to Him? Here's a good acid test: "If Jesus were me, would He do this?" In one sense He is! He's in you and you are making Him do it! Now the next 4 chapters contain:

2. rules concerning disease and discharges - chs. 12-15 They covered things like bleeding and female type problems, both after childbirth and on a normal monthly or even a chronic basis. They cover men too with emissions and even venereal diseases may be hinted at in some of the language. They covered skin diseases which are called in the KJV leprosy but really were probably any kind of skin disease from psoriasis to cancer. People with these types of problems were unclean and were not to be touched but rather were isolated in varying degrees until the problem stopped. Now obviously these laws had a:

a. direct value: prevention of contagious disease The Israelites knew nothing about bacteria and disease transmission and the regulations here are actually very similar to what we would practice today with all our knowledge. Keep individuals who are sick or diseased or germ carriers away from others and those who have contact wash in water and wash their clothes. A loving Father was basically protecting His children against the spread of contagious diseases and infections and unsanitary conditions. For the most part, He was teaching them elementary hygiene! And from that we can make this:

b. application: God cares about health We're not under these laws but God still cares about your hygiene; he cares that you take care of your body and see that it's cared for when it's sick and that you do what you can to prevent getting sick. God may not always have you be healthy but He certainly wants you to do whatever you can to promote health. This is His body, His tool, and it doesn't work very well if you don't take proper care of it, for example, if you push it too hard or don't rest it or don't get help for it when it's sick! God cares about the health of your body. But by these rules God also taught for us some:

c. spiritual lessons:

(1) the principle of depravity (12:6-7) A mother was unclean after childbirth due to her bleeding. Now there certainly was no sin in having a child yet the strange thing is that purification required not just washing but a sacrifice, a sin offering. There is no sin committed by either mother or child but sin is here just the same! A sin offering was for sins of ignorance, sins that you just kind of fell into because you're human, sins that come of your sin nature. You see, I think this is a reminder for us that we are born in sin, born with a sin nature, that sin is a part of us from birth and is transmitted by birth and we can't escape it! Before we ever do anything, we are sinners.

(2) the principle of contamination (15:7) When clean touches unclean, which thing rubs off? What happens to a drop of mud in a bucket of clean water? A well person does not infect a sick one with wellness! Sickness is not sinful but it is always a picture or symbol of sin. Paul taught the same lesson illustrated here when he said "evil company corrupts good morals!" We need to understand that sin rubs off, that it is a corrupting influence and we must associate with sinners but we must also be ever so careful in our associations and ministry and witness that it does not rub off on us! And that naturally leads to:

(3) the principle of separation (13:45-46) The diseased person was isolated from the community. It was not his fault but it protected the community from infection. The same thing applies to us in the spiritual realm. Paul warned that the leaven had to be thrown out before the whole lump got contaminated, that the man in Corinth living in sin had to be separated from the community of believers for its own protection. Jesus taught the same in Mt. 18. Church discipline has to operate for the protection of the body!

(4) the principle of cleansing (14:4-7, 10) All diseases and discharges required some kind of sacrifice for cleansing afterward showing they are a picture of sin. But this one is especially interesting. It requires two birds; one is killed and sheds its blood while the other is dipped in the blood and released to go free. Then the person washed and could enter the camp and normal sacrifices were offered later. One bird pictures the death of Christ, the other His Resurrection. And that's what it takes to cleanse from sin. Washing was not enough. Changing our ways and sinful habits is not enough. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin! And His resurrection life seals it. When we sin and are precluded from fellowship with God, we must first come for forgiveness by way of the blood! Then we get washed and can walk with Him once again!

Are you clean? Pure? Fit for fellowship with God? Have you been treating your body as God's temple and God's property? Has sin rubbed off on you from somewhere and taken root in your life so that you're a Christian who is not walking with God? Christ has already died and risen. All that remains is for the blood to be sprinkled on your sin problem and then to wash through God's power of change.

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Day of Atonement - Chs. 16-17

Memorial Day is a day we've set aside to remember. First of all, to remember all of those who have gone before and have given their very lives to protect us. Then to remember all our departed loved ones. It's a humbling day, a day to think about the seriousness of life and freedom, and the supreme cost it took to provide that for us. Memory is important. To forget the source of our freedom is a dangerous thing. And I'd urge you parents to make sure you tell your kids what Memorial Day is all about each year. Israel too had a Memorial Day. It occurred in late September every year. It was called in the Hebrew *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Covering or the Day of Atonement. It was the most serious day in the whole year, a day of fasting and mourning, the day when the Israelites remembered their sins of the past year and when atonement was made for all their sins. Now I want you to notice 2 aspects of the Day of Atonement:

I. The Inclusiveness of the Day of Atonement This was not a personal but a national holy day. Compare 16:5-10 In addition to the regular sacrifices, on this day two special goats were brought before the Lord which together form a sin offering. The high priest cast two lots so the Lord could show which one He had chosen to be slain as an actual sacrifice to Him for sins and the other to be a scapegoat on which the sins would be carried away. Now in these two goats we have two pictures.

1. the picture in the slain goat (15-17) There really were 2 stages in the offering of this goat. First:

a. the goat was slain which pictures **JESUS DYING ON THE CROSS**. But I want you to notice why this goat was slain:

(1) for all the people All the other offerings we studied were individual. If a person sinned, he brought an individual sacrifice; if he wanted to give something to God, he brought an individual offering. It was one person, one sacrifice. But on this day, there were no individuals. This goat died for all the people, for the whole community at once. Simply put: One died for all! And that all includes everybody: priest and pauper, clean and leper, rich and poor. The one goat was for all. Isn't that just what Romans says about Jesus? *By the One man's death, the many were made righteous*. One for all. Go so loved the WORLD that He gave His ONLY Son. But notice further it was:

(2) for all the sins (21) Now if you're a quick thinker, you're thinking that if an Israelite kept up with offering sin offerings through the year, he would not have any sins left on the Day of Atonement. Well, my opinion is (and I might be wrong because I haven't seen anybody else say this) that probably the individual sacrifices provided a covering for sin (e.g., the sin offering is said to make an atonement for sin, literally a covering) until the once for all sacrifice on the Day of Atonement when the sins were actually sent away by the Final Sacrifice on the Scapegoat! If that's so then every year you have a picture of what Heb. 10 says. All the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament years could not take away sin in themselves. They just covered it until the Lamb of God came to take away the sins of the world! But notice, the normal pattern was 1 sin, 1 sacrifice. On this day it was 1 sacrifice, all sins. Big and little, intentional and accidental, ceremonial and personal, against God and against man, every sin was included. Jesus' death is the one sacrifice for all sins! Now after the goat was slain:

b. the blood was sprinkled The High Priest would then do what He could never do any other time. He would enter inside the veil to the Holy of Holies where the Ark of God was and on top of that ark was what the NIV calls the *atonement cover*, but I like the KJV term *mercy seat*! And he would sprinkle the blood of that goat in the presence of Almighty God and come out alive! Here's what we usually miss: the fact that He came out alive indicates that now man had fellowship with God, could be in His presence through the shed blood. Of course, this pictures **JESUS ENTERING HEAVEN FOR US**. Compare Heb. 9:7-8, 11-12. He entered right into God's presence in Heaven with His own blood and stayed! He sat down at the right hand of God. So, the Judgment Throne is for us a Mercy Seat and we can now boldly enter with Him any time! Now the effect of what this meant was spelled out in:

2. the picture in the scapegoat (20-22) which is obviously **JESUS TAKING AWAY OUR SINS**. There are two actions here:

a. the transfer of sins Aaron laid his hands on the goat's head and confessed the sins; after that the goat carried the sins. There was a Divine Transfer. Their iniquities were laid on the goat. Remember Is. 53:6. Our iniquities were laid on Him! We had sinned but God in His Divine reckoning transferred our sins to Christ on the cross. Then came:

b. the sending away of sins That goat was led out and released in the wilderness somewhere, far from the presence of God and the people. In later years they led the goat to a cliff about 10 miles from Jerusalem and pushed it over to its death. The symbolic meaning was that their sins were gone and would never be remembered anymore. Compare Heb. 10:17-18. We have the same privilege in reality! Our sins are forgiven and the Greek word *forgiven* means "sent away". They are no longer remembered against us by God. Think of it! Every sin of every person, all taken away by one sacrifice forever. That's what we have in Jesus Christ and that's what enables us to walk with God! That's the joyous inclusiveness of the Day but now I want you to see:

II. The Exclusiveness of the Day of Atonement This day was absolutely unique in every aspect. This atonement could be made:

1. no other time (16:29a, 2) Only on the 10th day of the 7th month. If Aaron walked into the Holy Place on any other day he would die. Fellowship with God was provided only at God's one specific time. At Calvary! Then there could be:

2. no other work (16:29-31) On this day nobody worked but the High Priest. Nobody could add to it or aid him in attaining forgiveness. Jesus did it all! And there could be:

3. no other one (16:32-33) Only the one God picked, only Aaron. Not just anybody could make atonement, only the Lord Jesus Christ! And it could be made in:

4. no other place (17:3-5) Ch. 17's regulations applied to all sacrifices but they certainly applied to the Day of Atonement as well. No Israelite could go out into a field anymore and offer a sacrifice or on a hill or under a tree. They had to come to God's place. The offering had to be made on God's chosen spot, on the Hill of Golgotha! And lastly it could be made:

5. no other way (17:11) The high priest could not come in with armloads of produce or of gold to give God. He had to come with blood because blood represents the giving of life and it is only the giving of life that can pay for sins. There is no other way.

The Day of Atonement was absolutely exclusive. It accomplished what could not be done at any other time in any other way. There was nothing else that could do what it did! That's how important this memorial day was to them and to us. Without it there is no forgiveness of sins! But before we quit, let's make application by looking at:

III. The Observation of the Day of Atonement - 23:26-30 First note:

1. the participation required The Israelite had nothing to do with the offering of the sacrifice. He probably didn't even get to see it or watch the goat led away. No Israelite participated in the sacrifice but every Israelite who wanted fellowship with God had to be doing two things on that day:

a. humbling himself The NIV says *denying*; it means on that day he fasted, gave up eating, probably put on sackcloth and ashes. It's a sign of sadness, of humbleness before God. It means recognition of my sin, remembering how I've failed God, recognizing the awful cost of my sin and how I can only come into God's presence because of His mercy in providing a way!

b. resting This day was a sabbath, a rest day, a day when no one could do any work. The meaning of that is made clear in Heb. 4:9-10. Rest is the recognition of God's work, the recognition that He's done it all and I can't add to it. And here you also have:

2. the penalty specified The person who did not acknowledge this day, who did not humble himself before God, who did not rest and recognize God's work in forgiving him, was cut off from his people. That may mean he was killed, or at the very least sent into exile. At any rate he could not walk in fellowship with God! Remember I told you last week that this whole section of the book is about the Walk with God, and that to walk with God requires personal purity, a body presented to God for His use. These chapters tell us it requires spiritual purity. If you want to walk with God then you've got to have every day the attitude they had on this one day, a heart that is humble and recognizes and confesses sin and absolutely depends only on Jesus for forgiveness. You can't walk with God and have unconfessed, harbored sins that you refuse to humble yourself about. You can't walk with God and try to impress Him with how good you are and all the wonderful things you're doing for Him. To walk with God means to come humbly in Jesus' Name and in Him to come right into the Holy of Holies and have communion with God.

Two geese about to start southward on their annual autumn migration were entreated by a frog to take him with them. When the geese expressed their willingness to do so if a means of conveyance could be devised, the frog produced a long stick and got the two geese to take it at each end, while he clung to it by his mouth in the middle. In this manner the three were making their journey successfully when they were noticed from below by some men who loudly expressed their admiration of the device and wondered who had been clever enough to discover it. The vain-glorious frog, opening his mouth to say, "It was I," lost his hold, fell to the earth, and was dashed to pieces. You see, he forgot who was carrying whom. The danger on Memorial Day is to think that we got all this just because we're nice people and that we deserve it, forgetting that somebody gave his life to give us what we have. The danger in the Christian walk is exactly the same, to forget that Jesus paid it all, a great price that we could never pay for the forgiveness of our sins and to focus on how good and great and wonderful we are. We are required to walk humbly with our God. Are you?

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A Clean Life - Chs. 18-20

Let me remind you that in Leviticus we're talking about what it takes for you to have a relationship with God. Chapters 11-20 tell us what it takes on our part if we're going to be able to walk with God. Chapters 11-15 told us it takes personal purity, a clean body presented to the Lord as His tool. Chapters 16-17 told us it takes spiritual purity, a clean soul kept that way through repentance and confession of sin. Now chapters 18-20 tell us it takes moral purity, a clean life. Now please don't get me wrong. Don't think that you are saved by living a clean life because you can't do it! You are saved by trusting in Jesus Christ alone to give you the eternal life you don't deserve, but if as a child of God, you want to walk with God, your life must be morally clean. Now just what does that mean? Well, that's what these chapters are all about. They give us God's mind about what a morally clean life is and His mind hasn't changed on morality even though our society's has:

I. The Areas of a Clean Life Ch. 18 tells us that in God's eyes, a clean life is one that is clean in three areas:

1. clean sexual behavior This chapter is very explicit and probably very repulsive to you. You may even wonder who would do these things and think surely no one does, but they do! And not just in some jungle somewhere but right here, all around you. Clean sexual behavior means:

a. no incest (18:6-18) Read 6. Basically, you are not to marry your parent or child or grandchild or sister or aunt, etc. You might say, "why mention that?" But it's all around. Just watch the news and listen to the statistics of how incestuous type things are prevalent. The church at Corinth in Paul's day had a member committing incest with his father's wife! Some time ago, I had a radio call from another state from a poor girl who now knows Christ but she said, "My husband slept with my mother and I'm trying to forgive him." And what's even more prevalent is:

b. no adultery (18:20) It's openly portrayed on TV and talked about and joked about. It's everywhere: husbands and wives having affairs, young people living together or teens and adults involved in all kinds of sexual relationships outside of marriage. God says it's wrong! Sex belongs in marriage and nowhere else. Not before, not outside of it! And it gets worse:

c. no deviant sexuality (18:22-23) You think surely nobody would get into things like vs. 23. You just talk with some folks that know the city. These things happen here! And homosexuality, regardless of how accepted it has become, is still wrong according to God; it is still a detestable act. Why does God warn about these things? Because this is what man naturally gravitates toward. And Christ gives the same advice to His church Compare 1 Cor. 6:13,18-20. You don't have to flee from things that don't tempt you; I can walk by a plate of liver and not even turn my head but not a plate of cake! These things tempt us. If you think Christians don't have problems in the area of sexual temptation just because they're saved, you're kidding yourself. I've talked to too many of them. They always want to know "Is this OK, is that OK" but God says "Flee!" Run from it. Keep your life clean so you can walk in tune with the HOLY Spirit of God who lives in you. But having a clean life also means:

2. clean social behavior (Ch. 19) Here are laws God gave His people regulating their relationships and interaction with one another. He expects:

a. financial honesty (11a, 13, 35-36) You don't steal. And that means you don't gyp somebody or con somebody into buying something and you don't hold back what belongs to somebody. In short you are to be scrupulously honest when it comes to finances. Wouldn't it be nice if you didn't have to worry about a garage cheating you on car repairs or about buying merchandise that's junk? With Christians that's how it ought to be! But there's also:

b. personal honesty (11-12,16) To walk with God your mouth has got to be as honest as your hands. You've got to tell the truth, not just when it's convenient but always. That's how God is and how He expects us to be with other people. But He also expects:

c. kindness (9-10, 14, 33) To the underprivileged and the needy who are not so fortunate as you are, to the handicapped who have special needs, to the stranger who is lonely and unfamiliar and needs help. Those issues are as fresh as today's news but they are not new. Isn't it a shame that the needy and the handicapped and the immigrant have to cry out for help for their own cause instead of us initiating kindness and compassion! But that's how God is and how He expects us to be. And beyond that there is:

d. respect (3, 32) For your own parents, for the elderly, indeed for the feelings of all others.

Now lest you think God only expected this kind of walk of the Israelites, compare Eph. 4:25-32. Did you notice what's mentioned in there: honesty, truthfulness, kindness and compassion, building others up, the very things in Lev. 19. A clean life worthy of walking with Jesus Christ is one where you love your neighbor as yourself.

3. clean religious behavior (19:26-31) All of these things are practices of the heathen religions commonly practiced by the people around the Israelites who worshipped the gods of Egypt or Baal or Ashtaroah or Molech. They practiced mutilation, sacred prostitution, contacting the dead. 20:2 talks about sacrificing children to Molech; they used to heat the idol red hot and throw the child into the fire inside! Now we don't know many folks who do those things but there is a principle or 2 to gather here. God wants:

a. no adoption of pagan practices What's the first thing Israel did when they got into the land? Adopted these things! Does it happen in the church? We've got gay churches, ordained homosexuals, ministers on every hand indicted for immorality and thousands of churches which believe and support things like evolution and abortion which is nothing more than sanitized child sacrifice! And God also wants:

b. no dabbling in the occult Every one of the things mentioned here is practiced openly in Satan worship and that is everywhere today, not just in N. Mex. or California. It is in Phila., in Abington. It is exposed on the news. Yet how many Christians want to get their fortune told or their cards read or follow their horoscope or play with Ouija boards or seances. Listen to the advice of I Cor. 10:14. Flee from idolatry. All those things are the worship of false gods. And you can't adopt them, even in small measure and walk with the True God! A clean life means that you are dedicated to the worship of God through Jesus Christ and Him alone. Now why. Why does God want this clean life of us?

II. The Reasons for a Clean Life

1. our God is a holy God (19:1-2) The Lord is a holy God. He has not set for us standards that are different than His own. In fact, the opposite is true. These standards arise out of His nature. He is absolutely pure and without fault and further:

2. we have a relationship with God (18:1-2,4) He is our God; we have a relationship with a holy God and a holy God only walks with holy people, people whose attitude and behavior matches His own. Let me illustrate: you and I still sin, do we not? But could you be best friends with a rapist or a child abuser who was continuing to do it? No way! You know why? Because there is something in you that is utterly repulsed by that (it's even in people that don't know the Lord). And marred though it may be, that's a part of the image of God showing in you. Now escalate that sense to its fullest. God is absolutely pure; He cannot walk with someone who is continually living a dirty life.

3. we have left the old life (18:3, 20:26) In Egypt where they used to live, the Israelites saw all the things in these chs. In fact, they used to do them. In Canaan where they were going, these things are the way people lived. It was so bad God had all the Canaanites exterminated. But Israel had left that old life in Egypt through trusting in the Lord and they were not to return to it in Canaan. They were set apart to the Lord and not to be like all the people around them or like they used to be. They had left that. And I recollect a verse that says if any man is in Christ, he's a new creature, the old things pass away and all things become new. You're not the person you used to be. Those things don't fit your nature. They're being done by people all around you but they don't fit you anymore; they're not who you are. To do them is to copy after people who you don't want to be!

4. it is for our good (18:5) The man who obeys them will live. That's not talking about eternal life. Ch. 20 is the penalty manual for the crimes of Ch. 18 and it says the man who doesn't dies! If the individual did them, he was either killed or cut off from Israel. If the nation refused to keep those standards, they would be kicked out of the land; the land would spue them out or spit them out. You see there is only one way to really live and that is in fellowship with God. To walk with God is to live and experience the blessings of God. To walk any other way is to die whether on the spot or slowly. Paul said to Timothy that to live the wrong way is to be already dead while you live! Cp. Rom. 6:20-23 Sin always leads to death. The people around you who are up to their necks in these things will tell you "this is living!" But it isn't; it's dying, slowly but surely! There is a way that seems right to a man but the ends thereof are the ways of death! Jesus came to give us real life, abundant life. And the walk that He has laid out for us is not just arbitrary, it makes for the best and most fruitful human life; it is for our good.

Now having said all that let me tell you a story: *A young boy asked his mother if he could help her wash the windows. She welcomed his offer and told him to begin with the one in the kitchen because it was the dirtiest. He went outside and worked diligently until he thought it was clean. Then with a dry cloth he rubbed until his arms were tired, but the pane of glass still had many smudges. Frustrated, he called his mother and asked her what was wrong. Looking at what he had done, she said with a smile, "Why, you have been spending all your time washing the glass out here. What's wrong is that the dirt is on the inside!" The boy went into the house, and soon his efforts made the window clean and sparkling.* I confess that as we study what makes a clean life, I'm convicted. Child sacrifice is no problem to avoid but I don't always show respect or compassion or hold my tongue in check, do you? In fact, the more you study the law, the more that you find you can't keep it. And you can't if you're just washing the outside, trying to change your life by your own efforts. But the dirt is on the inside; it's in our hearts. The drive toward these things is bound up inside of us. To live a clean life first of all you need Jesus Christ to give you a new heart. But beyond that you need His power to live it out through you, you need to rely on Him every moment to empower you to live a clean life. But you know what? When you do, you'll find it's possible!

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Law Of The Priests - Chs. 21-22

At Chapter 21 you come to what I consider to be the third major division of the Book of Leviticus. Chapters 1-10 explained the Way to God and we saw there how Christ's sacrifice and His Priesthood make it possible for us to have a relationship with God. Chapters 11-20 showed us the Walk with God and the kinds of purity it takes on our part if we're going to walk in fellowship with God. Chapters 21-28 will show us the Worship of God. Now worship is an interesting concept; in fact, both in Hebrew and Greek it is a dual concept. Our church once had a hymnal whose title was *WORSHIP and SERVICE Hymnal!* The one concept is to bow down and offer adoration and praise to God. The other is to yield yourself by serving. One who worships God also serves God and that's what these chapters are about, not so much about the sanctuary type of worship, but about the worship we yield to God by serving Him. Now chapters 21-22 are the Law of the Priests. It tells the priests how they were to go about serving God. But before you say "Big Deal! What does that have to do with me?", let me give you a little introduction to:

I. The Study of the Servants of God The priests were God's special servants in Israel and what God has to say to them is very important once you understand three things:

1. the priests are pictures of us - 1 Pet. 2:2-5 In the Church of Jesus Christ, there is no longer a priesthood, or, more accurately, every true believer is a priest. He can come directly and personally to God through Jesus Christ without anyone else to represent him. But the other thing this tells us is that the priests are Old Testament pictures of each one of us. If we look at them and how God wanted them to serve Him, we can see some things about how God wants us to serve Him. Notice a few points of correlation:

a. we are born spiritually into our priestly position (21:1) How did they get to be priests? Did they apply for the job and submit a resume? No, they got it by birth; they were born into the job. Every son of Aaron was a priest and so are we. 1 Pet. 5:2 speaks of us as newborn babes who grow up into spiritual priesthood. We are priests to God through our new birth, through receiving Jesus Christ. And Peter also says:

b. we offer spiritual sacrifices to God Not animal sacrifices like they did but spiritual ones. Like what? Well, Heb. 13:15 says that when you offer praise to God with your lips, it is a sacrifice of praise. Paul told the Philippians (4:18) that their money gift to him was an acceptable sacrifice to God. He wrote to the Romans (12:1) that our reasonable service or our spiritual service of worship is to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. And that is something we carry out daily as we use our body to do God's will. You see, the sacrifice that we offer to God is not just our worship but also our service. Now notice this:

c. our development affects our service and communion but not our position In 21:16-24 you'll find that some of Aaron's sons were born priests but as they grew up, they turned out to have defective development. *Read vs. 21.* One might turn out to be blind or lame or a dwarf and if so, he could not serve. Does this mean that God doesn't love the handicapped? No, the reason for it is the symbolism; only a perfect priest can approach God. Jesus was the only True Priest who could approach God for us. But the thing I want you to notice is in v. 22. This person was born a priest and defective or not he was still a priest and the evidence was that he could eat the offerings. However, he could not serve God like the others. There's a lesson in that. As we mature and develop in Christ, we serve Him as a holy priesthood. We are born spiritually as priests but some of us have defective spiritual development. Some just stop growing and become spiritual dwarves or they become blind to important truths or something hinders their walk or they grow up out of proportion and unbalanced. You know Christians like that. But they are still Christians; they are still saved. They may be disqualified from serving God or at least hindered a great deal, but they are still priests! Our development affects our ability to serve God but nothing can ever affect our position.

2. the High Priest pictures Christ (21:10) I don't need to remind you how many times Hebrews tells us Christ is our Great High Priest. The thing that strikes me here in Ch. 21 is that the standards for the High Priest were well above the standards for the regular priests. He had to basically be ceremonially perfect so that he might picture Christ our perfect High Priest. I wish we had more time to look at that but as you read on your own, just try to see Christ pictured in him.

3. the priests were spiritual leaders They were the spiritual leaders, the preachers and teachers, the clergy, the ones whom God had called from among the body of His people to special responsibilities of service. So, in that sense they also picture for us those who are leaders in the church of Jesus Christ. And as leaders, God set up standards for their behavior. Remember this: What God DESIRES of all, He DEMANDS of leaders! The point is that God does not have two standards, saying, "it's OK for regular Christians to do this but not for leaders." God desires all Christians to behave in a holy fashion. But in leaders He demands it. They cannot serve unless they meet the standards. Now what are:

II. The Standards for a Servant of God (Ch. 21) There are 3 things God demanded of the priests or they could not serve. It's interesting that you'll find the same 3 things in Titus required of those who would serve in the church as elders

or overseers. So here is a challenge for you church leaders. But these are also the 3 things God desires in anyone who wants to be used of Him. First:

1. a pure personal life (1-4, 11-12) *Read 1-2.* A servant of God must be clean. He must have a personal life that is free from the defiling influence of sin. Compare Titus 1:7-8. God wants our personal life to be blameless i.e., pure enough that no one can accuse us of being hot-tempered or drunk or greedy or irresponsible or unkind. You see, when those kinds of things creep in through contact with the world, they hinder our ability to serve God.

2. a perfect adherence to the faith (5-6, 10) As far as I can tell, shaving the head and cutting the body were customs that were practiced in the idol worship of the day, customs for mourning the dead (19:27-28). The high priest wasn't even allowed to tear his garments or neglect his grooming like other Israelites did. You see, to adopt those things was to leave the true worship of God and to accept the customs of idolatry. That was not acceptable in a servant of God. He had to have a strict adherence to the faith. Look what God wants in us. Compare Titus 1:9-11. He's not going to use us if we blow back and forth with every wind of doctrine, if in one hand we hold our Bible but in the other we're reading new age materials or flirting with weird ideas. He uses those who adhere to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

3. a proper marriage and family (7-9, 13-15) *Read 7-9.* We don't have time to get into the whole subject of divorce and remarriage and if we did, I think we'd miss the point I'm trying to make. That priest couldn't serve God unless his marriage was in order and unless his children were in order! Sound familiar? Compare Titus 1:6. You can't serve God with a messed up and improper marriage. Your prayers are hindered. Your testimony is shattered. You can try but it won't work. And you can't serve God with messed up and unruly children in the home for the same reasons. I know people who genuinely want to serve God but their families are a wreck. If you want to be used of God, these areas must be put in order first. Leaders, these things are what God demands of you if you want to be in leadership. Brethren, these things are what God desires of you if you want to be used by Him! Now let's sum up by talking about:

III. The Service of a Servant of God (Ch. 22) What must I do to serve God? Two things:

1. you must serve in a clean state (1-16) That means first:

a. you must be one born into God's family (10-16) *Read 10.* You must be born into a priestly family before you can serve as a priest or enjoy the privileges of a priest. So, you must be born as a child in God's family before you can enjoy the privilege of service. Simply put: if you're not saved, you can't serve! But for those who are saved it means:

b. you must not serve while unclean (1-9) *Read 6.* The priest who became unclean for whatever reason could not serve until he was cleansed. He could not offer sacrifices in a state of uncleanness. So, if you become unclean through sin, don't serve until you make it right. Simply put: if you're soiled, you can't serve! Exercise 1 Jn. 1:9 and make whatever amends are necessary. Be a vessel that's clean and fit for the Master's use. But there is another thing:

2. you must present an acceptable offering The priest had to be right but the offering also had to be right. It had to be:

a. an offering without defect (17-25) *Read 20.* Of course, symbolically that is true because the animal pictured Christ who was the perfect sacrifice. But what was true with their sacrifices must be true with ours also. What you do for God must be done right. When you praise and worship Him it must be sincere, not just going through the motions. When you give, it must be your best and in the right attitude. When you teach or help someone, it must be the best job you can do, not the least you can get away with! God accepts feeble service but He doesn't accept flawed service. You may not be able to do much and that's OK, but it must be your best! And finally, it must be:

b. an offering presented in obedience (26-33) *Read 28.* This section says the offering must be presented and eaten at the right time and in the right manner. In short, v. 29 says that in this, as in everything, the person must keep God's commands. Saul wanted to give God an offering so he spared the best of the animals from the Amalekites to give to God, but God wanted obedience, not sacrifice! It's not enough to offer God service. It must be service according to His will, at His direction, in obedience to His commands in your life!

A village in Greece learned that the king would pay them a visit! How honored the village officials were. They decided to hold a feast. So that every villager could offer the king something, everyone was to bring a pitcher of the finest wine and pour into a vat from which the king would be served. Behold the king arrived! The moment came for him to taste the rich wine from the vat. However, when one of the officials turned the spigot, out came water! How embarrassing! Each villager assumed that the others would pour in their best and their one pitcher of water would not make any difference! The result was dishonoring for the king. You are a servant of God. Only your best service will bring honor to the king. What kind of servant will you be?

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Law Of The Feasts - Ch. 23

This third section of the book deals with the Worship of God. Now the worship God commanded for Israel followed a pattern. There was the weekly observance of the Sabbath Day or Rest Day mentioned here in v. 3. There were some monthly celebrations of the new moon and that sort of thing which are mentioned but never seem to be commanded. Then, of course, the Israelites offered individual sacrifices whenever they had need or desire. But over top of all their worship God superimposed a master plan, a pattern of 7 feasts or festivals that were to be celebrated by the entire nation each year. 3 together in the spring, 1 at the beginning of summer, and 3 together in the fall, so that 3 times a year all of Israel would go up to one spot, to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate these feasts together. Now each of these feasts has two kinds of meaning for us. First, as you study it becomes clear that each of these feasts pictures a future historical event, so that by the time you finish all seven each year, you have displayed God's entire plan for the whole history of Israel. But secondly, each of these feasts reminds us of some aspect of our personal walk with God, both today and in the future. So, let's examine them one at a time. The religious year began in the spring around our March-April with:

1. Passover (4-5) Not much is said about it here because all the details of how to celebrate it were laid out in Ex. 12. For the Israelites it was an annual reminder of how the death angel passed over them in Egypt when God brought them out of Egyptian bondage. It reminded them of their national salvation, their redemption from slavery in Egypt. But when we come to the New Testament, we find a:

a. prophetic meaning: 1 Cor. 5:7 - THE CRUCIFIXION Christ's Sacrifice is the real Passover! The lamb is a picture of the Lamb. The blood on the door pictured the blood on the Cross. And as with Israel, that's where the history of God's work really begins. But for us it has a:

b. personal meaning: 1 Pet. 1:18-19 - our redemption The world has an empty way of life, a life of bondage, a life of slavery to sin, a life that goes nowhere and it's passed on from generation to generation. It's being lived by people all around you, but you were redeemed from it. You were bought out of that slavery, not with money, but with the precious blood of the spotless Lamb of God. The Israelite could look back and say, "But for the grace of God, I'd still be a slave" and you can look around you at every empty life enslaved to material things or drugs or sex or whatever and say, "But for the grace of God, there go I".

2. Unleavened Bread (6-8) The next day after Passover, the 15th of the month began a 7 day festival called Unleavened Bread. It was a reminder to the Israelites that when they came out of Egypt, they had no time to put yeast in their dough, so they ate unleavened bread. Really it pointed to the effect of God's Passover deliverance. But it has a:

a. prophetic meaning: 1 Cor. 5:7 - SANCTIFICATION The key feature was "no yeast" and yeast or leaven in the Bible is always a symbol for sin. Indeed, the context of this passage speaks of removing sin. So, the feast of Unleavened Bread points to the effect of the cross: Sanctification, the removal of sin. As a result of the cross, we, the church, are a new batch without yeast before God; sin has been removed. And there is an obvious:

b. personal meaning: 1 Cor. 5:8 - our holy walk Since we're a new batch, the way that we keep the feast is not to let any of the old leaven back into our lives but to fill them with a new kind of leaven, sincerity and truth and righteousness, and let those things permeate our lives. This feast says to us that we are redeemed people and we ought to act like it, like sanctified people. We ought to be progressing in holiness.

3. First fruits (9-14) The first three feasts are actually one long celebration. Passover was the 14th of the month, the first day of Unleavened Bread was a sabbath or rest day on the 15th and on the next day was the offering of the first sheaf of grain from the harvest. So, it was on the third day that the first fruits of the harvest were brought to God and waved before Him, before any new grain could be used or eaten. Obviously, there is a:

a. prophetic meaning: 1 Cor. 15:20 - THE RESURRECTION This picture is even complete to the very Day! The third day Christ rose from the dead and became the first fruits of all the dead! Before His resurrection there were no resurrections! Oh, there were resuscitations, people restored to human life only to die again, but He was the first to rise from the dead with a resurrected body. And that has for us a very:

b. personal meaning: 1 Cor. 15:23 - our resurrection The first sheaf of grain was the guarantee that the harvest was successful, that more would follow. So, Christ's resurrection guarantees our own! There is an order here. Christ went first and at His coming, we too will have glorified resurrected living bodies forever!

4. Pentecost (15-22) Now 50 days pass and it is the beginning of summer. Seven full weeks and on the next day, the 50th day there is another celebration, the feast of weeks, or as the Greeks later called it, Pentecost. There can be no mistaking its:

a. prophetic meaning: Acts 2:1 THE SPIRIT'S COMING That phrase *fully come* means far more than we realize. Through the centuries, the day of Pentecost had been celebrated but this time it was full and final and brought to com-

pletion. Exactly 50 days after the Resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit came and indwelt the disciples! But for us there is a more:

b. personal meaning: the Church It was the beginning, the very first of what Christ predicted He would build, His church. Now did you notice that now there is, not have a single sheaf of grain, but one offering composed of two loaves of bread and, not unleavened, but leavened bread. Compare 1 Cor 12:13, Eph. 3:6. Here's what the Spirit's coming did. It created a brand new body, the Church. But in doing it He took two loaves, two groups of believing people, still in earthly bodies and mingled with sin, and made them one offering, one loaf to present to God. When you think of Pentecost, think of the unity of the church. We are not divided; all one body we. I am part of a body of true believers that extends all over the world.

Then comes the long hot summer alluded to in v. 22. During this time the grain harvest continues and comes to its conclusion. Then there is the harvesting of other crops like grapes and figs and dates. It is when the Israelite is to think of the alien and the stranger. The mind is to be focused on the Gentiles. And so, we live in the great harvest age of history, the church age, a time when God is calling out from among the Gentiles a people for His name. But soon the fall will come and with it the Feast of:

5. Trumpets (23-25) Nothing much specific is said about this day except that the first day of Tishri, the 7th month (our Sept.-Oct.) was to be a day of rest and of the blowing of trumpets. We live in an age with too much technology to appreciate the symbolism, but for centuries it was the trumpet or *shofar*, the ram's horn or some metal instrument that was used to call together large groups of people and give directions. Even our cavalry used a bugler in times past. To sound the trumpets meant that it was time for the people to gather, in this case to get ready to travel once again from wherever they lived up to Jerusalem a few days later. Since the first four feasts have such specific prophetic fulfillments, this one also must have a:

a. prophetic meaning: Jer. 32:37 REGATHERING When the church age is all finished and the harvest all in, God is going to blow His great trumpet and gather all Israel back again to her land. I know there are 3 million Jews in Israel now but there are millions more still scattered all over the world. In that day it will be, as Ezekiel says, that they will soon come home! And what will trigger that mass immigration of God's people? The very thing that gives the feast of Trumpets a:

b. personal meaning: 1 Thess. 4:16 The Rapture The trumpet that calls Israel to begin assembling so God can deal with her once more is the same trumpet that calls the Church out of the world, the Trumpet at the Rapture of the Church. Listen, one day that Trumpet's going to sound and even if I'm dead and in heaven already, I'm going to be there and get my new resurrection body and join the saints of all the ages as we're gathered home to Jesus. And then what a feast we'll have! But just 10 days later came the:

6. Day of Atonement (26-32) We already studied this in Lev. 16 in great detail. It was a feast that was a fast, a day when the whole nation would mourn and sorrow over their sins. You can readily see how this event has a:

a. prophetic meaning: Zech. 12:10 THE TRIBULATION We're talking about the Tribulation Period. After the Rapture, God will take 7 years to bring Israel to her knees in repentance at last and, as a nation, at the end of that time they will at last understand and acknowledge that they pierced their own Messiah and they will receive and turn to Him *en masse* with great mourning and sorrow of heart. But here is the:

b. personal meaning: Heb. 4:9-11 our faithfulness The primary thing that Lev. 23 said about this day over and over was that it was a day of complete rest, of no work at all. We have already entered that rest as far as salvation is concerned. Our once-for-all atonement is made. But v. 11 says in another sense the fullness of that rest is still in front of us and we are to make every effort to enter into it. How? By being careful not to fall away from our faith in disobedience like Israel did! Israel fell away from the Lord through disobedience and became unfaithful and God had to set her aside for 2000 years now and He will have to deal with her severely to bring her back to Himself in the future. Until that time, she has no rest! Don't make God have to do the same with you! Be faithful so that God does not have to put you through the weeping and mourning to bring you back to Himself. And at last, you will come to the Feast of:

7. Tabernacles (33-44) Read 33-34, 39-43. Five days later the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths began and lasted 7 days. During this time the Israelites would live in little lean-tos made of branches to remember the way they lived in the wilderness when God brought them out of Egypt. But this celebration capped off and finalized the whole year and the keyword for it is in v. 40: REJOICE! The last of all the harvests had been gathered in, the barns were full and they were to take 7 days to celebrate God's goodness, all the while remembering the humble beginnings of it in the wilderness where they had nothing.

a. prophetic meaning: Zech. 14:16 THE KINGDOM This is the feast that will be celebrated in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus reigns on earth. All the nations will come up to Jerusalem to celebrate it and rejoice together in what God has done. So, this feast too will have its literal fulfillment in the Kingdom when Israel will have a full thousand years to rejoice in what God has done and remember her humble beginnings! And yet for us there is a:

b. personal meaning: Rev. 21:3-4 our final joy At the same time that Israel is entering her millennial joy on earth, we'll be entering something special too. We'll be above the earth in our New Jerusalem entering into our eternal joy. And God will wipe away all the tears of the memories of earth and we will be with Him in joy forever and ever.

Seven feasts bring the year to completion; Seven events bring the history of the world to completion. Seven feasts take Israel from deliverance to final rest; seven events take the church from the cross to the throne; seven events take me from salvation through sanctification to glorification. The plan is laid out. The only question is how I will behave along the path! God taught Israel to remember each year through celebrating these seven feasts. Jesus only gave to us one feast to celebrate but it too is a time to remember, to remember the cross, our salvation, our sanctification, our resurrection, our fellowship in one body with other believers, our Rapture, and our eternal home. The Lord's Supper hints at all these things. Let's remember them as we celebrate it together.

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Law Of The Land Chs. 24-26 (Part 1)

The Worship of the Israelites extended far beyond sacrifices and celebrations. Their service to Jehovah affected the way they treated their neighbor and the way they treated their possessions. And that's true for us also. Our faith is more than just attending church or reading our Bibles or praying. Our service to God is lived out in the way we treat others and the way we use our possessions, just as theirs was. Now in these three chapters we have the Law of the Land. Israel was God's people and He was going to place them in His land. And He gave them a law to go with that land, a set of Divine rules for them as a people to live by in that land as His servants. I want to emphasize that. These are not rules intended for every nation in every time. They are God's rules for His people Israel living under His direct control in His land of Palestine. They were never intended for the Church of Jesus Christ, but there are plenty of principles here that we can apply to our lives and our service for God. As we enter Ch. 24, we find it deals with:

I. Justice In The Land (Ch. 24) Strangely enough, its first 9 verses seem to be out of place because they talk about daily and weekly ceremonial tasks. But really, I think they are showing us:

1. the basis of justice: God's presence (1-9) Vs. 1-4 tell us that the lamps on the lampstand in the Tabernacle must be kept burning continually. The oil and the lampstand and the light are symbols for the Holy Spirit, showing us that He is constantly at work, active. The darkness hides nothing from Him. Vs. 5-9 tell us about the 12 loaves of bread that were placed each week on the table in the Holy Place in the presence of God. 12 is Israel's number and the 12 loaves represent the 12 tribes. And it says to us that God's people are continually in His presence. Wherever they may be physically, they are before Him. And that is the basis of all justice. It may be dark and nobody else sees but God sees. You are always in His presence. Nothing is hidden from the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. I have to laugh when people swear in my presence and then excuse themselves. I always say, "If you don't mind doing it in front of God, don't worry about me!" God is always watching and so we are always accountable to do justice toward our fellow men. You may think you can get by with a little grudge here or a little hateful behavior there or a little taking advantage here but God's watching! Now in the rest of the chapter you will find:

2. the principles of justice (10-23) They are introduced by a narrative incident of a half-Israelite who got into a fight and cursed the sacred Name of God. By the way, that's the problem with marrying an unsaved person. It's so easy for your kids to grow up on the wrong side of the line! Anyway, they weren't sure what to do with him, so they asked God and God said "Take him out and stone him to death." So they did in v. 23. You know, if that rule was enacted here in the USA, our population would be reduced by 2/3! Of course, we're not Israel; we're not God's nation, and it would be wrong of us to enact such a law in America, but there is a principle here of:

a. regard for the Lord (10-16) *Read 16.* An alien could live in the land and he didn't have to believe in God but he had to respect God and the use of His Name. That is the basis of all law. All concepts of justice emanate from the nature of God. How else would we know that it's wrong to kill or to steal? Those things have been universally accepted as principles of justice but they came from somewhere. Animals don't have them. They came to man from God. And when we lose respect for God in our system of government, in our laws and in our courts, we are well on the way toward anarchy! There follow three more direct principles that form the basis of proper justice anywhere:

b. capital punishment (17) For justice to be done there must be a death penalty and one that is carried out, not just pronounced. Not just because it is the only effective deterrent to the most violent crimes, but because it is morally necessary. The only true justice for the taking of life is to have life taken. We would do well to remember that. But further:

c. punishment must fit the crime (18-21) *Read 19.* This is the old *eye for an eye* passage. It has nothing to do with personal vengeance or primitive cruelty. It simply teaches that whatever punishment is handed out must be equivalent to the offense committed. Our whole legal system is built on that premise, but you can use it even in the discipline of your own children. Not that you ought to punch them when they punch the neighbor kid but you ought

to be sure that your discipline is fair, that it is proportioned to the offense. The same applies in church discipline and employer discipline and many other areas. Then there is:

d. equality before the law (22) Justice knows no favorites; it applies to all! All are equal in the eyes of God and are equally responsible for their actions. That means you treat all your kids equally. It means you treat your fellow believers with the same fairness, not being hard on one and too easy on the next. Remember these things when voting time comes around and you have to pick people to make the laws and to enforce them. But also remember them in your personal life. God is a just God and He wants those who serve Him to be just in their treatment of others! Now in Ch. 25 we'll get into some things that may be even more personally applied because it talks about:

II. Ownership In The Land (Ch. 25) This chapter puts forth two principles that are extremely clear.

1. God owns the land (1-33) *Read 23.* The land is God's. God gave it to them but not in the absolute sense. It was not theirs to do with as they pleased. They were actually tenants or stewards of the land God had given them but He remained the ultimate owner. And as the ultimate owner, God instituted some rules for the use of the land, the first one being the institution of:

a. the Sabbatical Year (1-7) *Read 4.* Every seventh year was to be a year of rest for the land just like every seventh day was a day of rest for the people. The land was to lie fallow and uncultivated for the whole year and the people were only to eat what might grow by itself. They didn't know it but that made good agricultural sense, allowing the land to replenish its nutrients. Deut. 15 tells us the Sabbath year was also a year of canceling all debts and freeing all indentured Hebrew servants, but the emphasis here is the land. Then there was:

b. the Jubilee Year (8-24) *Read 10.* Every 7th 7 of years completed a full cycle and the next year, the 50th year would be a year of release or Jubilee for the land. In that year, basically all land purchases would revert to the original owner. This is how God intended to keep the inheritances of the various tribes intact. Land could only be permanently acquired by inheritance, not by purchase. So, in effect, every purchase was a lease and the price should be valued according to the time of the Jubilee year. However, in between the Jubilee years there was always the right of:

c. the redemption of property (25-34) *Read 25.* Land was always sold with the right to buy it back. A relative could buy it back for you or, if you prospered, you could buy it back for yourself and the new owner could not refuse to sell it. Now in point of fact, I doubt whether Israel ever kept a Jubilee year one time and probably not even a Sabbath year. In fact, God says that's one of the reasons they spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon, so the land would get its rest, one year for each Sabbath year they'd missed, 490 years worth of missing! Why didn't they? compare 20-21. They were afraid to trust God. Why? They thought their well-being, their food, their material possessions depended on them and on their labor. But it doesn't; it depends on God. That's what I'd like you to apply. James 1:17 says every good and perfect gift you have is from God. Your material well-being does not depend on your hard work, though God does want you to work; it depends on God. You can earn plenty of wages and God can make it seem you're putting it into a bag with holes in it, it slips away so fast. On the other hand, you can obey God and go to the mission field, for instance, and wonder how your needs will ever be met, but you can trust God. Everything you have, your house, your car, your money, your possessions, all of it, is God's; you're just a caretaker, a steward. It came from Him and God has the right to tell you what to do with it, how to use it! In fact, you ought to ask Him! They wouldn't do what God said with His land and God took it away from them! All the things you have, God can take away from you in a moment of time if He wants to. Be a good steward! Look at your things as God's things and ask His direction in how to best use them for His glory! But God owns more than the things:

2. God owns the people (35-55) *Read 55.* The land belonged to God and the people also belonged to God. He had brought them out of Egypt and because of that, they were His! And that applied to all of them, rich and poor alike and so you have His instructions for:

a. the treatment of the poor (35-46) *Read 35.* When a fellow Israelite is in trouble, help him. If he's in debt and has a financial need, don't loan him money and charge him interest. If you're the fellow he's in debt to and he can't pay and you make him work it off instead, don't treat him like a slave but rather the way you would a hired hand, with respect and care. And then let him go when the debt is paid or in the year of Jubilee. And then there is:

b. the redemption of the poor (47-55) *Read 47-48.* If he's in debt and has already become a servant to somebody who's a non-Israelite living in the land, then buy him back! Redeem him. Pay his debt and get him out if you can. And make sure his master treats him fairly. You see, God's people belong to Him and you are not to mistreat them but rather to help them in their time of need as much as you can. Does the church have problems with this? In 1 Cor. 6:6 Christians were suing each other over property and money and debts, etc. and going to court to settle it. In James 4:1-3 there were more problems and arguments over things, over wanting things but never getting them. Why? because they wouldn't ask God but instead picked on their brother! That happens today. Christians take advantage of other Christians and it ought not to be. Now those are active things but then there is 1 Jn. 3:16-17. There are plenty of times when our brother or sister is in a crisis and has a great need. Do we just sit by and say "I'll

pray for you or I hope you'll be OK" or do we get out the checkbook and write a check or go to the store and buy the groceries and take them over? Remember 1 Cor. 6:19. Every believer is bought with a price, including you. God bought us and He owns us! And so, we ought to treat fellow-believers as God's property, in love and caring and helping as much as we can!

American poet, Edwin Markham, told about a cobbler, a godly man who made shoes. One night the cobbler dreamed that the next day Jesus was coming to visit. It seemed real and he got up early to decorate his shop for his Guest. He waited, but the shop remained quiet, except for an old man who limped up to the door asking to come in for a few minutes of warmth. While the man rested, the cobbler noticed his worn shoes and gave him a new pair. In the afternoon, an elderly woman came, and seeing her struggling earlier under a heavy load, he invited her in to rest and gave her a nourishing meal. At night, a child was heard crying outside his door, lost and afraid. He went out, soothed the child, and took the child home. When he returned, the cobbler was sad, convinced the Lord had come while he was away. Now he lived through the moment as he had imagined it: the knock, the latch lifted, the radiant face, the offered cup. He would have kissed the hands where the nails had been, washed the feet where the spikes had entered. Then the Lord would have sat and talked to him. In his anguish, the cobbler cried out, "Why is it, Lord, that Your feet delay? Have you forgotten that this was the day?" Then, soft in the silence a voice he heard: "Lift up your heart for I kept My word. Three times I came to your friendly door; Three times My shadow was on your floor. I was the man with the bruised feet; I was the woman you gave to eat; I was the child on the homeless street." When you do it to the least of these you do it unto Me. Pure religion and acceptable before God is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. That's the kind of service God wants.

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Law Of The Land - Chs. 24-26 (Part 2)

We continue today looking at this section of Leviticus which I call the Law of the Land. It deals with their behavior when they arrive in the land God had promised them, the land of Canaan. In Ch. 24 we looked at Justice in the Land, how they were to treat one another in a just fashion. Then in Ch. 25 we looked at Ownership in the Land and saw that God owned both the land and the people and they had to treat both their possessions and other people as things belonging to God. Now we come to Ch. 26 which talks about:

III. Blessing In The Land (Ch. 26) How many times do we pray for God to bless someone? All the time! But have you ever thought what that would mean or how you would know if God answered your prayer? Can you define blessing? Well, for Israel, God spelled out pretty clearly just what it would mean for Him to bless them in the land. But first you have:

1. the condition of blessing (1-3) Obedience! It's as simple as that. If they obeyed the laws and rules God had laid down for them, He would bless them. And though we are no longer under the same set of obligations nor the same set of promises, that principle remains the same for us! God blesses us (whatever that means) when we obey! A lot of people want God to bless them while they live life their own way, while they live in disobedience and ignore His requirements. But it doesn't work that way, not for Israel or for us! Now what are:

2. the promises of blessing (4-13) Just for information, this chapter is a close parallel to Deut. 28 which has an even more specific and very detailed list of blessings and curses. Lev. 26 is more of a summary and so all the blessings God promised them can be summarized in the three found here. First, He promised them:

a. provision (3-5, 9-10) I don't think we have any idea how important rain is because we get our water out of a spigot and our food out of a grocery store. To us having no rain means you can't water the lawn, but in a farming society in an arid sort of land, no rain means no food! And abundant rain means abundant crops and full barns. In short, God promised to provide well for them. Now it is at this point that I must reemphasize again that these promises are specifically for Israel and not for us! There are too many preachers walking around preaching and too many Christians walking around believing that if you obey, God will bless and prosper your business and you'll get wealth. You'll succeed; you'll climb the ladder... And that IS what God promised Israel but it is not what God promised us. Compare Phil. 4:19 God will supply all our NEEDS when we're being faithful and obedient. He will provide for our material needs. And not only that, compare vs. 13; He will also provide for all of our other needs, power, strength, endurance, all the things it takes to make it through the tough spots in life! When you're obeying, you can count on it! God will provide for all the genuine needs you have! His blessing means Provision. But it also means:

b. peace (6-8) Physical, external peace. They would beat all their enemies with ease and then have rest and security without fear of other nations. In short, God would take away all their external problems. But that's not what God has promised us. Compare Phil. 4:7. He's promised us a peace inside in our mind and heart that will keep us through every problem we have to face! If we're obedient, if we're following the way of life that He has laid down for us, then we will have the same peace and security that God has because we know that none of these things can really harm us! Oh, He promises us peace, but most importantly He promises us His:

c. Presence (11-13) He promises to have a relationship with them, to walk with them, to be among them. What a wonderful thing that is but compare Phil. 4:9. When we walk His way, God is with us too! Now we know that He continually indwells us and we are still saved, even when we disobey, but the real promise is that He will have a wonderful personal relationship with us, that we will sense His presence and know that He's working in our lives and speaking to us through His word. That's what it means to be blessed, to have a wonderful sense of walking with God every day and to be flooded with His peace about what's going on in your life and to have full confidence that He will meet every need. That's a blessed way to live. But not in most folks' book. To them blessing is to have lots of THINGS and to have all their problems go away. If that's what you want, become a Jew and wait for the Millennium because you'll never get it here! But oh, our blessing is so much greater than theirs was. They had the earthly but we have the heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus. They had earthly security but we have eternal heavenly security in Him! They had a national walk with Him, but we have a personal walk with Him! When we obey and walk with Him, we live on an entirely new plane of life. But what happens when we don't? Well, that brings us to:

3. the warnings of discipline (14-39) Here God told them exactly how He would discipline them. And you know, these verses read like a prophetic history of Israel written ahead of time. Time after time they disobeyed God and forsook Him and every one of these things befell them at one time or another. For us, it reads like a manual of discipline. If provision, peace, and presence define what blessing is, then this section defines for us what discipline is or at least what things God uses in disciplining us. NOTE THIS: Just because 1 or more of these things may be happening to you does not mean you've sinned and are being disciplined for it. If you're walking with God and get sick or have a loss, that's God's training ground in your life and He'll walk you through it. We're talking here about believers who are knowingly disobeying God and not walking with Him.

a. defeat, disease, and dread (14-17) He would let their enemies rule over them (NO PEACE), He would make them sick, and make them afraid. And what do you read just after Israel gets into her land in the book of Judges? You read how time after time she forsook God and God let oppressive nations rule over her. You read how Israelites hid themselves in rocks and caves from the fear of their enemies and threshed their grain at night so as not to be seen. And when you stop walking with God, the first thing you find is defeat. You try things but they don't work. You try to serve God but it doesn't succeed. You begin to live in dread and fear of your circumstances instead of victory because your peace is gone. 1 Cor. 11 tells us God may even allow you to get sick and have physical problems. In short, God begins to get your attention by messing up your life and making it miserable so you realize how much you need Him! Now if that doesn't work:

b. drought (18-20) Remember how much wickedness Ahab and Jezebel led Israel into in the days of Elijah? God shut up the heavens so there was no rain for 3 1/2 years. The ground got hard like iron and crops didn't grow. The brooks dried up. There was famine in the land and it didn't rain until Israel up on top of Mt. Carmel cried out, "The LORD, HE is God!" And that's what God does with us when we forsake Him; He begins to take away His provision and let us fend for ourselves. Maybe He takes away our job or makes us unable to work or lets some big expense come our way. Then comes:

c. deprivation (21-22) God would begin to take away things: their cattle, their children, things they held dear. He would deprive them of things dear to them. That happened in the days of Shamgar, the third judge of Israel before Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites. The roads were deserted and normal village life ceased. Travelers snuck through winding paths out of fear. So, God may begin to deprive us of the things we care about, begin to take them away to show us that we should care about Him more. Then comes:

d. devastation (23-26) Now it would not just be enemies ruling over them but enemies out to kill them and they would be forced to withdraw inside walled cities and be besieged and then impoverished as provisions ran out. God would back them into a corner so there was no other way to look but up! That's what God did with Jonah and that's what He'll do with us if He has to, back us into a set of circumstances where He is our only hope. And if that doesn't work:

e. degradation and destruction (27-31) In the siege of Samaria the famine was so great that women boiled and ate their own children! In the siege of Jerusalem, they did the same until the Babylonians broke through the wall and slew heaps of people and destroyed the people. God can let you get reduced pretty low when you backslide; He can let you degrade yourself with immorality, drugs, or alcohol, with low things. Then for Israel there was one final step:

f. dispersion (32-39) Read 33, 38-39. This ultimate discipline was fulfilled twice. First, God sent Israel to Babylon for 70 years to see if they would learn their lesson. But they didn't. They rejected His Son and so through the Romans in 70 AD God crushed the city and scattered the Jews to the winds. And they have remained in this diaspora, this dispersion nearly 2000 years. The final discipline for not behaving in the land was to be taken out of the land. And John says there is a sin unto death for believers. At the last, if we persist in backsliding, God can take us out of the world to prevent us from dishonoring His name any further.

Oh, isn't it better to be in the place of blessing than the place of discipline, to obey and to know peace and provision and His Presence than to forsake Him and know His discipline? But what if you have strayed away? What if you're backslidden and under His discipline right now? What can you do? Well, along with His discipline comes:

4. the process of repentance (40-46) God made a way back to the place of blessing. And no matter how far down the ladder of discipline you've gone, there are some rungs to climb back up. The first is:

a. confession of sins (40-41a) This is 1 John 1:9 spelled out in the Old Testament. God wants us simply to wake up and admit what we have done, how we have rebelled against Him. And it must be done in:

b. humility of heart (41b) It's pride that leads us into sin, thinking I can do what I jolly well want even though I belong to God. But it's humility that is the route to restoration, sorrow for what you've done, realization of how wrong it is. That's what God wants to see. Now there still may be some:

c. suffering of consequences (41b, 43) Don't think that just because you humble yourself and confess sin that all your problems brought on by discipline will vanish instantly! You may still have some things that God knows you need to go through because of what you've done. But eventually there is:

d. restoration of blessing (42, 44-45) Israel, no matter what they'd done, was still Israel and God's covenant with them still stood. He could not help but honor it. The door back to blessing was always open. So it is for us. No matter what we've done as His children, we're still His children and He can't forget that and so the door back to blessing, to peace and provision and His Presence, is always waiting and available to us.

A tourist in Scotland was driving along and saw a flock of sheep in a field. But one sheep was far away from the flock, limping along with a broken leg, bleating and crying. The tourist stopped and the shepherd came over. She asked what had happened to the lone sheep. With tears in his eyes the shepherd said "I had to break its leg. It always kept wandering away from the flock and I could not keep chasing it all the time. I find that when a sheep's leg is broken and I care for it and nurse it back to health, it always comes when I call." The sheep could either follow and be blessed or get its leg broken so it would be blessed later. Blessing as we've used it is not something that God arbitrarily chooses to give. It is something we determine. God stands ready with all the peace, provision, and Presence we need. Whether we get it or not is up to us. But I'll tell you one thing: it's a whole lot easier to follow and be blessed than to try the other route.

LEVITICUS: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Law Of Giving - Ch. 27

We're going to close our study of the Book of Leviticus the way the Lord closes it with a message on the subject of giving. This last section of the book has dealt with the Worship of God. We studied Israel's celebrations of worship, the feasts. We studied that worship is in the daily service you do for God; the way you live is a part of worship. And Ch. 27 stands here to tell us that giving is worship. I say that practically every Sunday at offering time but I don't know whether we fully grasp it. Let me ask: when you put that envelope or that money in the offering, do you stop and think, "I am giving this to God?" You ought to because that's what you're doing. In the same way that the Israelite brought an animal to the Tabernacle or the tithe of his crops to give to the Levites and that was worshipping God, so when you give out of your paycheck to the church or to missionaries, you are worshipping God! Now, the first 2/3 of the chapter talks about:

I. Things That You Can Dedicate To God (1-25) It speaks about vows that a person might make to voluntarily dedicate something to God, not because they had to or it was commanded, but when their heart moved them. Maybe God had blessed them in a special way (e.g., with an unexpected gift or a particularly good crop) and their heart was moved to voluntarily give something or dedicate it to God. Or perhaps there was concern; maybe they faced a problem or a difficulty and they wanted to be sure God knew how much they were depending on Him and so they would dedicate something to God, give it to Him. Aren't there times like that in your life, times when you are just moved to give to God? Maybe He touches your heart with the particular need of a visiting missionary. Maybe you get an unexpected blessing and your heart is moved to give part of it. Or maybe you're struggling and you want God to know you trust Him and so you promise to give to Him, not out of compulsion but because your heart loves God and you want to worship Him. Well, what can you dedicate to God? Almost anything but three things are mentioned here:

1. persons (1-8) The person could dedicate himself, a spouse, a child, or a servant to the Lord. Now I guess there was sometimes the option to actually take them to the Tabernacle and give them up to the Lord's service like Hannah did with her little boy Samuel, remember? But there was a problem with that: after while there would be hundreds of people all serving at the Tabernacle and needing to be cared for and fed. So instead of actually giving the person themselves, God established a system of equivalent values so that the person who genuinely wanted to worship God by dedicating themselves or someone to the Lord could do so by giving the equivalent value of their service in money. Now the thing that grabbed me was how expensive this was. A shekel was 2/5 of an ounce of silver and nobody really knows how much buying power that had in Moses' day. But later on, the shekel became an actual coin which was approximately a day's wages. So, at the equivalent of about \$75/day that made a man in his prime worth almost \$4000 and even a ba-

by worth almost \$400. Be honest. If we charged \$400 to dedicate your children, how many of you would do it? Even if the rate was totally different, my point is that this was a serious thing. To dedicate a person usually meant laying out thousands of dollars. A person was of great value to God! But why the different values for different ages and sexes? I think you'll find here a:

a. principle: God values ability It seems to me God set the value by the amount of manual work they'd be able to do, infants, young people, and older people being able to do less than persons in the prime of adulthood. Now please don't think that if you can't do much, God doesn't love you as much or can't use you. But the lesson here is that your ability to serve has great value to God. A baby may be very precious to God but he can't do much to win the lost world. The prime years of your life, when you have the most capacity to serve are of great importance; it is important that you serve God during that time even though you continue at all times! Now let's make an:

b. application: God wants you What's the difference in the Old Testament between a person just deciding to give God \$4000 as a gift or dedicating themselves to God and paying \$4000. The point is in 2 Cor. 8:5. God doesn't just want your money; He wants you! He wants you dedicated to serving Him and then that will affect your giving. Are you dedicated to serve God however He leads, to do His will and be His servant every day? That's real worship! And have you dedicated your family the same way (I don't just mean in public but in your heart and mind!)? It's a serious thing!

2. possessions (9-13) In those days people's chief possessions were animals, not cars and computers and stereos. Wealth was most often measured in camels and cows. A clean animal, a sheep, goat, or bull could be given to God by devoting it as a sacrifice. An unclean animal like a camel or a pig obviously could not be sacrificed so it could be given to the priests or sold and the money put into the Tabernacle treasury. But the point to me is that you can dedicate your possessions to God. I guess you could do that outright by selling your favorite chair and putting the money in the plate. People have done that as God led and a special need was at hand. Or they have given their possessions to others with a need in Jesus' name. But I'm thinking even along the lines of dedicating to God the possessions you don't sell or give away. Telling Him "God this is your car; I'll use it as you tell me" and then being ready to give others a lift or telling Him "God this is your kitchen and your food" and being ready to feed somebody who needs it. But I don't want to miss here a:

a. principle: God counts what is vowed as His If you changed your mind, you couldn't take your animal back or swap it for another. What you promised to God He already counted as being His. If you tell God something is His, He takes you at your word so here's an:

b. application: don't promise and not give In Acts 5:4 you have the story of Ananias and Sapphira who sold a possession and pretended to give the whole of the proceeds to the Lord but they lied about the price so they could keep part of it back. Peter says "It was yours, nobody made you give it, even after you sold it nobody made you give it all but once you promised it all and then lied about it, you've lied to God!" God doesn't force you to give anything to Him. But don't promise God you're going to give and then not do it. Don't promise Him you'll use your car or your kitchen for Him and then not do it! God counts it His! Then you could dedicate:

3. property (14-25) Vs. 14-15 talk about giving God a house in a town. Vs. 16-25 talk about dedicating to Him a piece of property, a field from the inheritance of your fathers. Sure, you might donate property to the church or to a mission. But I wonder whether you've thought about dedicating your house to the Lord while you still live in it, telling Him it's His house and using it to win neighbors and to shelter those with a need. Now the problem with donating property is the same as with dedicating people. The priests would end up owning all the land. So, God set up a system of equivalent value where you continued to live on the land but you gave to the Lord a money value instead. Then in the Jubilee year when all land reverted to its original owner, it would become the priests' or if a redemption price was paid it would be kept by the owner. Now that money value thing is interesting and you can find in it a:

a. principle: time limits usability The dedication price was figured on the number of years remaining until the Jubilee when it would be released. For every year that passed the value to God was less. Time limits usability. That is true of your life. It is true of your possessions. The less time God has to use it, the less value it has to Him and His purposes. So, let's make an:

b. application: the importance of now Now is the time to give whatever you're going to give to God, whether yourself or your possessions. Tomorrow it will do Him one day less good. Compare Eph. 5:15-16. The KJV says *redeeming the time*! "Lord, someday I'm going to get saved, someday I'm going to get baptized, someday I'm going to really start giving, someday I'm going to serve You..." NOOO! Now! Today! This is the most important time of your life and if God moves your heart to dedicate something to Him for His use, do it now! But did you know there are some things you can't dedicate to God? The rest of the chapter tells us about those. They are:

II. Things That Already Belong To God (26-34) You can't promise to give God voluntarily something that He has already laid claim to and is His. If I loan you a tool and over the years you forget whose it is and think it's yours and then you come to me and say "I'd like to give this to you as a present!", wouldn't that be ludicrous? Some things are already God's like:

1. His portion of your income Now Israelites did not get paychecks usually. Their income was in the form of baby animals that were born and crops that were harvested. Can you imagine if they had income taxes? "Dear IRS, enclosed is one baby goat; keep the change!" But on that income God had already staked a claim. He claimed:

a. the firstborn of animals (26-27) The first offspring of every animal was claimed by God. By this God taught them PRIORITY. The first part of what they got was His, not the leftovers! Second, He claimed:

b. the tithe of crops and animals (30-34) 1/10 of all the grain harvested, of all the grapes picked, of all the fruit picked and 1 in every ten animals, these things were God's, not voluntary but required. And by this God emphasized AMOUNT. He didn't claim just an occasional tidbit but a tenth of everything they got, a serious requirement. But the point is that these things were not given, they were claimed; they were already God's. Voluntary giving started only over and above these things. Now let me make it clear that we do not live under the law. You cannot show me anywhere in the New Testament where it says that we as believers must give a certain required percentage of our income to God. But I do believe that God has a prior claim to part of everything you get. I don't pretend to know what that part is. But I know this command: 1 Cor. 16:2. There is a portion which you and God need to work out, which you need to give every week to God's work somehow. I think it needs to be set aside from your income first as belonging to God before anything else is done and I think it needs to be a significant amount of what He gives you. I always say that if God required 10% of His Old Testament people who saw only through a glass darkly, how much more will He expect of us who see clearly His love in Jesus Christ. I strongly believe that that first significant part is His. You can't offer it to Him. It's His already. Your special dedications and offerings are above that. We'll let vs. 28-29 go because they deal with a special kind of vow or curse, in Heb. the *herem*, which often means "devoted to destruction", under which certain things could be placed and I've given you in your outline two references to check out.

2. His devoted things (28-29)

a. things He claimed for His own - Num. 18:14-17

b. things devoted to destruction- Josh. 6:17-19, 7:1

Just let me point out again that giving is worship. Their worship began by giving what God required. But it was completed as they gave beyond that from their hearts to Him. *Years ago, it was the custom for people to bring their gifts to the front of the church building. A preacher was making an appeal for people to give for a good cause. Many came to present their offerings, among them, a little crippled girl who hobbled along at the end of the line. Pulling a ring from her finger, she placed it on the table and went back up the aisle. After the service an usher was sent to bring her to the preacher's study. He said, "My dear, I saw what you did. It was beautiful, but the response of the people has been so generous that we have enough to take care of the need. We don't feel right about keeping your treasured ring, so we've decided to give it back to you." To his surprise the little girl vigorously shook her head in refusal. "You don't understand," she said. "I didn't give my ring to you; I gave it to God!"* That's what I want you to understand. You don't give to me or to the church. Real giving is worship. Giving is to God. Are you worshipping God genuinely in this way?

NUMBERS

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NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

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NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Numbers, like Leviticus which precedes it, is a pretty much forgotten book. It gets its English name from the Greek and Latin titles which were given because in it the people of Israel were counted. But the Hebrews name it more appropriately by its third word: *b'midbar* which means *in the wilderness* (NIV desert). It is the record of Israel's experiences in the wilderness. Or to put it another way, it is the record of Israel's journey from Mt. Sinai to the edge of Canaan, from the time of their redemption to the time they actually entered and enjoyed the land and the life they had been promised by God, what they had really been redeemed for. So it was a record of their passing through a stage, a temporary experience, a tent-kind of experience where God never intended for them to stay but which was dragged out to 40 years. Now if you go to the Book of Numbers and the only thing you see there is historical record, it will be extremely boring and useless to you. What I hope to show you is that God intended this book to be a picture that relates to your life and when you read it that way, you'll find some life-changing truths here. So before we actually look into the text, let me give you somewhat of an:

I. Introduction To The Book First we must think about:

1. what preceded the journey Numbers is set in a particular chronological sequence event-wise between the events of the books of Exodus and Joshua. The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are sit-still books; they are books of teaching but no time passes in the history of Israel during them. When Exodus ends, Numbers begins; when Numbers ends, Joshua begins. So let's back up. God has done 3 great things in Israel's life as a nation that precede this wilderness experience:

a. the Exodus God brought them out of slavery in Egypt through the shed blood of the Passover Lamb and passing through the Red Sea. That was their **REDEMPTION**. And it pictures ours. We are redeemed people, bought out of the slavery of sin by the blood of the Lamb shed at Calvary and buried with Him through the Spirit's baptizing us into the Body of Christ. Then they came to:

b. Mt. Sinai where God gave them the Law and made His Covenant with them which stated "I will be your God and you shall be my people". Here God put them into a new **RELATIONSHIP** with Himself. And so God has given us a new relationship with Himself through Christ; we are His sons and daughters, His children, bound into an eternal relationship with Him through the New Covenant. But there's another thing of importance that happened and that was:

c. the Tabernacle God let them stay about 2 years around Mt. Sinai and it was during that time that He gave them instructions and had them build a Tabernacle, a place where He would dwell in the midst of the camp. He would no longer just be a God who was above them controlling or around them protecting but a God in their midst **INDWELLING** them! And of course that pictures the glorious fact that at salvation we are also indwelt personally by Christ and the Holy Spirit; God comes to dwell, no longer outside of us, but in our very being, joined to our spirit as one. So now here they are, redeemed, related, and indwelt and they are ready to move on. To what? To Canaan, the land of promise. Now most often Christians think of Canaan as heaven and so the wilderness represents our journey through this life. The hymns say so. But think for a minute. When they get to Canaan in Joshua, what do they experience? Peace, plenty, rest, solitude? NO, WARFARE! And if that's what heaven's like, I don't want to go! And I'll tell you what else, if what I see in Numbers represents what my life on earth is going to be like, kill me now! It's miserable! If you think about it, you'll see here another way of looking at:

2. the symbolism of the journey Now to understand it, we need some New Testament background. And there Paul tells us that there are:

a. two stages of Christian life - 1 Cor. 3:1-4 The NIV says "worldly" but the KJV has a better word: *carnal*. Carnal and spiritual. He parallels it to the phases of life of a human being. There is infancy and adulthood. You are not born for infancy. You are not born to stay a baby. It is meant to be a temporary passing experience. In fact if you stay an infant, you're sick; you're diseased. So for us spiritually, there is an infancy and an adulthood. Now what is the chief characteristic of infancy? Self-centeredness! The infant's world centers around himself and what he wants and desires. That's the way the Corinthians were living: fighting and bickering and getting ahead of one another in everything. They were saved but living basically no differently than unsaved people, acting like "mere men" ie. like unsaved people act. And Paul calls this phase:

(1) carnal: life controlled by flesh (self) And this is how many, many Christians are living daily. They understand salvation as being for the future. They've been to Sinai and have a nice list of things they know they're supposed to act like but they really don't. They try and fail alot and give up. Sounds like Israel in Numbers, doesn't it? But there's a second stage which Paul calls:

(2) spiritual: life controlled by Holy Spirit This is when God has taken absolute control of their life and is living out in it His purpose so that the person's life is displaying the fruit or the result of the Holy Spirit's activity. This is spiritual adulthood. This is Israel in the book of Joshua, now living a different life, dependent on God and His power, following His direction at every step and experiencing one victory after another. And that is the Promised Life God has saved us for, a life controlled completely by Him, serving His purpose, revealing His glory to the world. So let's look again at:

b. the relationship to Israel's experience - 1 Cor. 10:1-6,11 Notice he mentions their priveleges of redemption and even refers to the Red Sea experience as a baptism. And then he goes on to mention particularly the wilderness experience, the Book of Numbers, and some of the experiences and backslidings there. And his comment is that God ordered these things to be illustrations for us. That is not a good word. It is literally "types", Old Testament prefigurings. Now the average person comes to Numbers and says "They did this and those things were wicked; I must not do those things". And that's true, but it is not just the individual events that are a type but the whole wilderness experience. Look at the chart in your outline:

Egypt----->	Exodus----->	Wilderness----->	Canaan
unsaved	saved	carnal	spiritual
dead	alive	flesh control	Holy Spirit control

The whole time they lived in the wilderness, they lived in a carnal state, acting under the will of their own flesh, time after time. But once they crossed Jordan they lived out the will of God. They became spiritual people. And that's where God wants us. He doesn't want us to stay in the baby Christian, carnal state all our lives. He wants us to make the journey to the life lived under the control of the Holy Spirit, to the life He saved us to live, the abundant life, the life that counts for eternal things. Now notice:

3. the characteristics of the journey

a. it was lengthened by choice, not design The distance they had to travel was short. It was only a short time until they arrived at Kadesh Barnea at the border of the Promised Land. But they chose to turn back, to live the kind of life they wanted to live, to turn back in their hearts to Egypt, to the unsaved life and it kept them in the wilderness

40 years. God never intended for it to take years and years for you to experience the kind of mature Spirit-oriented life He planned for you, but you can choose to drag it out! You can choose to live a wilderness existence all your life and still be saved but God never planned it that way.

b. it was characterized by failure, not victory If I had to choose one word to sum up the Book of Numbers it would be "failure". Time and time again Israel failed to be what they were: God's people. Then they would repent but it would happen all over again, a roller-coaster experience. Any victory they had was only brief and fleeting. If you choose to stay carnal, you're choosing failure; you're choosing a roller-coaster of obedience and disobedience, ups and downs, not at all the kind of life that God can use to accomplish His will! So in the first 9 chapters God laid out the principles for this journey, the principles which (if they would learn them) would take them to the life of victory God wanted them to have. I gave you a brief outline of this first section of the book. So let's quickly look at:

II. The First Principle: Christ's Centrality - Chs. 1-2 The first lesson we have to learn is that Christ wants to be at the center of all we are and all we do. That's what He showed Israel. We're not going to begin to attempt to read through these chapters verse by verse, but notice 2 key things:

1. the numbering of the people (ch. 1, compare vs. 1-3) God commanded a census to be taken and gave Moses 12 helpers to count and the rest of the chapter tells us the results, 603,550 men over age 20 able to be in God's army. It would be easy to leave this record without asking, "So what?" Let me point out two things:

a. they knew their ancestry (17-19) The people knew their ancestry. They knew which family they belonged to and how that traced back to Jacob. So they could confidently say they belonged to God; they were part of His people. They knew it. And God wants us to have that same kind of **ASSURANCE** that we are saved, that we belong to Him. Without that assurance we'll never have the life God wants us to have. If you don't have it, talk to me afterward! The second thing God did in this numbering was:

b. God indicated His purpose (45) - SERVICE God wasn't out to put the Israelites in paradise on earth to enjoy it and get their wants and desires met. He wanted an ARMY. He had a job to do. He had foes to vanquish and territory to take. I'm tired of people painting the Christian life with this "God'll give you everything you want" message. The Christian life is not about you; it's about God and what He wants. And what He wants is an ARMY to carry out His will, to take the Gospel to every living person on earth in this generation and reveal His glory to every living creature. When you come under the control of the Holy Spirit and are living that way, that's where you'll find yourself: SERVING GOD! Now the second important thing to notice here is:

2. the arrangement of the camp (ch. 2, compare vs. 34) This verse is the summary of the chapter. It tells how Israel camped when they were at rest and how they marched when they were on the move. We're not going to read it but here's the summary. (E,S,W,N - 1st,2nd,3rd,4th - vs. 3,10,18,25) Now notice where God's presence (the Tabernacle) always is: AT THE CENTER! And that's where Christ wants to be in our life. When He's at the center, we live the life He wants. When He isn't, we live a carnal life. Now each of these pictures makes a point:

a. when resting: Christ is central to our life (2:2) Look at the diagram. God wanted to be at the center! Listen to what Paul says, compare Phil. 1:21, Col. 3:4. He doesn't just want to be a piece of your life or a part of your life. He wants to BE your life. He wants to be the center and the core and the source in such a way that your life becomes His life or rather that His life becomes your life! And then capture this thought:

b. when moving: Christ is central to our service (2:17) When they moved out, God still stayed in the middle. And Christ wants to be central to our serving and the activities of our life too. Compare Gal. 2:20. The life you live is to be lived by Him as you completely trust in Him. It's not that you do something and ask Him for help. He wants to be at the very center and core of all you do!

Now it's time to quit but just let me ask you a question: Where is your life? Which kind of life are you living, the wilderness life, the carnal life which centers around you or the spirit-controlled life that God saved you for? Well, if you're ever going to live it, this is the thing you must grasp first: Christ is central to your life and service. He is your very life.

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Principles: The Dynamic of Service - Chs. 3-4

Chapters 1-2 picture us as God's WARRIORS; chapters 3-4 picture us as His WORKERS. 1-2 teach us that Christ indwells us and is central to our life and our service; 3-4 explain to us the dynamic of that service. Most of us think of service like this: I do something for God. It is precisely that thinking that keeps us living a wilderness life, a carnal life, a life lived under the direction and power of the flesh, of self. Service is us making ourselves a channel through which God can work to accomplish His purpose in the world. Chs. 3-4 are about the only tribe omitted in the census of 1-2, the Levites. But before we get into the text, I want to show you:

I. The Lesson of the Levites The tribe of Levi occupied a very special position within Israel. They were wholly given over to the service of God's tabernacle. And as such we can see:

1. their picture in serving: us - Num. 8:10 says that before they could serve, the rest of the Israelites came and laid their hands on their heads. That's a symbol of identification. It said, "You serve in my place; you represent me; your service to God represents my service to God". 3:7 says the same. So all of Israel was not only God's army but also God's servants and the service of the Levites pictures in miniature how God sees the service of all. And God has chosen to call US Levites. The church is a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation. Peter says priests are first levites and then Aaronites! If Israel as a whole pictures us as God's people, then the Levites picture us as God's workers.

2. their platform: grace - Gen. 49:5-7 Why on earth did God ever choose the tribe of Levi to be His workers? Look at their past. Their father Levi was cruel and vicious. He and his brother murdered an entire town over the defiling of their sister Tamar. God did not want to be close to them. He chose to scatter them in Israel and not give to them a set inheritance like the other tribes. Yet this is the tribe that came to have the high and holy privilege of serving God, of touching what no others could touch! How? Grace! It is only by the grace of God that I am God's servant, that I can work for Him! I was lost and dead in trespasses and sins before my redemption, an enemy of God. My platform of service is the same as my salvation; it is all of grace! Well, what changed them? Of course, the redemption of the Exodus but look further at:

3. their preparation: surrender - Ex. 32:25-29 There came a time when God called, "Who is on the Lord's side?" The camp was filled with idolatry and God needed somebody, somebody who was absolutely surrendered to Him, somebody who loved Him more than father, mother, sister, and brother, who would turn and kill his own idolatrous brethren. And the Levites said "Here I am!" to a man. It was that act of surrender that set them apart to God among all the people, that surrender of everything near and dear, that commitment to obey God no matter what the cost. And that is also our preparation for service: absolute surrender. Until you come to the place where you say "Lord, I will do whatever you want me to do; I give up all rights to direct my life and choose my course", you are not really serving God, you're just doing something for Him and it will be a wilderness kind of service, up and down, not the victorious service of Canaan.

4. their principle: dependence - Num. 8:5-11 For now let me just point out one simple thing. Before they could serve, they had to shave! First they were sprinkled with the special water of cleansing so the shaving symbolized the result of the sprinkling. As a result of the cleansing Christ has done in us, we are to remove from ourselves everything of the natural. We are to cast ourselves totally on Him, to serve Him not on the basis of our own strength and abilities, but on the basis of His cleansing power which is in us. And then note:

5. their performance: faithful and fruitful We don't have time to look up these references but I wish you would later: Num. 25:7-13, Mal. 2:4-6, Deut. 33:8-11. It was a Levite who stood up for God when Israel sinned with the Midianite women and because of that God made a special covenant of peace with the tribe of Levi. Malachi even refers to it and warns them not to violate it. And Moses in his dying remarks indicates that Levi has been used to teach righteousness and will be. So the Levites turned out to be both faithful and fruitful and so will you if you follow these principles for service. So with this basis, let's look at:

II. The Service of the Levites (ch. 3) The pattern I want to follow in the rest of this message is to draw some facts out of the text and then to look at the lessons for us later. We'll begin with:

1. the gift of the Levites Chapter 3 says that the tribe of Levi was actually a gift in two respects:

a. to the priests (1-10) Read 5. They were given to the priests to assist them. Why? How many priests were there? V.4 tells us: only 3! They needed help to offer the sacrifices for 2-3 million people! So God gave the Levites as a gift to the High Priest Aaron. Read 9. To do his work. And the Father has given us to our High Priest, the Son, to do His work. We are a gift to Jesus from the Father that His work on earth might be accomplished! More later. They were also a gift:

b. to the Lord (11-13) They were claimed by the Lord on behalf of, or in the place of, all the firstborn sons that were spared in the tenth plague. They were given to the Lord to be wholly dedicated to His service by the claim of their redemption. And Hebrews calls us the *church of the first-born*; our whole assembly, all of us, are first-born, all laid claim to by God to be wholly dedicated to His service. And verses 40-51 go on to tell us how God had every Levite from a month old counted and had all the firstborn of the tribes counted and made the numbers match by making the extra firstborn pay a silver redemption price. The point is clear: God has laid claim to service from every last Israelite, from every last one of us. Not one is exempt!

2. the organization of the Levites (14-20, 39) There were 3 families or clans and God organized them. He gave each a particular place to camp and a particular responsibility.

- a. Gershon** - 7500 - West (21-26)
- b. Kohath** - 8600 - South (27-32)
- c. Merari** - 6200 - North (33-37)
- d. priests** - 6 - East (38)

Now let's leave that for a moment and look at:

3. the lessons from the Levites First:

a. our service accomplishes His work If we are the Father's gift to the Son, then we have a purpose in living. We are here to accomplish His work; our work is His and His ours. The New Testament has another analogy for that:

(1) we are His body Compare Eph. 1:22. Christ could not accomplish all His work from heaven. He needed a visible body on earth and you and I are that body, given to Him to carry out the work He wishes to do. And that means:

(2) we are under His direction We don't come to God and tell Him what we'll do. We're His to direct. He's the Head and He has the brains and He knows what needs done. We're the body; we carry out the instructions just as surely as Aaron said to the individual Levite "put that over there, skin this animal here, etc." And further we learn that:

b. our service was claimed at the cross - 1 Cor. 6:19-20 We don't belong to ourselves anymore. Christ bought us at the cross, lock stock and barrel, every part of us and we have only one purpose in life, to use all of our faculties to glorify God. And how do we do that? They did it by carrying the Tabernacle around through the wilderness which represented the presence of God. We do it by bearing about in our body the Lord Jesus Christ and displaying Him to others! That is the work we have been claimed for! And so:

(1) we are ALL appointed to service Service is not for some, or for those who want to. God has a place for you to serve, a work for you to do. Every believer has a place of work in God's economy and that means YOU! Have you found it yet? And note:

(2) it is a responsibility (25,31) Note the phrase, *they were responsible for the care of...* Serving God is not an option. It is a responsibility that comes with salvation. God places certain pieces of His work under your care. If you don't do it, God holds you responsible!

III. The Work of the Levites (ch. 4) In this chapter we find:

1. the divisions of service The actual service of each clan was spelled out and specified:

a. the Kohathites - the holy things (1-20) *read 4* - They are to carry the holy things, the ark, the table, the altar, the incense altar, after the priests cover them properly.

b. the Gershonites - the curtains (21-28) *read 24* - They carried all the cloth materials of the Tabernacle, the outer cloth wall of the courtyard, the 4 curtains that covered the inner wooden sanctuary, etc.

c. the Merarites - the wood and metal (29-33) *read 31* - They carried the boards of the inner tabernacle, the posts, the stakes, and all the other heavy materials. And finally you have:

d. the counting of the workers (34-49) *read 46-49* The difference here is that only those from 30-50 years old are counted. So only 8500 Levites actually participated in the carrying of the Tabernacle. Now what's important here is:

2. the lessons about service

a. our service is not our choice God had a special assignment for each one. They didn't volunteer, nor choose. We don't come to God and tell Him what we'd like to do for Him. We come to Him and say "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" We set a poor example when we ask our child, "What do you want to be?". It's, "What does God want you to be?!"

b. our service is diverse Some carried tent pegs. Others carried cloth items. Others carried the handles of the holy objects. Not everybody did the same thing. I'm reminded of 1 Cor. 12 and the diversity of the gifts. There are lots of ways to serve God and they are as different as can be but:

c. our service is interdependent The Kohathites could show up with the ark but if the Merarites weren't there with the tent pegs, the whole thing would fall apart. Some folks got to carry one small pin, others a holy object. Yet every part was necessary and fit together to make a whole. Eph. 4 says that in the body of Christ every joint supplies a part to make up the whole. Every service is needed and depends on our working together.

d. our service is a precious privilege No matter how menial it may have seemed to carry a pothook, they were carrying the dwelling place of the King of Kings. There was no higher service, not in Egypt or Canaan. To be a doorkeeper in the tent of our God is a precious privilege, unknown to the world. What a privilege to bear about the Lord Jesus and to reveal Him to others by our humble, Christ-directed service! And so:

e. our service should bring contentment We don't have to envy one another. The foot doesn't have to envy the hand. The Gershonite doesn't have to envy the Kohathite. We should be content to serve at His direction wherever He places us. What counts in life is not how great a thing you are able to do but how faithful you are at doing the thing God has given you to do.

What is it for you my friend? Are you absolutely surrendered and yielded and letting Him direct you, serving in His strength, doing your small part? Then rest in it and hear His words, *Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will put thee in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of Thy Lord.*

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Principles: The Maintenance of Purity - Ch. 5

Now let me refresh your memory a bit. Numbers is the story of Israel's journey through the wilderness to the promised life God had for them. It is therefore the story of our journey to the victorious, spirit-controlled, Christ-centered life God has designed for us. In the first 10 chapters God is laying down to Israel some basic principles for their journey and thereby some basic principles we must learn in order to live the life God has planned for us to live. Chs. 1-2 taught us the principle of the centrality of Christ; He must be the center and source of everything we do and are. Chs. 3-4 taught us the dynamic of service, that God has chosen all of us to service on the basis of His grace and called us to a particular place of ministry. Tonite we'll see in ch. 5 the third principle: purity. In order to have a spirit-controlled life, we must be pure. There is no way around it. Now the first thing we notice here is:

I. The Basis of Purity (3) Israel had to be pure, not simply because God had given them some rules to follow, but because His presence was in their midst. The fact was simple: no purity, no Presence. If you want the Presence, there must be purity. Light and darkness cannot coexist. I'm not saying that you'll never sin when you live under the Spirit's control. I'm saying that for the Spirit of God to rule and control your life, there must be purity. Known and harbored sin must go. It must be removed. You see:

1. we are corporately indwelt by God - 1 Cor. 3:16 This verse is not about us as individuals. God dwelt in the midst of the camp of Israel. Today He dwells in the midst of His church, wherever two or three are gathered in His name. To keep His presence in the midst, the group must maintain its purity (more later on). But since Israel is a picture of us as individuals, note that:

2. we are individually indwelt by God - 1 Cor. 6:19 Individually and personally Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit actually dwell inside of us. Think about that. Thrice holy God who is of purer eyes than to behold evil lives inside me. Now I know He's not leaving, but I also know that I cannot expect His presence to fill and control every part of me while I am at the same time letting sin reign in my mortal body and yielding my members as instruments thereof. It won't work. There must be a maintaining of purity. and so we see in this chapter:

II. Three Kinds of Purity First there is a section dealing with:

1. physical purity: the law of disease (1-4) All of those who had certain types of disease or defilement had to leave the main camp and live alone outside it. On the surface this sounds cruel and much like ill treatment of the sick. But there is a very:

a. the practical reason for this law: protection From our standpoint we can see what was going on. The KJV word leprosy covers any kind of rash, swelling, growth, etc., any kind of infectious skin disease. This whole ordinance was an ordinance for the quarantine of disease. People who had contracted what we now know as possibly contagious things were isolated from contact with the population until they were healed. God was protecting His people from epidemic. But there is also:

b. the spiritual lesson of this law: sin Everywhere in the Bible disease is a picture of sin, not that sick people have sinned, but their exclusion from God's camp and from the Tabernacle are a spiritual picture for us that no unclean person, no person defiled by sin, can come into the presence of our Holy God. Instead, the sin has to be removed, taken outside the camp! Now in the second section we find the subject of:

2. moral purity: the law of restitution (5-10) Here God talks about what happens when somebody does wrong to another person, steals from them, lies to them, etc. There are really two general lessons here:

a. the practical effect: relationships God would not tolerate sin in the area of relationships. It could not be held and harbored. It had to be dealt with. There had to be purity in relationships with other people. And if you want the life God wants for you, you have to be pure in your relationships with others. You have to have moral purity. And here's something else neat:

b. the spiritual lesson: unfaithfulness (6) When you wrong somebody else, you're being unfaithful to the Lord. Did you know that? It's not just between the two of you. You are being unfaithful to Him, to His Word, to His presence in You. And so it must be purified. Then the third area in this chapter is:

3. marital purity: the law of jealousy (11-31) We won't take time to read all of this, only 11-14. Here's what the priest would do. He would take dust from the tabernacle floor and mix it with holy water to make a kind of spiritual milkshake and make the woman drink it after taking an oath before God. If she was faithful, it would have no effect. But if she was guilty her thigh would waste away and her abdomen swell. I guess we're not sure exactly what this means, but perhaps it means she would never be able to have children. However you can see here:

a. the practical application about marriage God evidently doesn't want any doubt or suspicion to exist in the marriage relationship. He doesn't want any jealousy to exist without cause. He doesn't want any unfaithfulness to exist nor to go undetected. God's intent is that your marriage relationship be one of absolute fidelity and trust. But there is also here:

b. the spiritual application of marriage Throughout the Old Testament God pictures Himself as Israel's husband and her as His wife. And He further describes Himself as a jealous God. He will not tolerate any unfaithfulness on Israel's part toward any other god! Nor will He on our part! He is a jealous husband! Now let me briefly ask you to notice here:

III. Three Levels of Purity

1. removing sin obvious to all In the case of the diseased person, the picture is one of sin obvious and up front, seen by all. That must be removed. So in our lives. Sin that is seen and known by others must be put away. But that is not enough.

2. removing sin hidden from view In the case of the one who wrongs another, it does not say "when he is caught". It says "he must confess..." It is sin that was hidden from view, sin which the person to this point had managed to keep hidden. That sin has to go from our lives too to have real purity. But that's not all:

3. removing sin only suspected In the case of the jealous husband, God does not tolerate even the suspicion of sin. Purity means there is no room in our lives for even having a wrong attitude or a false suspicion toward another. That too must go. Purity is purity. And God wants us to be PURE. To receive the full blessing of God's presence and control in our lives we have to be willing to let Him really search our hearts and clean house! Then lastly in these three laws we also find:

IV. Three Principles of Purity which are illustrated for us here in the life of Israel but are clearly delineated for us in the New Testament. They tell us the ways purity is accomplished in our lives. The first is the principle of:

1. corporate judgment God accomplishes purity in us through the corporate body of His people to which we belong, the local church, in the same way He did in Israel.

a. the community removes the unclean party (3a) It was the responsibility of the body to send the unclean outside the camp to prevent the contamination of the others. It was the body's responsibility to protect its own purity. And here's the reason:

b. the unclean party defiles the whole (3b) How? In two ways. First by contamination. Sin spreads and multiplies. Evil company corrupts good morals. If the body tolerates sin, it will spread to others. But secondly, if a part of the body is unclean, the whole is defiled. We are a unity, a body. And one corrupt part corrupts the whole before God, just as Achan's sin defiled Israel as a whole in the book of Joshua. Compare 1 Cor. 5:1-7. This teaches the very same principle, that the church body must purify itself by putting out those individuals involved in gross sin because a little leaven leavens the whole lump. And I don't think this passage means that we should wait until someone is living with his mother before we deal with them. There are other commands about confronting our brother and admonishing and rebuking and correcting. When the body is doing its job, it helps to keep us pure. But then there is the principle of:

2. individual self-judgment You can see here that if the individual who wrongs another deals with his sin, the community wouldn't have to deal with it. Compare 1 Cor. 11:31. This is what God also tells us. If we judge ourselves, God doesn't have to discipline us and neither does the community we are part of. Every one of us maintains our purity in this way. And here is the process you use:

a. confession - I admit my sin (7a) and in this context it is not talking about admitting it to God privately. It means to the party you wronged. Removing sin begins with owning up to those you wronged and with it goes:

b. restitution - I correct my sin (7b) Notice under the law that the repayment was 120%. I don't think you can mandate that in the New Testament but I think we can learn that it is not enough to apologize. We must correct what we did. And we must be generous in doing it, thinking of the hurt and inconvenience it caused the person! Now some things aren't correctable by payment. It is not always so simple. Sometimes it means going back and correcting rumors you passed, etc. But then and only then is there:

c. atonement - I am forgiven for my sin (8) Then the trespass offering is acceptable to God and forgiveness comes. This is the part some of us leave off. It is not enough to deal with the person. We have to deal with God. We have to then come and confess our sin to Him and ask His forgiveness on the basis of our Trespass Offering the Lord Jesus Christ. Then finally there is the principle of:

3. Divine judgment Those things with which we do not deal and the community does not deal, God will deal with, even for believers. Compare 2 Cor. 5:10. We're all going to stand before Him. He sees all that is going on; He knows. Now the law of jealousy teaches us that:

a. some judgment we must leave to God (11-16) Sometimes there is no way to know if there is sin in a person's life, to know if they're being honest or not. In those cases, though you can't administer a direct test like this one, you must still leave the judgment up to God and remember this:

b. God's judgment cannot be avoided (21-22) Once the woman drank the water, that was it. There was no escaping judgment for sin whether anybody else knew or not. When we stand before Him, we can rest assured that all things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! That ought to move us to want purity just as much as knowing those things are keeping us from the victorious abundant life God wants us to live.

In closing let me just emphasize this: there is no being full of the Spirit without purity. There is no Christ-centered life without purity. There is no abundant, victorious life, no spirituality, no maturity without purity. How is it in your life, my friend? What is it that has to go? Get rid of it. It's not worth letting it keep you from the life you were saved for!

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Principles: The Concept of Giving Chs. 6-8

At first glance, you might wonder what these three chapters have to do with each other. Chapter 6 is about the Nazirites, chapter 7 is the record of an offering, and chapter 8 is the dedication of the Levites. Well, the thread that pulls them together is the concept of giving. Each chapter deals with a different aspect of the giving that God expects from us. The promised life God has for us, the Canaan life, the life where He is in full control and we walk in victory, is not a life of receiving; it is a life of giving, a life of perpetual giving! And as the prayer of St. Francis says, "It is in giving that we receive." People living a carnal, self-centered life have the idea that blessing is receiving. God is blessing them if good things happen or if they get a gift or if they get everything they want. But Paul tells us in Acts 20:35 that Jesus said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. The happiness and the joy and the blessing is not in the getting nearly as much as in the giving! So the spiritual life, the life controlled by the Spirit, is a life that reflects the life of God who is by nature a giving God and we will not have the life He wants to give us until we adopt and enact His concept of giving. Now there are three aspects of my giving dealt with here. The first is:

I. Giving My Will For His Purpose: The Nazirite - Ch. 6 There was a special vow that one could voluntarily enter under the law called the Nazirite vow. It was a vow of special consecration to God for a period of time and in this vow is a picture of what God wants of me. Now let me ask you a question. Was Jesus a Nazirite? No, He was a Nazarene (the English letter Z is a different Hebrew letter in each word), a person hailing from Nazareth. He did things a Nazirite was forbidden to do: He drank wine, He touched the dead, and, as far as we can tell, cut his hair like everyone else. The only Nazirite we have any real record of in Scripture is Samson who broke all of his vows and is a terrible example. Yet Jesus who was not a Nazirite by the Law was in another sense the only true Nazirite that ever lived, a person wholly consecrated to God. So let's talk about:

1. the meaning of self-consecration (1-2) The Hebrew *nazar* means to separate or set apart. The Nazirite was one who promised to set himself apart from certain things that the other Israelites did unto God and His purpose. It was not a matter of purification, of eliminating sin like we saw in chapter 5; it was an above and beyond what was required kind of thing, a voluntary giving over of self to God. And so we learn here a lesson about consecration to God:

a. it is not the elimination of what is wrong That's purification; that's mandatory. That's commanded. That is a matter of obedience. That is a bottom line, required necessity, which if you fail to obey, God has to discipline you for. It is not that but rather:

b. it is the setting aside of good for better It is the willingness to put aside that which is OK, that which everybody else is doing and enjoying, that which is even good, in order to follow the will and purpose of God which is better. If we would really get hold of that concept it would solve a thousand of those little "Is it right to do this?" questions. For a consecrated person, that is not the question. The question is, "Does God want me to do this; is this His plan in my life?" Those are two entirely different questions. It might be perfectly OK, absolutely alright, but totally out of God's will for you. So let's look at the three aspects of the actual vow and get a more concrete idea of:

2. the areas of self-consecration Consecration means I am willing to give up:

a. my joy for His purpose (3-4) The Nazirite could have nothing whatever to do with wine, from the seed to the plant to the liquid. Now wine in the Bible is usually in the Old Testament a symbol of joy, compare Ps. 104:15. Wine

gladdens the heart. You'll find that repeatedly. The epitome of joy in Israel was a feast, not to get drunk, but to enjoy the bounty of the land and rejoice in God's blessing. And the good wine is said to make the heart merry. That was OK for everybody else but not for the Nazirite. He had to be willing to give up what would please him in the flesh for that which pleased God, for God's purpose. That's what God wants of us: a willingness to set aside the things I like, that please me, that I have my heart set on, to do what pleases Him, what serves His purpose. For example, there are an awful lot of missionaries who would rather be home enjoying their families in the States like the rest of us but have chosen to do God's will. They've chosen the better part. Jesus talked about giving up houses and lands and family for Him. That's consecration. But it also involves giving up:

b. my dignity for His purpose (5) Somehow we always picture people from ancient times as having long hair. That is not so. It seems to have been normal for men to cut their hair short in one degree or other for most of recorded history. The Nazirite was abnormal. He didn't do what other men did; he left his hair grow uncut. Now compare 1 Cor. 11:14. Paul said that it is by nature a disgrace or an indignity for a man to have long hair like a woman in his day. Yet that's what God commanded the Nazirite: to look different from everyone else, to lay down the dignity of how he'd like to look, of being like everyone else, to be obedient to His purpose. And that's what God wants of us, to be willing to give up the right to look good in the eyes of everybody else, to be willing to be different and to appear shameful or despised to do His will. Hudson Taylor took it literally; in China he dressed and looked like the Chinese to reach them, something few understood at the time. What is it in your life that may be beneath your dignity, that others may not understand and mock you for, but you know God wants you to do it? And then consecration means giving up:

c. my dearest ties for His purpose (6-8) Now you have to understand what this means. To us death is so far removed and the thought of touching a dead body is repulsive. But it was not so then. It was the loved ones who washed the body and prepared it for burial. That was an honor and a duty. And it's natural. If your husband or wife died suddenly, would you not touch the body just because they're dead? Sure you would. But not the Nazirite. No matter who it was or how much he loved them, he could never touch them again. God's purpose and will had to be more important to him than the dearest of human relationships. Compare Lk. 9:59-62. Consecration to Jesus means willingness to part from an aging father or maybe not getting the chance to say goodbye to family. It means loving and obeying Him above every human tie.

But what about when you fail? Nobody maintains that level of consecration every moment. The Nazirite vow was only temporary and for a time and then the person could go back to normal life like everybody else. Well, let's talk about:

3. the failure of self-consecration (9-12) God had a provision for the Nazirite. When he broke his vow accidentally, he could start over. God could forgive and his vow would not be violated. I would just point out two things:

a. once the vow was made, failure was sin Accidental or intentional didn't matter. What wasn't wrong before the consecration was now wrong! The consecrated person is now living on a new level. Wrong and sin are no longer just a matter of the law, the basic externals. Failure to do the will of God is sin. Failure to obey that call to go, failure to keep that practice that God has led you into, now is sin and must be forgiven. There must be cleansing. But also notice this:

b. once the failure came, the past did not count Failure wiped out the past days of keeping the vow. It meant a fresh start. It did not matter how long you had kept the vow before; what mattered was how long you kept it from now on. And that's a good way to look at consecration to the Lord. When you fail and sin, it's not just a glitch in your consecration. You need a whole brand new return to it, to start all over again committing yourself to obey from here onward. Well, we have to move on to chapter 7 which tells me about:

II. Giving My Substance For His Use: The Offering - Ch. 7 This is a very boring chapter to read because after the first few verses it is a line by line repeat of the record of the offering which the twelve leaders of the 12 tribes brought for the dedication of the Tabernacle, the beginning of its functioning. I would just like to point out 3 things:

1. what was given (2-5, 10-11) First they gave oxen and carts for the Levites to use in transporting the heavy items connected with the tabernacle. Then each of these 12 men brought an identical offering, one each day.

2. the value of what was given (84-88) The silver plates were worth about \$260 apiece currently, the bowls about \$1800 [*Bible Knowledge Commentary*] plus all the various animals. These 12 men gave the equivalent of a small fortune! It was not because it was commanded, not because anybody said they had to. This was a voluntary offering of dedication unto God made by people who just two years before were slaves in Egypt, who were living in tents in a desert, who didn't have much but what they had begged from their Egyptian neighbors. Yet they were willing to give sacrificially of their substance for God's use! Consecration to God means being willing to give Him all I have for His use. And look at:

3. the record of what was given Why didn't God just put down the summary at the end? Why all the individual repetition in the middle? Our God is a record-keeping God! This is like a page out of His account book in heaven. It's all

there. God notes and remembers individually who gives and what we give to Him. Compare Mk. 12:41-44. It's not how much that impresses Him but whether we are willing to give all that we have for Him to use at His direction! Then before we quit, let me just mention the third aspect of giving:

III. Giving My Life For His Service: The Levites - Ch. 8 Now we've already talked about the Levites and their service as a picture of our service to God back in chapters 3-4. Let me just point out two additional things from this chapter:

1. their presentation as a living offering (11) A wave offering is something you hold up and present to God by waving because it was not permissible to actually burn it on the altar. It was done with sheaves of grain, for instance. So now the Levites (who picture us as servants of Christ) are the offering; literally they are presented as a living sacrifice. Their lives of service to God are the sacrifice! Sound familiar? Compare Rom. 12:1. Our spiritual service is to offer God our bodies, our lives, to be absolutely dedicated and consecrated to his service, not our own! And notice that:

2. presentation prepares for service (15-16) Once they were presented, then they could serve. You can't really serve God effectively until you have presented your life to God as a living sacrifice, til you have said and meant it, "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee; take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold..." "Take it all Lord".

That is the giving that leads to the victorious life of blessing. No giving, no blessing. I wonder have you given your will to God like Jesus did in the garden. Have you given your possessions to God like the widow did? Have you given Him your very life, made His service the primary function of your existence?

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Principles: The Process of Guidance Ch. 9

The promised life God has for us, the life of victory, the spiritual life is not only a pure life as in chapter 5 and a giving, surrendered life as in chapters 6-8 but, as chapter 9 will show us, it is a guided life. You can never live the real Christian life, the one God intended for you by your own resources in any sense and that includes choosing your own direction whether in matters small or large. This is illustrated for us here very clearly as we have the record of the Israelites receiving God's guidance in two matters. The first incident in the chapter shows us the process of:

I. Guidance In The Matter Of Obedience (1-14) It was the first month of the new year and God told Moses to get ready to celebrate the second annual Passover on the 14th day. But there was an unforeseen problem. There were some people who couldn't do it. They had buried a loved one and were by God's own decree unclean and therefore unfit to offer sacrifice to God until the proper days of their cleansing. They wanted to obey God and keep the Passover but they could not because of circumstances He had allowed and because of obedience to another of His own laws. So we have the question, What do you do:

1. when you do not know God's will (8) Verse 8 clearly gives us three principles that you can apply when you don't know how to obey God's will in a certain situation.

a. admit your ignorance The answer to this problem had never been clearly revealed by God. So Moses didn't pretend to know it! Don't choose an answer just to have the appearance of being spiritual and to avoid the embarrassment of admitting ignorance. Moses was the leader of the entire nation, a man who talked with God face to face, and he admitted that he was unsure of the right thing to do. So admit it. Then:

b. wait until you do know *Stand still*, the KJV says. Don't go ahead and do one thing or the other until you do know what God's will is. Don't say, "Well, it could be either so I'll choose one." Sit still. Wait. Don't act on the matter until you know what God wants and you can do it in faith because whatever is not of faith is sin! And while you're waiting:

c. inquire of the Lord These people did the right thing. They went to ask God through Moses. Inquire. Search the Word. Read whatever you can get your hands on. Inquire of other godly spiritually mature people and get their view of the situation. And above all, pray! Pray til the answer comes and then do it!

Now this whole incident teaches us another complementary set of lessons on the subject of what you do:

2. when you can't obey God's will, when you know what God wants done but circumstances have prevented you from doing it, when there is a plain command in His Word but you can't keep it. I don't know how this might come up in your life, for example you might become disabled or shut-in and unable to keep the command to assemble or to provide for your family or you may be separated or divorced and unable to reconcile or rebuild that relationship because of the circumstances of the spouse or danger to the family.

a. do not willfully neglect God's command (13) We're not talking about circumstances where you choose not to obey, where you could but you don't want to. There is no excuse for that. That is sin and the man bears the consequences of it! So please never make up excuses to keep from obeying God that are not valid. That will bring discipline and judgment until God gets you to be honest about it! But when you honestly can't obey:

b. determine to obey from here on (10-11a) Maintain that attitude of readiness to obey. Know that there is a path of obedience to God that starts right here and now, right at your feet. You may not have been able to do THAT but there will always be a THIS for you that goes on from here. Then:

c. ask God to make the new manner known (6-7) These people came to God to admit their desire to obey God and their confusion about how to do it and to ask Him how they might obey. You have not because you ask not. Ask Him to make it plain but:

d. do not lower the standard (11-12) They were allowed to obey the command at a later time but they couldn't lower the standard. It had to be kept in the same way, by the same precise regulations, with the same degree of obedience. Just because you can't do one thing God wants you to do doesn't mean that you can lower the standard and settle for second-rate obedience. You must obey as whole-heartedly and completely from where you are right now as you would have in the first place if you could. And then here's something to be thankful for:

e. God's grace always provides a way (10) God always makes a way that you can still obey Him. He will not deny you the privilege of obeying. By His grace there is always a way to obey Him for you in your situation, right where you are. Circumstances can never prevent you totally from wholehearted obedience! But before we leave this half of the chapter, I can't fail to mention that there is here an obvious:

3. application to the Lord's Supper - 1 Cor. 11 The Passover Meal was the memorial of redemption. It was celebrated in Egypt in Exodus, in the wilderness in Numbers, and in the promised land in Joshua. It was the perpetually commanded memorial of redemption to the Israelites. And out of it Jesus gave to His church a new memorial celebration, the Lord's Supper and if we read what the New Testament teaches, we'll find:

a. it is not to be neglected (23-26) It is a command of the Lord Jesus. He said "DO THIS" until He comes. I fear that in our day of wanting to get away from anything that appears to have ritual and form we have minimized the importance of the Lord's Supper. I daresay many Christians would never care if we stopped doing it altogether; they would not miss it and do not mind that they miss it. But it is a command of Jesus. It is the precious memorial of redemption, of the blood of the Lamb without blemish and without spot. The Israelite who refused to celebrate was cut off from his people. God takes it seriously and so like the Passover:

b. it is not to be done in uncleanness (27-29) These Israelites knew they could not celebrate the Passover in an unworthy condition. Neither can we celebrate the Supper. God takes it so seriously that when we fail to recognize its holiness and come with unconfessed sin in our lives, He may discipline us bodily! That's a stern lesson!

But we must move on to the second half of chapter 9 and there we find a beautiful picture of:

II. Guidance In The Path Of Life (15-23) Israel was guided not only in matters of daily obedience but in the path she took through the wilderness. God did not put 2 million people in a vast desert to wander at will. He provided for them and He also guided them by His own presence in the Shekinah glory cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Now in this we can see:

1. the features of the guided life

a. the upward look (15) They had to look up for guidance, to watch the cloud. The guided life is one that has its eyes fixed upward, is constantly looking to the Lord for direction every day. But the reason there is an upward look is because of:

b. the constant Presence (16) There was never a day, never a moment when God didn't show up for duty. He was always there. The cloud and fire were always visible; they continued. And we have something even better, the constant indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us. He never leaves. There is never a moment of our lives that He is not there to guide us!

c. the daily dependence (17) The Israelites had no planned program of their own. Each day when they got up, they looked up to see if the cloud moved. If it did, they traveled that day. If not, they stayed put. This is how they lived for 40 years and by it God taught them a principle that would remain after they reached Canaan and weren't traveling anymore, the principle of daily dependence. That is the guided life, each day, each moment, looking to God, depending completely on Him for the wisdom to know what to do next. And it's a blessed life, a privileged life, resting completely in the Savior's hands! So here are:

2. the principles of the guided life

a. it never chooses its own path (18a) It only stays or goes at God's command. It never presumes to make its own decisions but waits on God's decisions. That's how God intended your Christian life to be; that's what really makes it His life.

b. it stays until God leads elsewhere (18b-20) This is a tremendous principle. Look all around and you'll find people trying to get out of where they are, looking for ways and opportunities to leave where God has put them, whether it's to leave their marriage or their job or their circumstances. God's principle is to stay where the cloud has settled, whether it's overnight or a day or a month or a year or the rest of your life. If you got where you are by following the Lord, then you are where He wants you. Stay there until He begins to make it clear to you that He wants you to move elsewhere. But by the same token:

c. it stands always ready to move (21-23) There is also the opposite tendency in us, to put down roots so deep that we're not ready to go on with God when He leads to some other step. When the cloud lifted they didn't drag their feet; they set out! When God makes it plain and confirms it that He wants you to change directions in the path of your life, whether it's in your job or where you live or work or in what you're doing with your life, then be ready to go.

That's a guided life, daily depending on God, staying when He says stay, even if He parks you at Marah where the waters are bitter and you don't like it, and going when He says go, even when you've been at Elim in the oasis of palm trees and you hate to leave. That makes your life His life or rather His life your life and that's what living is really all about.

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Problems: Wrong Desires Ch. 11

Chapter 10 of Numbers is a turning point. Up to that point God has had them sitting still at Mt. Sinai teaching them the principles for the life He has planned for them. In chapter 10 they organize and march out following the cloud, on their way to the promised land at last. But immediately in ch. 11 you are struck with this one thing: failure. And it's repeated every step along the way: failure, failure, failure... Most of the failures in chapters 10-21 arise simply from within themselves, from their own flesh, their own self-dominated lives. But if that's not bad enough, in chapters 22-25 they are led into failure and sin by external temptations.

I. The Principles For The Journey	1-9
II. The Problems Of The Journey	10-25
1. the works of the flesh	10-21
2. the works of the Enemy	22-25

There is a lot to be learned here in the wilderness journey. But before we look at it, let's turn to the New Testament and think about the source of:

I. Frustration In The Wilderness Life - Gal. 5:16-24 As I told you before, there is a wilderness life that is also led by Christians and the Israelites' wilderness life pictures it vividly and graphically for us. Let me point out three things about it:

1. the conflict of flesh and Spirit (17a) The NIV uses the words "sinful nature" to translate the Greek word *sarx* which is literally *flesh*, as it appears in the KJV. I don't care what you call it but it is that part of me which is self-centered and drives me toward sin. When I got saved God the Holy Spirit came to live in me, in my spirit, and my spirit was born again. But my flesh wasn't; it's still there. So there is this conflict going on inside of me; there's the Spirit and the new me, the new nature in me, wanting and desiring to obey and please God, but there's also this flesh of mine rearing its ugly head and trying to get its needs met apart from God. Isn't that what happened to Israel? They were walking along following God, wanting to obey Him, but every so often their selfish, wrong, human desires would pop up and rebel. And so you see:

2. the constant failure (17b) They end up failing and failing and failing God. They do not end up doing what they really want. And they had no choice because they were not individually regenerated as we are. The Holy Spirit did not personally indwell them. They lived under the principle of law which means: God commands; I try my best to do what He says, but the law is weak in that it gives me no power to obey and so flesh wins again and again. That's the difference between law and grace. Under grace, Christ came to live in us to not only make us want to please God, but to empower us to please God. Anyway, their wilderness walk was characterized by many of the things found in verses 19-21. And God literally didn't let them inherit His kingdom of Canaan; they died in the wilderness. But there are a lot of Christians living that try and fail, try and fail kind of life because they are trying to please God in the flesh and it doesn't work. What we need instead is:

3. the crucifixion of the flesh (24-25) And we have it! In the person of Jesus Christ, who by His cross not only removed the penalty of our sins but destroyed the power of sin over us so that we no longer have to live out of the motivating force of the flesh, we can live by the life-giving power of the Spirit through yielding ourselves fully to Him. And that will produce the promised life of victory, the Joshua life.

So with all that in mind let's examine the first flesh problem they faced in Num. 11:

II. Frustration In Marching: Wrong Desires (1-9) Read 1-6. It happened twice right at the beginning of the march. The trek was not easy. It was hot in the day and cold at night. There were no restaurants with a varied bill of fare to whet their appetites. There was monotony and fatigue. And they began to complain. So God started a fire in the camp and scared them a bit. But before long they were back to complaining again, this time even worse about their food supply! Can you imagine hundreds of people standing at the doors of their tents wailing out loud over the monotony of their diet? It's almost ridiculous to think of! Yet how many times do you hear Christians complaining about the difficulty of the life God has led them into? I was doing it myself the other day, wishing I had a 9-5 job at a computer, tired of the difficulty of dealing with people! But do you see where their problem came in?

1. forgetting the hardships of the world (1) Do you remember what it says about them in Egypt? They groaned under their taskmasters! How soon they forgot the whip and the lash and the brutality and cruelty and all their newborn babies that were thrown into the Nile! Sometimes we focus so much on the difficulty before us now that we forget how hard it was back there in the world without Christ. We forget what we were redeemed from. Listen, if you want to know hardship just turn your back on the Lord and live in the world for awhile. There's pain out there, misery, agony you can't imagine. But the flesh doesn't see it that way; it forgets. Christ's yoke is easy; don't forget that! But they were also:

2. remembering the delights of the world (4-5) Fish and onions and leeks and melons all tasted good. Some of the things out there in the world felt good and when the flesh doesn't like the way things are going now, it wants to feel good and so it remembers and longs for some of those delights that used to give it pleasure. The flesh has a selective memory. It erases the bad and remembers the good and pushes us to long for some of it. But along with that they were:

3. failing to appreciate the blessings of God (7-9) They were not unfed. They were not hungry. It was not as though God had provided for them. They had all they could eat. And it was not as though God had given them a supply of something that tasted like liver without onions. The manna was hard and they ground it into flour and prepared it in a variety of ways and it tasted good, like something made with olive oil. God was not mean to them, putting them on stale bread and water. And compare Ps. 78:23-31. Manna was the grain of heaven; it was the bread of angels. I guess that could mean that angels in heaven eat manna but I rather think the phrase refers to the miraculous manner in which they got it: it came down to them from heaven daily carried and distributed by the angels themselves. It was a daily miracle that had become mundane and unappreciated by them. So, in our flesh we can fail to appreciate God's daily blessings for us. But they had still another cause:

4. failing to separate from wrong company (4,10) When they came out of Egypt, some Egyptians converted out of fear and came along. They really didn't know the Lord and were the first to complain but soon, because of being around them, the Israelites began to complain and soon it was being done all over the camp. Wrong company had stirred up wrong desires. It still does. Satan uses wrong associations and wrong company to stir up the desires of the flesh against God. Now there's a second frustration here:

III. Frustration In Ministry: Wrong Dependence (10-25) The people were not the only ones frustrated by the hardship of the journey. Moses was too. Listen to him:

1. the frustration in ministry: why me? (10-13) Hear the key word? I, me... He has wrong desires too. He wants out! Serving God sometimes begins to appear just as hard as following Him. There are times in serving God when you feel just like Moses. But that reveals:

2. the failure in ministry: Me-dependence Who was Moses relying on to do the job? Himself! He was forgetting the power and presence of Almighty God to do the job just like the people were forgetting the provision of Almighty God for them. Moses had flesh too! Fortunately, he did not operate in this mode all the time. I may be wrong but I think this is the only place in the whole journey where he complained. But in dealing with his frustration, God demonstrated for us:

3. the foundations of ministry

a. the utter failure of my own strength (15) That's where God wanted Moses to end up, didn't He? "I am not capable; I have no power; I cannot be what you want me to be." And that's where God wants all of us to get to, to admit our failure, to admit that in our fleshly resources we cannot live the Canaan life and then to be:

b. drawing fully on the Spirit's power (17) God took the Spirit who was upon Moses and put Him also upon 70 of the elders. Now that teaches something about the principle of multiple leadership, but more importantly it reveals Moses' problem. At the very moment he was complaining, he was forgetting the Spirit who was upon him! He was not drawing upon the power of the Holy Spirit. However, from here on he did and so must we. Success in life or ministry is in drawing nothing from the strength of the flesh and living moment by moment in the Spirit's power. But the whole incident is not over yet. As you know, God sends them quail to eat. He gives them their desire but he also sends a plague and kills a number of them. That's what we're told in the closing section of the chapter and here I would like to make just points about the:

IV. Frustration Of Wrong Desires (26-35) What lessons are there in this for us about the problem of wrong desires in our lives?

1. the Spirit filling all (29) Moses spoke more than he knew in this verse. If every Israelite had the Holy Spirit, then they would have the possibility of victory over their wrong desires as he did. Isn't that what God has done for us? In the church every believer has the Holy Spirit and the potential to have a life filled and controlled by Him. And therefore these wilderness experiences are avoidable for us, if we will walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

2. the results of craving (33) If you give in to wrong desires, God may give them to you but along with them will come His discipline. Now compare Ps. 106:13-15. God gave them what they wanted but along with it came something else. The Hebrew says literally *a wasting of soul*. Now that could be a reference to the plague that came, but it is deliberately ambiguous and it can refer to *leanness of soul* as KJV puts it. You may get what the flesh wants but your soul, your spiritual life, will suffer for it. You can't have both the joys of heaven and the lusts of earth.

3. the graves of craving (34) The name is significant: *Kibroth Hataavah*. It means *the graves of craving*; it's the place where they buried the ones who lusted the most among them. In essence, it's where they as a nation buried their wrong desires, only in them it wasn't a permanent burial. In us it can be. We can have a Kibroth Hataavah, a place where we come to the Lord and confess the sinfulness of all our wrong desires and yield ourselves to the filling of the Spirit so that we walk in the Spirit and do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Wrong desires need to die. And that isn't only desires for things that are bad. Onions and leeks are not sinful. But anything outside of the will of God for you is bad and the desire for it is wrong and sinful and it needs to be buried. You can't do that but God can and He will if you let Him.

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Problems: Pride Chs. 12, 16-17

Well, no sooner had the graves been filled at Kibroth Hataavah and the camp moved to Hazeroth than the next flesh problem arose in the camp, the problem of pride. The flesh in man is proud! It is self-seeking, self-centered, self-exalting, and selfish! And I'm not just talking about someone else; I mean YOUR FLESH! You may appear to be the humblest of people but I can guarantee that if you give me a half-hour to fish a little and find the right button to push in your life, pride will come out. And if you're thinking "I am NOT proud", I've just found it! We all are! And just when you least expect it in living the Spirit-controlled, Christ-centered life, the flesh tries to rear its ugly head and pride comes out and it's always in relationship to other people. Since they describe virtually the same thing, we're going to look at:

I. Two Cases Of Pride The first is the story of:

1. Miriam's Resistance (ch. 12) Miriam led her brother Aaron in lodging a charge against Moses (the verb is feminine, *and she spoke*) and Aaron, follower that he was, went right along with her. Now note:

a. the charge: violating the ministry (1) Moses married a Cushite woman. The term *cushite* in this period is used to describe peoples that lived beyond Egypt in Ethiopia but also those in the direction of Arabia. This could mean that Moses took a new wife who was non-Israelite. If that is the case, neither she nor any children by her are ever mentioned. I rather think this was a reference to his current wife Zipporah who was a Midianite, not an Israelite. And I see the connection to chapter 11 this way. It was the mixed multitude, the non-Israelites in the camp, who had begun the complaining and led to the death of hundreds of people at Kibroth-Hataavah. Now here is Moses and he's married to one! So Miriam started speaking to the people about this and saying that Moses was not fit for his leadership position because of his union with a non-Israelite wife. They charged him with violating the qualifications of the ministry. But you can quickly see:

b. the intent: seeking the prophetic office (2) They wanted to share the prophetic office with Moses, to also speak for God to the people. Now don't forget one small fact; Moses is their baby brother! Miriam helped save his life when he was just a baby in the river. Aaron's the one who stayed in Egypt and endured 40 years of slavery while Moses was off tending sheep in Midian. They didn't think it was fair that Moses exercised the sole leadership of the people. After all, Miriam was a prophetess too according to Ex. 15:20 and Aaron had the Urim and Thummim in his ephod through which God spoke to the people. You see, it's pride, isn't it? It's not the marriage; it's pride.

c. the punishment: defilement (10,14-15) God sets the record straight and then strikes Miriam with leprosy and makes her sit unclean and defiled outside the camp for seven days. What a lesson! Here she was seeing herself high and lifted up and God saw her as a leprous, defiled woman, unfit to approach. Miriam's view must have changed because we never hear of her pulling this again. Let's hope she had a new attitude, one that said "There but for the grace of God I would sit, forever unclean!" Now let me just throw in a quick aside:

d. the allegory: Moses and Christ; Miriam and Israel Isn't this a spiritual picture of Israel and Christ? Check the book of Acts. Israel could not stand Christ and the Christian message. Why? Because Christ was busy taking to Himself a Gentile bride; Gentiles were coming to faith. So what happened? God set Israel aside outside His camp, leprous and defiled spiritually until the time is completed and one day He will cleanse her and call her back in! But now we're going to skip ahead to look at a second occurrence of this same problem:

2. Korah's Rebellion (ch. 16) Korah was a Levite of the clan of Kohath which carried the holy things. And he found three buddies by the name of Dathan, Abiram, and On who were Reubenites and together with them he got 250 of the leaders of the people to join his cause and led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Here is:

a. the charge: usurping the authority (3) "Moses and Aaron, you have taken unjust authority to yourself. You have no right to lord it over the rest of us this way. We are all holy; we are all God's people. We should all have a right to approach God in the same way you do." But Moses saw right through their pious-sounding speech to:

b. the intent: seeking the priestly office (8-11) Kohath was a Levite but he wanted to be a priest. He couldn't, because he wasn't of the line of Aaron. So he accused Moses and Aaron of making the whole thing up in order to set themselves up in superiority and preserve for themselves the right to approach God and thus impose their will on the people. Do you hear the pride? "I want what you have!" Well you know:

c. the punishment: death (31-35) God opened the ground and buried the leaders alive. Then He sent fire from heaven and burned the 250 to ashes. I think that says clearly that there is no room for pride in God's economy! So let's begin to make application and talk about:

II. The Manifestations of Pride Gal. 5:20 lists for us the works of the flesh and notice how many of them are simply manifestations of either the wrong desires of the flesh or of pride. Yet pride itself is not listed. Pride doesn't walk around with a sign on itself saying, "I am a self-loving, self-seeking, egotistical, proud, person". It comes out in the things you say and think. We have at least four manifestations of it right here in Numbers.

1. criticism of others' service (12:8b) God was upset that they would presume to speak against His servant. But isn't that how pride comes out in us? We talk about the way other Christians live and serve and criticize them. We say, "Why is so and so a teacher; he does this or that..." Jude 11 calls Korah's crime in the Greek, not *rebellion* but *antologeo*, that is, *speaking against*. Speaking against God's servants is a manifestation of pride. Compare Rom. 14:4,9-13. A servant gives account to His own master. We are to stop passing judgment on each other. Now that doesn't mean there isn't a place to lovingly correct a brother or sister; we're commanded to do that. It doesn't mean there isn't a place to discipline sin in a life. But Moses hadn't done anything wrong. This criticism arose out of pride. Most criticism does. How do you talk about others who are serving God? Do you speak against them regularly? If so, you're proud. Then pride goes a level deeper to:

2. coveting the office of others Both Miriam and Korah, as we saw, coveted the office held by Moses. They were jealous of the position that God had put Moses in. They saw how he was looked up to and listened to and how he had power from the hand of God. And they said, "I want some of that." Like Simon the Magician and Diotrephes in 3 John, they loved to have the preeminence, to be first. When you see someone God has on center stage at the moment, do you get jealous? It might be a lead role in a drama, a solo in the choir, the authority exercised by elders or the public ministry of a teacher or a pastor. Are you jealous that it's not you? Do you want it for yourself so you can be first instead of somebody else? That's pride. But it usually moves on one step further to:

3. claiming an office for self (16:10) Korah vocalized his pride, claiming that he had a right to be a priest as much as Aaron. Well, compare Heb. 5:4. Nobody can presume to be a priest; that is a calling given by God. Let me add to that. Nobody can presume the right to occupy any of God's offices. In the New Testament, offices like that of apostle, evangelist, pastor/teacher, missionary, elder, deacon, and so on are not offices of man but callings of God, callings that are recognized by God's work in the life and recognized by the believers in the local body. To try and make yourself what God has not called you to be so that you can have the preeminence is pride! You might say to yourself, "I have this qualification and that qualification, this experience and that experience; I should be this or that." That's the sin of Korah! And its end result is:

4. causing division in the body (16:2) That's how it works in the church. You begin to push yourself and gather a following and split the body. It's been done time after time. Two leaders disagree and one starts a campaign and leads off his followers. They had that problem in Corinth, compare 1 Cor. 1:10-12. The reason is in 3:3: carnality, living in the flesh instead of the Spirit. Pride promotes division in the body. What influence do you have on the body? Do you divide it? Do you separate brethren by what you say and do? Well, fortunately Moses was walking in the power of the spirit here and in Him we can see:

III. The Remedy for Pride - Gal. 5:22 The eighth fruit of the Spirit is gentleness, literally meekness, which is the biblical opposite of pride, a synonym for humility. It is a fruit of the Spirit, which means that the more you yield your life to the control of the Holy Spirit, the more He will produce it in you. In fact, you see in Moses:

1. a continual spirit of meekness (12:3) What a statement! Moses was the least presumptive, least self-seeking, least proud man on earth. That doesn't mean he had no spirit, no fire, no oomph. It means that the Holy Spirit had such a hold on his life that he never took or sought any of the credit for himself but gave it all to God. He never took anything upon himself and in fact, objected when God tried to give it to him! He simply obeyed God, knowing that everything in his life was all of God, not of him! That's how we need to live, to open our hearts and say, "Spirit of God, fill me with your meekness, your humility." The second thing you see in Moses is:

2. a constant praying for sinners (12:13, 16:22) Israel sinned and sinned and complained and complained but Moses prayed for them. He would never stand back and say "Lord, go ahead and give them what they deserve; teach them a lesson!" Instead he was ever ready to fall on his face and beg for mercy for them. It's so easy to criticize in return, but pray. When people oppose you and are jealous of you, pray for them, beg God for them. You can't be proud on your knees. Then the last thing you need is:

3. a conscious acceptance of God's calling You need to accept and be content with God's calling, first of all:

a. for you (16:9-10) Korah already had a precious and high privilege; he carried the holy things. But he could not accept anything except what looked to him like the top position. The thing he couldn't see is that in God's economy there are no top and bottom positions. 1 Cor. 12:18 says that God has arranged all the parts of the body just as He wanted them to be. Wherever God has put you is a precious and holy and privileged spot. Be content with it, accept it and do it well. But that means you also have to accept God's calling:

b. for others (17:1-10) God made it plain. He had them bring 12 rods and He made Aaron's dead stick bud and bring forth blossoms and bear ripe almonds overnight! He made it clear that Aaron hadn't chosen his own office, that he hadn't picked it for himself or usurped it; God had chosen him. Nobody questioned that ever again. That's how we have to see others. They are all God's servants; God has called them to the positions and offices they occupy. That is His business and there is no need to be jealous.

Pride is a deadly thing. Ask God to make you aware of it in your life. Ask Him to show it to you in your own heart. Ask Him to take it away and fill you with meekness.

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Problems: Unbelief Chs. 13-14

After some months, Israel finally arrives at their destination, a place called Kadesh Barnea, at the southern edge of the Promised Land. It is from here that they should have entered in to possess the land, to claim all the blessings that God had promised them. But instead they left this place turned 180 degrees in the opposite direction, heading south to the Red Sea. And what made the difference? Unbelief. They simply refused to believe God, even after He defeated Egypt before their eyes, and after all the miracles in the wilderness. They still refused to believe wholeheartedly in Him. And unbelief is another factor that keeps us from having the Spirit-controlled life of victory that God has promised us. You see, our flesh is not only full of wrong desires and pride; it is full of unbelief. The flesh does not believe God. It does not trust God. It trusts only what it can see for itself and then it is selective about it! Now in ch. 13 you can see:

I. The Roots of Unbelief (ch. 13) It is the story of a spy mission and at first it sounds very daring and intriguing. Twelve men are chosen out of the tribes to go up and spy out the land. For 40 days they roam its length and breadth and see what it is like. They come back safe and sound, carrying a cluster of grapes so big that they have to hang it on a pole between two men. Quite a story but let's look more closely at:

1. the sending of the spies (1-20) *READ 1-3.* It sounds like a prudent idea: check out the land first, prepare well. Indeed it is a command of God. But what we don't see at first glance is that:

a. it originated in unbelief - Deut. 1:19-23 Here's the fuller story. When they got to Kadesh Barnea, Moses said, "Come on, let's go take the land, we're here. God will give it to us as He said." It was the people who said, "Let's send spies first!" What did they need spies for? They had just trekked through miles and miles of deserted wilderness, not having any road map, any idea where they were going next. They just followed the cloud. Why did they have to know what lay in Canaan? Why not just follow the cloud to the next spot and begin to take it step by step at God's direction? There's unbelief creeping in, unwillingness to simply trust God, under the guise of planning ahead. Now understand this: there's nothing wrong with planning ahead, with checking out the turf. After all, in the end God sent the spies. But their response to the spies' report makes it clear what was in their heart. They didn't want to know how; they wanted to know whether or not to go! And that's unbelief! So:

b. it became a test Much like when the people asked for a king and God said, "OK, give them a king; they'll regret it." So God said to Moses, "Send the spies. To you it's a good idea but we will see whether they will believe ME!"

The spy mission became a test to draw out the unbelief and rejection of God in the people and it did just that after they heard:

2. the reporting of the spies (21-33) First of all, I want you to notice:

a. what they saw They saw 2 things at the same time:

(1) the goodness of the land (27) It was a good land. It was everything God said it would be. It was a bountiful and plentiful land, a land of good harvests. And that filled them with joy, but they also saw:

(2) the size of its inhabitants (28-29) There was a race of very tall people living in some of the hill country at that time, called the Anakim. They saw cities fortified with high walls. They saw the seven nations of Canaan living all through the land. They would have to fight for every inch of it and that filled them with fear. But the real problem was not WHAT they saw, but rather:

b. how they saw

(1) two saw the eternal things (30) Caleb and Joshua were men of faith. They said, "We can do it; we are well able to do it because we have the Lord on our side. He is bigger than any Anakim giant, higher than any Canaanite wall." That's the reasoning of faith. Faith looks at the problem next to God and says, "no problem". But:

(2) ten saw the temporal things (31) They said, "We can't do it; they're stronger than we are." That's the reasoning of unbelief. Unbelief looks at the problem next to myself and my resources and says, "big problem". Let me take you to the New Testament. Compare 2 Cor. 4:18. Here is the remedy for unbelief. Here's the way to keep the unbelief of your flesh from creeping in and ruining you. Fix your eyes on the unseen things, the eternal things. They are the true realities. That's what we're told Moses did, compare Heb. 11:27. He endured; He was not afraid when He left Egypt because He fixed His eyes on what eyes can't see, on God! And that's the test for you. Are you willing to obey God and do what He tells you, no matter what circumstances look like? Do you trust Him enough to do His will without having to see for yourself that you have everything you need to carry it out? And let me clarify this: faith is not deciding to trust God for something big; faith is obeying God when He asks you to do something big. There's a difference. Faith is looking to do God's will and trusting Him no matter what! Now in chapter 14 we have:

II. The Results of Unbelief (ch. 14) There were two of them; the first is:

1. rebellion against God's direction That's what Israel did when the spies gave their report. Unbelief took hold and they ended up in rebellion, not once but twice. First it was:

a. not doing what He has commanded (1-10) READ 1-4. They refused to go up to conquer the land as God had commanded. They refused to do His will, even though it was for their benefit and blessing. And when we don't believe God, we end up saying "NO" to what He wants us to do. What things are there in your life that you know God wants you to do but you're refusing and you know it? That's not stubbornness; it's unbelief! You're failing to believe God! But it can also happen in reverse by:

b. doing what He has forbidden (39-45) Now, because they got scared after God killed the ten unbelieving spies, they were ready to go up. However, now God had said, "Don't go; turn around and go the other way." But again they wouldn't listen. Unbelief can manifest itself in continuing to do what God has forbidden. What is there in your life that you are doing that you know God doesn't want? That's not stubbornness; it's not room for maturing; it's unbelief! And the really sad part about unbelief is that it leads to a consequence:

2. failure to enter God's rest (20-38) READ 28-35 God gave them their grumbled wish; all of them died in the desert. Every last man of that generation died, though they were forgiven as we'll see. The New Testament has another term to describe it. Compare Heb. 3:12, 16-19. They failed to enter His rest. God wanted to bring them into the land to give them, not conflict, but REST! Rest from their slavery, rest from their journeying, from their wilderness life, but unbelief kept them out. This is not talking about salvation. Their sin was forgiven, but they never experienced on earth the life of rest in His completed work that He had for them. And that's the worst thing about unbelief for us. God has for us a Canaan life, a life of rest, a life that knows only victory. But when we persist in unbelief we fail to enter it. When we keep looking at the circumstances instead of God, we fail to know the rest. When we refuse to do what He has commanded or refuse to stop what He has forbidden, we fail to know the rest. Instead, we know the wilderness life of struggle and failure and striving and trying and failing again. Let's not follow their example, rather let's follow:

III. The Example of Belief (14:11-19) READ 11-12. In the middle of all this, God gave Moses a test as well. He offered to destroy Israel and build a nation out of Moses. Now He couldn't do that; He had promises that related to each of the 12 tribes and it was already promised that Messiah would come out of Judah. To keep His word, He couldn't destroy them and start over, but it was tempting to a mere human. The thought of becoming another Abraham, of becoming the progenitor of the chosen people, was a tempting thing to the old flesh ego. Unbelief would have grabbed at it, ignoring what God had said earlier. But Moses was a man of faith:

1. He sought God's glory (13-16) He didn't want any of the credit or glory for himself. He was concerned about God's glory. And folks, I don't believe this was a put on argument, like he had to fish around and find some selfish reason to convince God not to do it. He really was concerned for God's glory. "What will the world think, Lord? What will the Egyptians and the Canaanites say? I can't stand the thought of your glory being tarnished!" That's the heart full of faith, centered on the living God. But notice also that:

2. He stood on God's promise (17-19) He prayed for and indeed claimed forgiveness for the people. Compare Ex. 34:5-7. Moses never forgot that day when God's glory passed by him. He remembered what God had proclaimed about His nature that He was loving and compassionate and forgiving. And he reminded God of His own Word; he stood on it and claimed forgiveness for unbelieving Israel!

Oh, if only Israel had that heart of belief! If only they could have simply believed God when He said, "Go up and take the land; it is yours!" If only we could believe God and stand upon His word and seek His glory alone, instead of seeking our own selfish interests and worrying about our own hides! The warning of Hebrews stands clear: beware lest there be found in any of us a heart of unbelief like theirs and we fail to enter into the life of rest God has for us!

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Problems: Willful Disobedience 15:30-41

The next wilderness problem we encounter in the Book of Numbers after wrong desires, pride, and unbelief comes at the end of ch. 15. It is the problem of deliberate willful disobedience. Now we understand the concept of falling into sin and it happens to all of us. We understand how we end up disobeying God through our wrong desires and pride and unbelief. We relate well to Moses getting angry and striking the rock or the people becoming afraid and refusing to go up or to David and Bathsheba. But what about those cases where a person, who to every appearance is a believer, just deliberately and cold-bloodedly decides to act as though God and everything He stands for doesn't exist? Well, let's look at:

I. The Principle of Disobedience (30-31) The whole chapter up to this point is about offerings and sacrifices which the Israelites are to begin to offer once they reach the land of Canaan. These two verses stand in stark contrast to the whole rest of the chapter as a dire warning of:

1. the danger of disobedience And the warning that is being given is this:

a. there is a sacrifice for sins of error (28-29) The word *unintentional* might be translated in error. There is a sacrifice for sins which are fallen into by temptation, for sins which are done without realizing they were wrong, for sins which may be deliberate but are not defiant, over which there is a sense of guilt and wrongness. But notice:

b. there is no sacrifice for high-handed sins That is the literal translation of *defiant*. The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt with a "high hand", that is, demonstrating His superior power and authority to Egypt and its gods. And a person can act that way toward God, high-handedly, showing no regard for God or His laws, acting as though they are the supreme being of the universe and God is somebody who has to reckon with them! Now here's:

2. the reason it is serious Notice three descriptions of it here:

a. it is despising the Lord's Word It is treating what God says as a thing of no consequence. It's like when a teacher tells a child to do an assignment and they ignore it and don't do it because they simply take the teacher's word lightly. Well, the reason you despise the Lord's word is:

b. it is defying the Lord's authority When you break His commands deliberately, you defy His authority over you. You shake your fist at Him and say, "You have no authority over me!" And so ultimately:

c. it is blaspheming the Lord It is an offense against His person. It is setting yourself up to be God and casting God down from His throne in your eyes. And so:

3. the penalty: death You were sentenced to die and you remained guilty. No sacrifice could atone for that. When you reject God and His authority over you, then you also reject atonement, His need or ability to forgive you. There is nothing left but to die under His wrath. Now let's look at:

4. the New Testament analogy: Heb. 10:26-31 This passage seems to be drawn right out of Israel's experiences, doesn't it? When I read passages like this, I don't know about you, but I come with a handicap. I believe strongly in the doctrine of eternal security of the believer. A saved person can't be lost. That is taught everywhere in the New Testament. But then you come to passages like this one which at first glance seem to say the opposite. What it's really saying is this:

a. deliberate sin is evidence of lostness He is not talking here about Christians falling into temptation or doing any of the things that the Corinthian church got into. He is talking about people who seem to have faith in Christ throwing it away under pressure, giving up their faith in Christ, going back to their former beliefs and lifestyles,

apostasizing, if you will. The ability to trample on the Son of God, to count His blood shed on the cross as nothing and high-handedly sin without hesitation or remorse is indication that a person is lost, that they are not really regenerate, not really born again. Oh, God may have worked with him; he may have a profession of faith, have become part of the church, but he is lost. Jesus talked about this. He said there would be those shallow soil types who would start out looking like genuine believers but later when trouble came, like it had for the people in Hebrews, they would fall away. They had no root. They were not really in Him. He talked about the vine which had some dead branches on it that were pruned and cast into the fire because they were not connected with Him. Yet they looked like branches. He even said, *Have not I chosen you 12 and one of you is a devil?* Judas, it says, *went to his own place*. He looked to all appearances like any other disciple, yet in the crux it was shown that he never really did belong to Christ. You see, a believer can fall into sin and loathe it but he can never live in sin and love it! If he can sin in high-handed fashion like that he is none of His! And so:

b. deliberate sin leads to final judgment If the sacrifice of Christ is not being counted on to save, then what sacrifice is left? None! There is only wrath and judgment. And if a man who deliberately ignored and broke Moses' law died without mercy at the hands of the community, what do you think God will do to those who trample on the blood of His Son knowingly? The Lord does judge His people and sort out from among them those who are not really His, who are really His enemies. And there is a terrible judgment waiting for them. So:

c. this is a dire warning (23, 25, 35, 39) Now note verse 39. He doesn't say that these people had already done it, that they had sinned in such a way as to prove they were lost. He said the opposite, that they hadn't, but he was warning them against it. The evidence of true faith is continuation and that evidence is being written every day as we continue to love and serve Him. Yet every one of us can heed the warning to be sure of ourselves, to be sure that we really are in Christ and He in us, to hold fast to Him and not throw away that which we are trusting in. It has happened to more than one person whom you would have thought was securely in Christ! Now right after his statements on disobedience, Moses gives:

II. The Illustration of Disobedience (32-36) They catch a man out in the wilderness one day gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. The reason I believe Moses mentions it is because it's a direct example of the kind of sin he's been talking about, high-handed willful sin.

1. the problem examined (32-34) Now there were some specific instructions given from the very first about the Sabbath Day. Compare Ex. 31:12-15, 35:1-3. Why then was it not clear what should be done? Well, there are 2 possible reasons. First, it is not stated when this occurred. Moses may be relating something that had happened earlier on the trip to Mt. Sinai before the penalty for Sabbath-breaking had been given. That actually seems to make the most sense. Otherwise, they might have been unsure as to whether gathering sticks to make a fire constituted actual work, since he hadn't actually broken the prohibition we read about lighting a fire. At any rate here was a man who after clear warning decided to ignore it and sin high-handedly against God. And so we have:

2. the principle enacted (35) God identifies it as a high-handed sin and says "stone him". It may seem to us a small offense for such a harsh punishment, but you must remember it was an act of defiance against Almighty God who had given Israel the Sabbath as a special covenant sign of His favor. It was akin to trampling underfoot the blood of the Son of God! It is not the size of the sin we commit in our eyes but the sin in our heart which God condemns! And so you have:

3. the penalty administered (36) He was stoned to death and removed from among God's people, shown clearly for what he was. Now what may be of more interest to us is:

III. The Prevention of Disobedience (37-41) God gave Israel a visual reminder to help them understand and remember the importance of obedience:

1. their reminder: the blue cords and tassels On the borders of their garments they were to put blue cords with little tassels or petals on them. The blue signified heaven and the sight of them was to be a reminder that they were heavenly people and should live in obedience to the laws of God from heaven. The Pharisees managed to abuse this for the New Testament says they enlarged the borders of their garments. They wanted everybody to know just how "heavenly" they were, how much regard they had for the law, but it was all a show, a pretext. Well, we don't have to wear tassels anymore but we do have:

2. our reminder: the Word of God In those days, not everyone could have their own scroll of the law to read. So God gave a visual reminder to help think of the law and its commands. We have the higher privilege of having His actual Word in written form as our preventative! Somebody said, "Sin will keep you from this Book; but this Book will keep you from sin". Want to be sure of your salvation? Want to be sure you are not of those who will draw back in the crunch? Want to be sure you're not really a Judas in disciple's clothing? Stay in the Book!

Just as total disregard for God's commands signifies blasphemy against Him, so a love for His Word, is born out of a love for Him who wrote it. Jn. 14:21, 24 says, *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me...He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.* You don't obey to save yourself, but if you love Him you will obey, and you'll love His Word, and you will not be of those who shrink back to destruction.

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Problems: Anger Chs. 20-21

After some years of wandering, Israel meandered back to Kadesh on the southern border of the promised land and from there set out to the south to make a detour out around Edom and approach Canaan from the east side across Jordan. It was during this time that another flesh problem surfaced and was dealt with: ANGER. Compare Gal. 5:20. The NIV *fits of rage* is literally *passionate angers* and is plural. Actually the NIV is probably a good translation. It's not talking about righteous anger or any such thing here, though the same word is used to describe the wrath of God in many passages. What's in view here is the kind of anger we'd describe as the loss of temper, where there's impatience and then quarreling. One of the marks of spiritual maturity and qualifications for eldership in Titus 1 is that a person is "not quick-tempered". We are exhorted to be "slow to anger" in James 1:19. This flared-up kind of anger is a work of the flesh in us and it keeps us from the promised kind of life God has for us. Now in the two chapters before us we have:

I. Four Cases of Anger The first is:

1. anger at those trying to help you (20:2-5) Now consider this for a minute. Moses and Aaron have done nothing all along but help the people. They risked their lives in going in to Pharaoh. They were used of God to deliver the people from an intolerable life of slavery in Egypt where their own children were being killed. Every time Israel sinned, Moses fell on his face before God to beg for their forgiveness. He even offered to trade his own salvation for theirs! All the way along Moses and Aaron have done nothing but care for these people, yet now when things are a little difficult and discouraging, they get the blame. The people become angry at them and blame them! Isn't that true human nature? Don't we do the same? Aren't we ready to flare up at those who love and help us and blame them for our problems? It happens in our families; it happens in our church family. And it's just the old flesh flaring up!

2. anger at those you help (20:9-11) The people weren't the only ones who got angry. Moses, who's been a real model of virtue most of the time, got angry at them. I guess it wore him down, their constant complaining and griping, and he spoke to them in anger and struck the rock in his anger, even though he was commanded to speak to it. Compare Ps. 106:32-33. Moses spoke rashly. He was angry, angry at the very ones he loved and had been helping all along. Now I think we can easily understand his anger. In fact, we probably marvel at the fact that it didn't happen sooner. But you can't get around the fact that this was a sinful type of anger. And don't we experience it too? Don't we get angry at those we love and those we help and minister to when they don't respond, when they fail to appreciate us, or when they fail to follow the Lord the way they should?

3. anger at God (21:4-5) Now they were on the way out around Edom and the same old thing happened again. But you'll notice this time it doesn't just say that they were angry with Moses. They grew impatient because their circumstances were difficult and spoke against God. They blamed God for allowing all their troubles to come upon them and became angry at Him. That's in us too, isn't it? Sometimes when illness comes or financial upset or tragedy or death in our lives, we get angry too. The struggle wears us down and we get mad at God for allowing and sending these things. Now I've always said, "If you're angry at God, tell Him; He's big enough to handle it." But in case I've said it to any of you, I don't mean that it's a right attitude to have. Telling Him is just being honest and if you go to Him with your anger, it won't be long before you find yourself not angry anymore and asking forgiveness. Anger at God is another work of the flesh; it wants nothing to do with God in the first place and so becomes easily angry at Him. But we can't forget to think about:

4. the anger of God (21:6) In the first incident, the people were not punished, possibly because of Moses' failure. God in grace provided water for them. This time, however God sent snakes among them and many died. Why? Compare Ps. 106:32. God was angry with them both at Meribah and, no doubt, here. God has an anger too, but it is not an unrighteous flaring of temper. It is a holy wrath against sin. It is that same holy wrath that was vented upon Christ on the cross on our behalf. It is the same holy wrath that will be poured out upon the earth in the Tribulation Period. It is the just reaction of the holiness of God against the awfulness of sin. So let's see a difference between His anger and ours. Ours is usually of the flesh and self-centered. His is righteous and holy. That's how ours must become if it is to be legitimate!

Now let's take a moment to talk about:

II. The Nature of Anger There are some important facts in these two incidents that we don't want to miss:

1. difficulty is God's "testing" us - Ps. 81:7 He was testing them there at Meribah. You see, they had been in that position before of having no water and God proved to them He could provide. They had no reason to complain. They needed only faith to ask and to trust God to meet their needs. And difficulty serves that same kind of purpose in our

lives. Through it God tests our faith and through it produces perseverance and then character and then hope according to Romans 5. Difficulty is a "proving ground" where the reality of our faith is tested and made sure. Anger is a failing of the test. Paul says he learned the secret of being content in any circumstance in Phil. 4:13, drawing on the strength of Christ. Anger is the opposite of trusting in Christ's sufficiency. But more than that:

2. angry reaction is our "testing" God - 1 Cor. 10:9 He not only tested them but, by being angry at Him, they were "testing" Him. Remember when Satan tried to get Jesus to jump off the Temple and let the angels catch him? Jesus said that would be "testing" or "tempting" God. What does that mean? It is true that angels did protect Jesus and minister to Him and had He fallen off the temple they would no doubt have caught Him. So why not jump? Because jumping deliberately carries an attitude, an attitude of rebellion, an attitude of self-centeredness and wanting to force God into doing what I want. Israel knew full well God could and would provide for them. He'd been doing it daily. Their anger was testing God, demanding of Him that He do something for them, something they wanted. And when we go angrily to God, isn't that what we really want, for the Eternal to bend to our mortal wishes? It's the old ploy, "If you really loved me, you'd do this..." If we look a little more carefully we can see just what is so bad about this kind of anger. Compare Num. 20:12. The flaring up of anger indicates two things:

a. it is a failed loyalty to God It indicates a lack of trust in Him, a kind of conditional loyalty that says, "Lord, I'll love you as long as you..." Compare Deut. 32:50-51. The NIV says they *broke faith*. The Hebrew says they *sinned* and the word for sin here means "to act treacherously; to be a traitor". This kind of anger is failure in our loyalty to Him. But it is more:

b. it is a flawed testimony to others - Num. 27:14 They failed to regard the holiness of God before the eyes of the people. They acted just like the people did instead of representing God to the people. Anger flaws your testimony, ruins it! One good flare-up can undo years of relationship building; it will cause people to think you're a fake and a phony. It's a miserable testimony that has to be remedied. But how? Well, we also have here:

III. Two Remedies For Anger The first you might call:

1. speaking to the Rock (20:6-8) God told them to give an example to the people of what they needed to do, speak to the rock. How many times do we read in the Psalms and in worship passages, "The Lord is my Rock". Well, in this case we know certainly:

a. the Rock is a type of Christ - 1 Cor. 10:3-4 Now this does not literally mean that that physical rock followed them around the desert giving them water and Christ was hiding inside it. No, that rock was to them a visual reminder of another rock, the one Moses had struck when they first came out of Egypt and God had brought forth water out of the rock. And that was a reminder that they had a greater ROCK, the Lord. Paul is telling us that the pre-incarnate presence of Christ was with them everywhere they went. Christ, their provider, their supplier, their rock, was with them. And:

b. speaking is a type of prayer People make a big deal of the fact that Moses struck the rock twice instead of once. That's not the point. He was not to strike it at all. God had already struck the rock; all that was needed now was to speak to it. So Christ has already been struck on the cross once and for all for us. All we need to do now when in difficulty is to speak to Him and that's:

c. the point: seeking God's power against anger Moses and Aaron did the right thing. When the people were angry at them the first time they came and spoke to the Rock; they fell on their faces before God! When anger welled up within them later they should have done the same. When we sense ourselves becoming angry and about to lose it, we have a Rock to speak to; we have a Savior from whom flow rivers of living water, the Holy Spirit who has the power to control even this. When you start to feel anger, stop and pray. Call out to God for His power so that you might not betray Him and flaw your testimony. But there's a second action here:

2. looking to the Cross (21:7-9) When the people were dying of the snake bites, God had Moses make a bronze serpent and suspend it on a pole. Now we know:

a. the Snake is a type of the cross - Jn. 3:14-15 Jesus said that the snake on the pole was a picture of Him being lifted up on the cross. And therefore:

b. looking is a type of faith The Israelite had to look. The New Testament person has to believe. Looking is believing. It is trusting in the one hanging there to save you. You see, verse 7 tells us that when the snakes came, the people realized the sinfulness of their anger. They knew it required forgiveness. How could they get forgiveness? By looking to the snake, by trusting that through the snake on the pole God would forgive them and they would be made whole. So by looking to Christ, we trust that in Him we find forgiveness for sin because of His death on the cross. Now here's:

c. the point: seeking God's forgiveness for anger We not only need God's power against anger, but His forgiveness for wrong anger. And it is always there. We can come to Him saying "Lord, it was wrong to be angry; I've

sinned against you and given a bad testimony. I need your forgiveness." And when we do, the forgiveness is already there because of what Jesus has done for us at the cross!

My friend, how are you dealing with your anger? Do you just excuse yourself by saying "Well, I'm just a hot-tempered person" and keep on blowing up?" Or do you speak to God and ask for His power to conquer it and when you fail, do you ask His forgiveness? Make no mistake, failing to deal with anger will keep you in the wilderness life. You must deal with it in order to reach the promised life, the life of the Spirit instead of the flesh, that God has for you.

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Journey Problems: Works of the Enemy Chs. 22-25

There is more than just our flesh that works to keep us in the wilderness life and to keep us from the life of victory that God has promised us. At the same time that internally our flesh is striving to keep us from yielding our lives to the Spirit of God, we have an outside enemy with the same goal. Satan himself is the sworn enemy of God's people and is committed to preventing them from living the kind of life they were saved for. In chapters 11-21 of Numbers we've been examining the works of the flesh as they manifested themselves in Israel's national life and kept her in the wilderness. Now in chapters 22-25 we can see the works of the enemy pitted against her. Now the principle character we meet here is:

I. The Enemy's Man: Balaam (22:1-8) Israel has traveled out around Edom, has met resistance from Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan and conquered them. Now they have come into the plains next to the Jordan River across from Jericho in the land of Moab. The Moabites and the Midianites were confederate with each other and plenty worried about Israel. So the king of Moab, Balak, decides to send for a prophet he knows by the name of Balaam who lives more than 300 miles to the northeast in the Euphrates River Valley to come and curse Israel so he can defeat them. Just who was this man, anyway?

1. he was a pagan prophet We usually think of him as a genuine prophet of the Lord. But the evidence rather suggests that he was a pagan prophet. He lived hundreds of miles away from the land of Canaan where God had been revealing Himself over the last 500-600 years. Now there probably were believers at Haran in Syria left over from Abraham's brother's family and there were some in Midian where Moses spent 40 years with his father-in-law Jethro the priest. The name of the Lord was not unknown in these regions. Yet Balaam was literally in the "land of the sons of his people". He was native to that region and a descendant not of any of the lines connected with Abraham, but of the Syrians or Amorites inhabiting that area who were rank pagans. Further, we know that:

2. he practiced divination - Josh. 13:22 calls him a diviner. A diviner is one who tried to know the future in advance by examining the entrails of animal sacrifices, etc. Deut. 18:10-14 lists divination as a pagan occult practice and says that anyone who does it is an abomination to the Lord and should not live. A vast number of clay tablets were found at a place called Mari on the Euphrates in 1933 and they tell of a complex cult of prophets and seers just like Balaam who lived there. The Lord was not his God; He was the god of the people Balaam was to curse. And everyone knew in that day that a people's own gods had the most power over them. If Israel's God Jehovah had brought them out of Egypt and given them such victory, then He was the one by whom they would have to be cursed. The place he first went up to to curse Israel was Bamoth Baal, a high place dedicated to the worship of Baal. The altars and sacrifices he commanded were not the sacrifices of Israel but the pagan attempt to appease God and divine the future.

3. his motive was greed and everybody knew it. Balak sure did. And even though he seems so righteous in this account saying, "I can only say what God tells me", the only reason he even desired to go in the first place was for the money. That's why God was so mad at him and you have the story of the talking donkey. He wanted God to change His mind about going; he hoped by constant approach to get Him to change His mind about cursing Israel so he could get rich. Compare Jude 11, 2 Pet. 2:15-16. God spoke through a greedy pagan prophet to accomplish His purpose!

4. his heart was against God's people - Josh. 24:9-10 God refused to listen to him. Remember how Balaam set up all those altars and then went off by himself to pray. No doubt in those times he was doing his pagan thing, invoking the God of Israel to curse them, desperately trying to do what Balak wanted. But God refused to listen to him and made him speak blessings instead! There is no question that he was a man empowered of the Enemy to be used against Israel. Now let's step back and look more generally at:

II. The Enemy's Tactics When Satan opposes God's people he has many schemes to do it. But three major ones show up here:

1. opposition (21:21-35; 22:2-3,6) He tried a direct attack on God's people through Sihon and Og in chapter 21. They came out to fight. Balak himself wanted to attack Israel but was too frightened by her previous victories and the number of her people. Sometimes Satan will attack us directly. He will try to injure or hurt or even kill us. He is our sworn enemy and hates us. But for each of Satan's tactics God has a remedy. In the case of opposition the remedy is **God's protection of His people (21:34)**. God protected them during attack and gave them victory instead. Note it was not Israel's superior fighting ability. Their hands had not been trained for war. They were former slaves who'd been wander-

ing in the desert for 40 years. God handed over Sihon and Og. God supernaturally protects His own. Oh if we only had eyes to see how often and in what ways He does it! But these chapters are mainly about his second tactic:

2. accusation (chs. 22-24) That's where Balaam comes in. His function is to arouse the God of Israel against His own people. Look at:

a. the ruse (22:6) "Come curse them for me..." Compare Rev. 12:12. That is Satan's function. He accuses God's people before God constantly. He tried to do it with Job and you can be sure he's also doing it with you. But these chapters teach us that God has a remedy for that attack too:

b. the remedy: God's vision of His people (24:2-4) God doesn't see with human eyes. He doesn't see us, His people, from an earthly point of view. He sees us from the Divine point of view. You see, when He deals with us, He speaks to us clearly about what we are and our behavior and all that. But when He deals with the enemy, He sees us as we are made in Jesus Christ! The four visions that God gave Balaam are not the miserable day-to-day wilderness view of Israel's failures which were no doubt continuing even as the prophecies were uttered; they are God's view of His own people. Pagan Balaam's eyes have been opened to see as God sees and here's what He sees:

(1) their specialness (23:9-10) God says they are set apart. They are unlike any of the other peoples on earth. They are peculiar and special. They are the righteous and Balaam wishes he were one of them! We are God's chosen, peculiar people as believers. He doesn't see us like the rest of the world, lost sinners. He sees us as His own.

(2) their spotlessness (23:21-23) God does not behold their sins, doesn't see them as sinners. He sees them as righteous, justified. That's how He sees us! We are pure and holy and blameless in Jesus Christ. We are made the righteousness of God in Him.

(3) their sublimeness (24:5-7) He sees Israel as beautiful and orderly and bounteous. The whole message of the Song of Solomon is that Christ sees His bride as beautiful and altogether lovely! To Him she is sublime, the desire of His heart. That is how God sees us in Christ!

(4) their supremeness (24:17-19) There's a Star, a King, going to come out of Israel who will crush Moab some day and all the other surrounding nations. Of course, we know that as a reference to Christ and His return in glory and then His people shall reign supreme with Him. Not only will Israel be the ruling center of the world, but the church will reign with Him. His people are rulers, supreme, reigning with Him forever and ever! That's how God sees us. No accusation can stand against us. Satan cannot accuse us before Him because He sees us in Christ.

3. seduction (ch. 25) Here is Satan's third major tactic. When Satan could not attack them directly, nor accuse them before God and move God against them, he sought to deceive them and seduce them into sin so that God would have to discipline them! Here you have:

a. the ruin of Israel (1-3) Now they stayed there awhile and the young men began to check out the local women and vice versa. They began to invite them to their Baal worship. And the reason that worked was simple; Baal worship was a fertility cult and the worship involved sexual relations. The men were quick to fall for this open invitation to immorality, even if it meant bowing down to a statue a little bit to enjoy it. But why did this really come about? Here's:

b. the reason (31:16, 8) Balaam went home but he just couldn't stand the loss of that reward. He had figured out the one thing that would arouse God against Israel, idolatry, and he must have come back to tell Balak and get his reward because he was killed by the Israelites along with the Midianites. Lest you doubt that, compare Rev. 2:14. He deliberately taught the Moabites how to lure the Israelites astray and bring judgment on them. That's Satan; he knows that he cannot get God to abandon us and cut off our salvation. We are chosen and secure. But he also knows that if he can seduce us into sin that he can ruin our testimony and our service and bring discipline upon us. And yet God has:

c. the remedy: God's discipline of His people (4-5,9) God brought a severe measure of discipline so that long afterward His people would remember Peor and stay clear of that sin. God uses His judgment on His people as a means of discipline to turn their hearts back to Him and solidify them. Compare 1 Cor. 11:32. God disciplines us for our ultimate good and Satan's purpose is nullified. But rather than waiting for discipline, the real remedy is in v. 31. Be awake and aware. Watch out for that seduction. And when you find yourself starting to fall into sin, judge yourself; put a stop to it on your own so that God doesn't have to discipline you.

Make no mistake about it. Satan is out there like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour and that someone is you. You need to be careful, constantly vigilant. But remember you also have a Father who protects you and in whose eyes you are a great treasure. And that knowledge will help to propel you out of the wilderness and on to the promised life.

NUMBERS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LIFE

Prerequisites For Promised Life Chs. 26-36

Tonite we're going to finish out the Book of Numbers. I must admit I don't think I've ever tried to cover 11 chapters in one message before, but I think we can do it because these chapters form a new and separate portion of the book.

- I. The Principles For The Journey** **1-9**
- II. The Problems Of The Journey** **10-25**
- III. The Prerequisites For The Entry** **26-36**

You see, the journey's over now. Israel is camped on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River ready to go into the land. 40 years of wilderness are already past. But God still has some things to say to them before they are ready to enter the Promised Land and live the Promised Life. These chapters are either instructions for when they enter the land or the taking care of yet unresolved matters before entering. So in a sense they form the preparations or the prerequisites for Israel to enter the land. The actual content of much of them is "boring" to us, lists of numbers and places and boundary lines and offerings, etc. But spiritually speaking, these chapters display to us the things that we must have in our experience before we can move out of living the wilderness life, the carnal life of a Christian who lives a self-centered, flesh-motivated, Romans 7 kind of life, and move into the promised life of victory in the power of the Holy Spirit. Now the first thing we need is:

I. An Experiential Death (Ch. 26) This chapter is the record of the second numbering of the people. In chapter 1 the fighting men were counted and found to number 603,550. Now after 40 yrs., verse 51 says there were 601,730, a difference of only 1820 that is almost insignificant. But why is that worth noting?

1. they experienced death in the wilderness (63-64) Get the picture. Every single male Israelite over 20 died in the wilderness. Yet the numbers are practically the same. The Israel that stood ready to go in was a brand new Israel. The old Israel had died in the wilderness, that unbelieving Israel, the one fraught with wrong desires and works of the flesh. Now follow me closely. 1 Cor. 10 says that the crossing of the Red Sea was Israel's baptism. Just like our baptism, it pictured that they were no longer the slaves of Egypt, but God's own people. What they were had been buried and left behind. They were a new people, the people of God. But that fact took time to work itself out in their experience. Their dying to sin and self, while accomplished at the beginning, took 40 years to work out in their experience of wilderness life. For us too, this is true. We died with Christ. The old man was put off and we were transformed at the moment we received Him. But that death must be made real in our experience so that:

2. we must live as those who have died - Rom. 6:8-13 You see, the fact of our death to sin is true but the reckoning of it is an ongoing process. Learning to count myself as being dead to sin and to yield myself completely to the Spirit and to face life that way may take a long while to happen on a constant basis in our experience. But it's necessary. The spiritual life cannot be lived by someone who's dead but doesn't know it and doesn't act like it! That death must become real in our experience.

II. A Changed Allegiance (27:12-23) Here God tells Moses it's time to die and appoints Joshua as the new leader. So the point is:

1. they now followed Joshua, not Moses (18-21) There's a beautiful truth hidden here. Moses stands for the Law; his very name is synonymous with it. Joshua, however is essentially the Hebrew form of the name Jesus and is what our Jewish believer brethren call Him, *Yeshua*, which means Jehovah is salvation. Now they would no longer follow Moses, because Moses was removed; now they would give their full allegiance to following Joshua. This is a type of the fact that:

2. we must live by grace not law - Rom. 6:14 In the wilderness we live by law; we try in the flesh to please God and live the Christian life by keeping a bunch of rules. And we fail and fail and fail. That doesn't work in Canaan. In Canaan you give your full allegiance to following our Joshua; you live by grace, allowing His power and His spirit to control your life so His life is lived out through you. You have a changed allegiance; your life is not law; it is Jesus!

III. A Constant Dependence (Chs. 28-29) These two chapters describe the regular offerings according to the calendar. 28:3 describes the daily sacrifice, vs. 9 the weekly, vs. 11 the monthly, and verse 16 on describes the annual sacrifices at the Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and Tabernacles. The point is in 28:1-2. The sacrifices pleased God and they were to be given at the appointed times. Well, those appointed times were daily, morning and evening, PLUS weekly PLUS monthly PLUS the 7 annual special feasts. You see:

1. they depended constantly on the act of sacrifice There was a constant reminder that the sacrifices were the basis of everything they did. And, of course, we know that each and every one of those sacrifices was a picture of Christ's work on the cross which would be done for man and which would please God. So, the application for us is:

2. we must live in dependence on Christ's work It is the work of Christ that made atonement for us. It is the work of Christ that pleased God. In HIM He was well pleased. His being pleased with us and accepting us is only IN HIM. We need to live in a constant consciousness of the work of the cross. It provides our forgiveness, our access, our pleasingness to God and our righteousness. The cross, and by the cross I mean Christ's death and resurrection, is the center of our life and work, the spring of all our blessings and we need to be in conscious dependence on it constantly!

IV. A Depth Of Commitment (Ch. 30) This chapter is the law of vows. I would just point out two quick things:

1. they had to keep their commitments (2) They were not to play games with God like so many people do. If they made a promise or told God something, they were to fulfill it without fail. Many times believers do not have this depth of commitment. They are emotionally moved and tell God things and promise this and that but when the emotion fades the action somehow never comes about. A spiritual life is a life of deep commitment and the second picture in the chapter teaches us a further lesson:

2. we must live in submission to His lordship (13) A wife had to submit to her husband's lordship. Her vows and promises were subject to his will. Well, spiritually we are the bride of Christ and He is our husband. Our will and our vows and promises are subject to Him. He may choose to disallow them. We may decide to commit ourselves to do something that is just not what He wants, so He has the right to prevent it or change it. The point is that depth of commitment means that we must be submissive to His Lordship in everything.

V. A Deliberate Separation (Ch. 31) Now God sends Israel to attack the Midianites who had led them into idolatry through their women at the advice of Balaam. They conquered them, killed them, and divided up the spoils. The point is:

1. they severed all sinful association (6,15-20) This is God's war; the High Priest leads the battle. See, the point is purification. They were severing all association with sinful practices and persons who were leading them into sin. Hence:

2. we must live a separated life - 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 We ought not to yoke ourselves with anything or anyone who will lead us into sin. Those things we have to be willing to put away from us. You can't live the Canaan life with a sinful skeleton in your closet that you hang on to. There has to be a deliberate separation from sin and from that which pulls you into it!

VI. A Consuming Desire (Chs. 32-34) These three chapters are about the land. Chapter 32 tells how some settled on the far side of Jordan in Gilead. Chapter 33 summarizes the journey and tells how they got to the land. Chapter 34 gives the boundaries of the land. When taken altogether, though, they say to me that a person living the spiritual life must have a consuming desire to have it! First, he must have a consuming desire:

1. to not settle for less than God promised (32:1-5) Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh decided they didn't want to go into Canaan after all. They'd settle right here in already conquered territory, in Gilead and Bashan. Now that was not God's intent. The boundaries He described in chapter 34 had the Jordan as an eastern boundary. Moses longed to go over and see the land God had promised. It was over there; this land was second best. It was OK. It was appealing as far as its situation in this world went, but it was not God's best, the land of milk and honey! Moses was adamant about that! But when they offered to go over and fight with their brothers before settling it, Moses gave in. However, the fact remains that the circumstances of this world distracted them from pursuing God's best, His perfect place for them. And a lot of Christians stay on the edge of the wilderness that way, loving the Lord, worshipping Him, but not willing to go on and really be where God wants them because they are in pleasant circumstances. The spiritual life demands a burning desire to go all the way to have the best, to be in the center of God's will and also:

2. to not lose it by compromise (33:50-56) Some people go all the way with God and are doing well but some Canaanite attraction along the way grabs them and they compromise. Instead of getting rid of it and separating it out, they let it be and it grows and becomes a snare and pretty soon the wilderness life is back! The spiritual life takes a deep desire for God and for all that He has for us.

VII. A Careful Justice (Ch. 35) This chapter describes the Levitical cities and especially the cities of refuge. I don't have time to delve into it now. It has several lessons. Suffice it to say for now that a careful, considered sense of justice is part of the spiritual life.

VIII. A Walk By Faith (27:1-11; Ch. 36) These two sections tell the story of a man named Zelophehad who had only daughters and no sons. The first part tells how they came to Moses and wanted to be included in the inheritance. Ch. 36 tells how the tribes were worried that since they were included, that their portions of inheritance would be amended to other tribes. But what stands out to me is:

1. they counted on what God promised as real (27:4, 36:4) Here they are sitting on the far side of Jordan. The land they're talking about is inhabited by seven nations with fortified cities and big walls. Jericho is in view. The only thing they had to count on was a promise from God that it belonged to them and they counted that as being as real as if they were already settled in it. That's faith. Unbelief wouldn't have worried about such questions! These people believed God and arranged their daily walk by faith. So too:

2. we must live by faith - 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7 The spiritual life demands that we must fix our eyes on what we cannot see and count it as being real. We must not depend on our eyes and live accordingly. We must walk by faith, counting every word of God as being true and anything contrary as a lie!

Well these are the prerequisites to real spiritual life. May God grant that they can be developed in each of our lives so that we might be done with wilderness living and live the promised life of Canaan.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

Today we begin a new series of studies through the Old Testament book of Joshua which will take us through the summer. For those who may not be familiar, Joshua was Moses' younger assistant through the last 40 years of his life and God chose him to become the leader of Israel in Moses' place when he died; this book is the story of Israel under his leadership. To put it in perspective, Genesis is the record of how God *created* the people of Israel; Exodus is the record of how God *saved* the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt; Leviticus is the record of how God *taught* the people to live at Mt. Sinai; Numbers is the record of how God *led* the people of Israel through the wilderness; Deuteronomy is the record of what God again taught Israel on the border of the land of Canaan and Joshua is the record of how God conquered the land of Canaan and gave it to Israel to possess forever. So:

• **The Book of Joshua is the record of a historical war** which Israel fought and won about 1400 BC at God's direction, against the seven idol-worshipping peoples who lived in the land of Canaan at that time. She attacked and defeated them in a series of battles and took possession of their entire land, placing it under the rule of God, in effect making it His kingdom! Now if you think about it, the same process has essentially been going on for the last 2,000 years. John wrote, *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.* - 1Jn. 5:19. But God sent His Son Jesus (whose Hebrew name, by the way, was Yeshua, i.e., Joshua) to save and create a new people for Himself, the Church. And throughout the record of history Jesus has been leading the Church, His victorious army, against the whole world and waging war against Satan's rule over every part of it and taking it back for Himself to make it God's kingdom! So, like it or not:

• **Your life as a Christian is participation in a spiritual war!** Only it is not a war against people. Paul said, *...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms [Eph. 6:12]. And The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.* - 2 Cor. 10:4. Our war is not against human beings like Joshua's was; rather it is against Satan and all the systems he's established and the demonic forces which he uses to hold the world of people captive and to attack us. And we don't fight our war with swords and spears and shields like Joshua did or the crusaders tried to do, nor with guns and bombs as Muslim radicals do wanting to physically take over the world; rather we fight our spiritual war with spiritual weapons that are Divinely energized to fight these spiritual powers, pull down the strongholds they've established in the world and in people's lives and place their territory under Jesus' control. Like it or not, you and I live in a continuing war all our lives that is just as real as World War II and, living in that environment, we need to learn to fight spiritually or we'll get creamed! And that's what the Book of Joshua is going to teach us. We are told that:

• **Israel's experiences are intended to teach us important spiritual lessons** In 1 Cor. 10:6, 11 Paul says twice that all *These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.* [NLT] We're supposed to study them and learn important lessons from them so that we don't mess up! And that's why we're going to study Joshua. Now the Book divides very simply into four parts:

- I. Preparing For Combat chs. 1-5
- II. Fighting The Battles chs. 6-11
- III. Dividing The Territory chs. 12-21 [**we're omitting these**]
- IV. Maintaining The Victory chs. 22-24

So, we begin by looking at how God prepared Israel to face combat in order to learn how we need to prepare ourselves to face our spiritual battle and the lesson we're going to learn in Chapter 1 is a very important one:

We Prepare For Battle Through the Word - Ch. 1

Notice that the first thing God gives us at the very beginning of the book is:

I. Our Personal Command To Engage In The Battle (1-2) Literally God says to Joshua, *Arise!* "Get up, you and all these people, go cross the Jordan and take the land! You've camped here long enough, now accept your responsibility. Rise up and go!" That's the first step, accepting that there truly is a war upon us and that we personally must deliberately rise up and take a role in it! It is not somebody else's battle; you can't choose to sit it out. For 40 years Joshua had simply been a servant to Moses, hearing God speak to Moses and doing whatever Moses said. But now God speaks to HIM and tells him "Moses is dead. He's not here anymore! YOU are going to have to go over and fight this war; nobody else is going to be able to do it for you!" *In the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, hundreds of thousands of*

Americans rushed to enlist in the armed forces. All across the country, in urban and rural communities, military recruiting offices were jammed. Some offices announced they would stay open 24 hours, seven days a week to accept enlistments. Veterans of the first World War wanted to enlist, even though most were too old! ...Before the war ended, well over 16 million men and women were enrolled in the armed forces, over 12 percent of the total U.S. population at the time! [\[http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life_02.html\]](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life_02.html). Contrast that attitude with the time of the Vietnam War where we originated the term "draft dodger", wrote popular songs about how to get out of serving and 100,000 people actually left the country to evade military service! People wanted to go on living their own secure, safe, happy lives and ignore the war their country was engaged in! Listen, in large measure the generation before us had that "eager to serve" attitude. Many believers you once knew and were taught by gave and sacrificed unselfishly to the cause of Christ; they went to the ends of the earth with the Gospel as well as to the hearts of our decaying cities to start rescue missions. They prayed like crazy, gave to the bottom of their wallets and worshipped together every time the church door was open. Why? They recognized there was a war on and God needed them in it! They served well, but now they're dead and gone and it's our turn! Yet so many in our generation would like to ignore the war and go about our self-oriented lives and not worry about the cause of Christ. And to us God says personally, "Arise! Go take the land!" Like the old recruiting poster of Uncle Sam, God says, "I want YOU!" "Rise up!" *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* - Eph. 6:11. There's no opting out; to refuse is to lose already, so accept your command to engage in battle! Next, we read about:

II. The Provisions That Have Prepared Us for Battle (3-5) God told Joshua three things to prepare him. Knowing these three things, I'm sure, made all the difference. At least I know that if God told ME these three things, I'd be ready to rise up and go to war! Oh, but in reality, He has! Listen:

1. God has already declared us victorious (3) Even though he was young at the time, David knew this truth and it's what made him willing to fight Goliath, *...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.* - 1Sam. 17:47. It doesn't matter who has the most men or the best weapons; the outcome of the battle belongs to the Lord. HE declares the winner and determines the outcome. The Canaanites had already lost the war before the battles started! The outcome was recorded in the annals of heaven as a "done deal". Joshua could not lose, no matter what it may have seemed like at the moment. In like manner you should know this, Heb. 2:14 (NASB) *Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.* Listen, the devil is fighting this battle with blank ammunition! All his weapons can't kill you, not eternally! All his forces can't stop you and the cause you fight for! I've read the end of the book. I know how the war turns out! And I see you there along with millions of us from every people on earth standing before His throne for the victory celebration! We're fighting a war we KNOW we'll win! Second:

2. God has given us His almighty power (5a) What a promise! Remember how the 10 spies had gone over to check out the land and said, *...All the people we saw there are of great size. ...We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them?* God says, "No enemy, no matter how huge he is or how large his force appears will be able to withstand your attack. Not one! And not just on a good day, but all the days of your life!" I'd go to war on that, wouldn't you? Well, what did Jesus tell us? *...I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.* - Matt 16:18 (NASB). No power on earth can stop us! No barricade the enemy puts up can long prevent our advance! He said, *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he WILL flee from you.* - Jas. 4:7. Why? Not because of our own strength, of course, but of His. That's why in Eph. 6:10 Paul exhorts us, *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power* and then tells us about all this armor that God has given us and how we need to put it on. Our weapons have *Divine power to demolish strongholds!* Third:

3. God has given us His constant Presence (5b) Wow, God Himself says, "I will be with you AND I'll never take a vacation or a break from being with you and I'll never abandon you!" Look at vs. (9) "This promise is good wherever you go! So, you NEVER need to be afraid!" Oh, don't you wish YOU had a promise like that? Well, just maybe does it sound a tad familiar? You know Heb. 13:5b-6 *...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* God meant it for us too and He told us so directly. He is with us in this war; He's right here in our camp! He actually dwells right inside of us and He's not going anywhere!

So, when I tell you that we live in a war, I'm not trying to scare you; I'm not trying to make you afraid. We DO live in a perpetual war but our God has told us that we're going to win, has given us His Divine power to fight with and has promised to be with us personally every second of it! Look at v. (6). "Joshua, you WILL do this! You will lead them over there and take the land. So don't be afraid; be brave and strong! I keep My promises and I am not about to default on them! BUT... there is one specific thing you need to do." (7-8) Joshua had something that none of the great men of faith before him had. He had straight from Moses' own hand the Book of the Law, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible which Moses had written down. He no longer had to rely simply on remembering what God said. He had God's instructions and promises in writing! And with that privilege now came a set of instructions. God told him to prepare himself for battle by using the Book! And just like Joshua, we still have:

III. The Book That Prepares Us for Battle, only we have the finished and completed work with ALL the information that we will ever need. But we still must use it the same way Joshua was instructed. First of all:

1. we must be committed to following the Word of God (7) If God's army doesn't follow His commands, how can it succeed? If your feet decide to just do whatever they want instead of doing what the head tells them, you're in trouble, aren't you? God is in charge and He knows what He's doing, so when you don't do what He tells you, you mess it up. You end up defeated in that particular battle. Joshua had to come to the Word of God with the mindset that he was going to do whatever it said to do regardless of the consequences in every situation. To experience victory, you have to approach the Word of God with an attitude that says, "When I find out what God says to do, I'm going to do it! I'm not going to do what I feel like first or turn to the right and try that or turn to the left and try this. I'm going to do what God says." Is that how you approach it? Secondly:

2. we must be constant in thinking the Word of God (8a) Of course, that means you have to READ it first to know what it says! God told Joshua that he had to have the Word of God constantly in his mind. He was to be saying it with his mouth, talking about it to other people and meditating on it. He was to be thinking about what it says and what it means all the time, day and night. You can't DO it without KNOWING it! And that's what He wants for us. We've got to read it regularly, every day and then think about what we've read, maybe research some things we don't understand. We've got to keep it constantly fresh in our minds. You know, I have discovered over the years the sad fact that what you don't use, you lose! Verses that used to come to me readily 20 years ago don't now because I haven't used them! We must be constantly immersing ourselves in the Word of God if we want to be ready for this war we're in! And finally:

3. we must be careful in doing the Word of God (8b) Joshua had to be careful not to neglect any part of the Book but to do everything written in it. We cannot neglect the portions we don't like but must be careful, meticulous, with the Word of God, constantly on guard for blind spots in our lives. It helps if we choose to read it in a balanced pattern over and over so that we clearly end up following the whole counsel of God.

And that's what causes us to succeed in the war! Without the Book and without immersing Himself in it, Joshua and Israel would never have succeeded in taking the whole land! In fact, when they were NOT careful to obey the Word of God, they lost the battle or they ended up in trouble, as we'll see later on. Ephesians calls the Bible the sword which the Holy Spirit uses. Hebrews says it is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword because it pierces right into the heart of man. It was the Scripture that Jesus used in His battle against Satan in the wilderness. It is the Scripture that filled Jesus' mind and which He used time and again in His battles with the Pharisees. *Chet Bitterman, the Wycliffe missionary who was kidnaped by Colombian terrorists in 1981, was held for 7 weeks and then killed. Before he was captured, he had memorized all of 1 Peter, a book written to encourage first-century Christians who were suffering for their faith. During Chet's captivity, he wrote a letter to his wife in which he quoted 1 Peter 3:15 and 16 indicating that he was using God's Word to guide and strengthen him in the way he responded to his captors. The Word of God sustained him during the long days of his trying ordeal. But as he was memorizing that passage months earlier, he had no way of knowing how soon he would be needing it.* Listen, we've been given a powerful tool which will prepare us for all of life's battles if we put it in our minds and hearts all the time. What are you doing with it? Beloved, *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.* - Josh 1:8.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua God Prepares For Our Battle; We Must Pray - Ch. 2

We live in a war and our lives as Christians are filled with spiritual battles. Have you ever noticed that many of the great hymns of the past are songs like "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "A Mighty Fortress" which point that out? We are in a war against Satan and all his hosts who seek to wreck and ruin our lives and to keep the unbelieving world under their control. The daily circumstances of our lives are, in fact, battlegrounds where Satan seeks to defeat us and stop our efforts to serve the King. There are battles where we face temptation and discouragement and fear and deception and much more. And to go into this combat we must be prepared. Last time we saw in chapter 1 how God told Joshua that in order to have victory he had to prepare himself through the Word of God, through saturating his life and thoughts and mind with the Word. Now in chapter 2 we come to:

I. The Wonderful Story Of Rahab You can read the story in (1-7, 15), but it goes like this. Israel was camped across the Jordan from Jericho to the east. In verse 1 Joshua sent out two spies to cross the river, enter the city and bring back intelligence on its situation. After slipping through the gates, they encountered a prostitute by the name of Rahab who took them to her home but not for the immoral purpose for which she usually took men home. Amazingly, she sheltered and protected them when the King of Jericho heard of their presence and began searching for them. Instead of turning them in, she took them up on the roof, hid them under the stalks of flax drying there and sent the pursuers on a wild goose chase. Then she shocked them by confessing her faith in *their* God, let them down through her window outside the city wall since they were trapped inside and hung a scarlet rope in the window as a visible sign so that her life would be

spared when Israel attacked. When you ponder it, the story is truly astonishing, but I want to get to the heart of what's going on in it. What you see in this story is:

II. The Key Lesson: God Prepares For The Battles We Face In Life! Joshua and Israel are not the only ones preparing for battle. When we listen to the voice of Rahab, we find out that God has been at work preparing for Israel's battles too! And that's what I want to point out to you this morning: whenever you face a spiritual battle in the circumstances of your life, Almighty God has already been at work to prepare you with the provision, the information and the help you need to face that battle AND also to prepare the circumstances surrounding the battle itself. When Jacob came home from 20 years in Syria, he was extremely worried about how his brother Esau, whom he had cheated before he left, was going to receive him. So, he prayed and made all kinds of contingency plans, expecting the worst, but when Esau arrived, he threw his arms around Jacob and kissed him! God had already been at work in Esau too and took away that hatred and animosity! Listen, you cannot enter a situation that God does not know about and has not already been at work preparing for! If that's hard to believe, just look at what He did in this story. On a personal level:

1. He prepared Rahab to be saved before Israel arrived (8-11) Now remember this woman is a Canaanite, a citizen of Jericho. All her life she has worshipped idols. For most of it she has never even heard of the God of Israel, and if she had, she probably would just have considered Him as another god like Baal or Ashtaroah or whatever other idol men worship. Plus, her lifestyle was base and immoral. Some have tried to paint her as a friendly innkeeper (there's even a note in the NIV margin) but when James mentions her in the New Testament, he calls her in the Greek a *porn-ee*, a prostitute, a woman who regularly engaged in sexual immorality. This was the lifestyle she knew and practiced daily in that pagan society. In Israel she would have been stoned to death, but here she is practicing her sin openly in Jericho, a haughty city with strong walls, proud and pompous. There is no *reason* on earth for God to save her soul; she should by rights be left to destruction with all the rest. Plus, there is no *way* on earth, it seems, for God to save her if He wanted to. But He did! Look at God's amazing work in her life. First:

a. He caused her to hear the news of His mighty acts She had heard how the Lord dried up the Red Sea for Israel to cross and how He had completely destroyed the land of Egypt and its army 40 years earlier. Somehow the news had filtered north to Jericho. Then, more recently she had heard also how Israel had whipped Sihon, the King of the Amorites, and Og, the King of Bashan on the other side of the Jordan and taken their land. That was pretty close to home and God had caused that news to be told in Jericho and allowed her to hear it. Of course, news travels, especially big news, but what is more amazing is that He caused her to **believe** the reports! Think about it. If someone told you that a path opened up in the middle of an ocean that was big enough for a couple million people to cross on dry land, would you believe it? Would you believe that every firstborn child in Egypt died in the same night? Or that the Nile River had turned to blood or that the vegetation of Egypt was destroyed by hail mixed with fire? Such acts had never been heard of! Her gods had certainly never done anything like that! And yet, when she heard it, in her heart she genuinely believed that the Lord had indeed done all those things instead of doubting! That is truly the mercy of God at work in her! Yet here is the most amazing thing:

b. He caused her to understand His true nature Look at the last half of verse 11. She believed that Jehovah, the God of Israel was the one true God, the only God, and that He was in complete control of heaven and earth. She was renouncing her gods and choosing to believe in the God of strangers. And notice this belief didn't come from some lecture she got from the spies after they arrived; this was something she had already come to believe on her own before they got there! She had true faith; she was reaching out to the True God before any messenger ever got near her. And by the way, do you know God is still doing that? South American missionary Donald Richards in the Central Amazon Basin tells this story: *"So we started doing some quick fact-finding about the area, we found the government knew of at least two tribal groups in the sections donated to us. No one had ever been granted permission to enter these areas or contact these groups. So...we began praying and planning for contact with these unreached people groups. Three of us took this trek, not sure where we were heading. All the aerial maps showed nothing; but we knew there was a tribal group here somewhere. After five hours and 27 rivers crossed, it was pitch dark as we drove into the village of the cabana-type huts of the Karitiana [people]. Several of them had been out to trading posts, so a few of them knew some Portuguese. But we were the first outsiders they had seen in ten years. We finally understood they were having some kind of gathering in large huts made of mud bricks. All the other huts were of palm branch. Near the door there was fish roasting over a fire, with the smoke wafting inside. Several of them insisted we enter. With no idea what we were getting into, we ducked inside. There were candles made of gum flickering everywhere, shining off the faces of about 30 or 40 men, women and kids. A man sitting in the center spoke in Portuguese and said he would stop what they were doing to tell us a story. So, the three of us squeezed in and sat on the ground. 'This is where we celebrate Jesus,' the man said. I know my jaw dropped and my eyes must have bugged out. I asked him to repeat it and he told me in rough Portuguese that these 35 Karitiana were following Jesus. So he stood in the hut and gave us what amounted to a testimony. He said it was almost a year ago that he had a vision. He said Jesus came to him and took him to heaven. Somehow, he knew who it was - Jesus - and knew he was seeing heaven. It was beautiful, filled with more people than he had ever seen. But he didn't see many Indians and didn't see any Karitiana. So he asked Jesus why. And he says Jesus told him, 'Because you are serving demons, not Me.' And then Jesus asked him his name and he said, 'Francisco.' Then Jesus said, 'No, that is what you are called in Portuguese. What is your Karitiana name?' He replied, 'Rual.' Jesus said, 'I made you a*

Karitiana. You are worthy of the Karitiana. I made you a nation and I want you to worship Me as Karitiana.' And immediately he's back in his hut. So Rual has spent the last year telling everyone in the tribe what happened and what Jesus said. And so far, 35 of them have quit worshiping spirits to follow Jesus. There are only 156 Karitiana. But there's going to be a good showing of them percentage-wise around the throne of the Lamb." [Run With A Vision, p. 44-45] "Imagine the awesome privilege of getting to tell these folks the whole story! Listen, God is still preparing people's hearts, not always in such dramatic ways, of course, but just as He did in Rahab, He is at work making them ready to believe in Christ before He ever sends you to share the Gospel with them! And then notice this:

c. He led the spies to her door Of all the people in the city of Jericho they might have bumped into, they immediately met Rahab and she recognized them as Israelites and whisked them into her house. For weeks she'd been waiting and agonizing, convinced that she was about to die with all of Jericho when the Israelite army crossed the Jordan. Maybe she was praying to the God of Israel to hear her and spare her! And suddenly here stood two Israelites, people who actually knew and worshipped the God she had come to believe in without knowing Him! Oh, how her heart must have jumped for joy! She knew this was no accident and it wasn't. God sent those spies to a prepared person in a Divinely pre-arranged meeting to bring her to fully trust in Him and save her life. And what's even more fantastic is that:

d. He moved her to trust Him at the risk of her own life Please understand, this is an act of treason, one punishable by death. This is betraying your own people and King and siding with the enemy. To protect the spies was to risk life itself on her newfound faith in the God of Israel; that's how deep her faith was! **Heb. 11:31** says, *By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.* And **James 2:25** adds, *In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?* She demonstrated the depth and the reality of her faith by protecting those spies; it was genuine and God memorializes it forever in His Word! Truly God had been at work through circumstances preparing her for salvation before Israel ever arrived, but that's not the whole point. Through her words we can also see that:

2. He prepared the Canaanites to be destroyed before Israel arrived God had been working not just in Rahab but in all the people of Jericho, indeed, in all the inhabitants of Canaan. He had a plan that He was working out on behalf of Israel. He had already told Moses that:

a. He planned to terrify them before Israel He said, *This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you."* - **Deut. 2:25**. And Moses told the people, *No man will be able to stand against you. The LORD your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go.* - **Deut. 11:25**. God made it so all the Canaanites heard about the Red Sea and about Sihon and Og across the river and that they all knew that Israel had but one objective: Canaan. He wanted them to be in fear and terror of Israel and her God and here's why:

b. that terror was designed to cause confusion He said, *I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run.* - **Ex. 23:27**. Terror would confuse them. You don't fight well and bravely when you're convinced you're going to lose and die. You take the first opportunity to run or you hesitate in following orders or you are constantly unsure of what to do to preserve yourself. God's plan was to defeat the enemy before the battles ever got started, right in their own minds. And in Rahab's words you can see that:

c. His preparation worked (9, 11) The whole city is shaking in their boots! They don't know what to do except shut the gates and try to hold out the best they can. Now look down to **(23-24)**. You see, this whole incident does a marvelous thing for the people of Israel. They know they're going to win because they hear that God has been at work! Listen, dear one, whatever battle you're going to face in life, this story is a message of assurance to you from God. He has already been at work! He has already prepared the circumstances. The entire thing is in His hands and under His control. Know this! Count on this! Then because of this, it seems to me there is something you and I must do:

III. We Participate In God's Preparation Through Prayer Since we know that God is at work in any situation we face, it is only natural that as soon as we're aware of the situation, we will begin praying and asking Him to be at work! You see:

1. our praying acknowledges our dependence upon God You remember the story of King Jehoshaphat, one of the godly Kings of Judah. One day he got word that a large army composed of three enemy peoples had gathered against him. Not only that, but they had rounded the bottom of the Dead Sea and were already at En Gedi, just 25 miles to the south of Jerusalem before any word reached him. Talk about being faced with a battle! Yet his first response was not to panic, but to gather whoever he could and pray! Look at **2 Chr. 20:12-13**. That's where we should stand always! When we pray:

a. it is an admission that we are not trusting our own strength We have no power to face this on our own. It is not in us. We can't do it; we don't know WHAT to do! We cry out to Him because we have no trust in ourselves. Prayer says, "Our eyes are upon YOU!" And so:

b. it is our assurance that He will get all the glory from the victory As you know a prophet stood up and told them, "God says go out tomorrow and take a stand against the enemy. You won't even have to fight!" And they didn't. God put such confusion among the enemy troops that they fought one another and destroyed themselves! Well, guess who got the credit for that battle! When we pray, knowing that the battle belongs to the Lord and He is completely in control, it is the sure sign that when He delivers us and enables us to come through our situation unscathed, with our faith whole and following Him with all our hearts, that He will get all the credit! But what we must truly realize is that:

2. our praying is part of fighting the battle Turn with me to **Eph. 6:18**. In verse 12 we are warned about the spiritual battles we're going to face in life. In verse 13 we're told to get ready for those battles by putting on the things God has given us, His armor, and piece after piece is listed. In verse 17 we come to the need to saturate ourselves with the Word of God and then we arrive at **Eph. 6:18**. Prayer is part of fighting the battle! If you really believe that God prepares the battles of life and sets the stage for them, you PRAY! You build a prayer life, a daily communion with God where you spend time with Him talking about the issues of life you face ahead of time, anticipating coming difficulties and needs and bathing them in prayer so that as you come to them both you and the circumstances are prepared and you enter them with the confidence that God is at work and you will have victory, no matter what the outcome! Paul tells us four things. First:

a. our praying must be real It must be *in the Spirit*, not the chanting of empty words, but real communication of our heart with God. Second:

b. our praying must be continual It must be all the time, every day. Communion with God is not something you can walk in and do on Sunday. It is learned and worked out in a daily quiet time alone with God. This is vital. Third:

c. our praying must be vigilant We must be alert and watching for what God is trying to do in our life and others' lives. We must be alert and watching for what Satan is trying to do, anticipating his moves, anticipating how he will try to use pain or bad news or that new responsibility at work. Will he try to fill us with pride or to discourage us because finances are tight? We must be alert when we pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us to pray on a spiritual plane and not merely about the physical and the obvious. And finally:

d. our praying must be persistent We must keep on in it. Even when we don't feel like it. Even when it looks like a particular situation may be hopeless. We must persist and keep on praying, never giving up, if we're going to be effective.

Listen, God is at work preparing for the battles that are coming in your life. You can participate with Him in that by praying, by developing a consistent prayer life. It's important. I know you don't have time. Neither do I. But we must. *In the 1700's there was a man who ran a cobbler's shop in England. He was once reproached by someone for spending so much time in prayer that he neglected his business. He replied, "Prayer IS my real business! Cobbling shoes is just a sideline; it helps me pay expenses." He knew that prayer was more important in his life than laying up treasures on earth. And the Lord later used him greatly as a missionary to India, Burma, and the East Indies. His name was William Carey, the founder of modern missions!* He prepared for the battles he was to face with a life of prayer. Are you? Oh, by the way, would you like to know what happened to Rahab? She lived and later married a godly Israelite by the name of Salmon and together they raised a godly son whose name was Boaz, the redeemer, the husband of Ruth, the grandfather of King David, and ultimately of whom came the Savior, Jesus Christ. So, pray! Rahab did! You never know how great the reward can be.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

We Prepare For Battle Through Following - Ch. 3

In our study of the Book of Joshua we've been learning that life is war, that we live in a continual spiritual battle with the enemy of our souls who is seeking to defeat and deter us in every situation from advancing Jesus' Kingdom. And in these first five chapters we're learning how to prepare ourselves for this spiritual combat. In chapter 1 God told us that we must saturate our lives with the Word of God; His Book comes before all else. Then in chapter 2 God showed us powerfully through the story of Rahab that He is always at work preparing for the battles we face and that we must recognize that and join with Him through a lifestyle of prayer. Now in chapter 3 we come to another of those landmark stories that became the bedrock of Israel's faith for all time. Before Israel entered the Promised Land and engaged in the battles that lay ahead of them, they faced a formidable obstacle. The Jordan River lay between them and land of Canaan. Of course, this was no accident. God had deliberately led them in a circular fashion around the east side of the land of Edom and back to the plains of Moab on the east side of Jordan to enter the land of Canaan from the middle instead of the southern bottom.

But that caused them to have to cross the only major river in the region. Why? God knew what He was doing; He had a preliminary lesson that He wanted to teach them in preparation for the battles to come, a lesson about following Him. And that's a lesson we need to learn also to prepare us for the spiritual battles we will face in life. You will not be well-prepared to face temptation or fear or discouragement or any of the other spiritual attacks Satan will make against you unless you have solidly learned the lesson of following God without hesitation. God showed that lesson to Israel very graphically in a grand object lesson, a symbolic picture, in the crossing of the Jordan. So, let's look at:

I. The Lesson Which God Set Up About His Leading (1-5) Israel had been camped for some time at Shittim about 7 miles from the river's edge and it was while there that Moses spoke to them our book of Deuteronomy, climbed Mt. Nebo to look across to the Promised Land and died. From there Joshua had sent out the spies and after they returned, he moved the camp to the very edge of the river and waited three days to cross. Joshua had instructions from God about how they were to go across and on the third day the officers passed out the instructions for the crossing. Now please notice:

1. the uniqueness of the physical arrangement On this march:

a. the ark would lead the way forward The priests would carry the ark of God at the head of the column. That was new. In their wilderness travels the ark was always in the middle of the camp and the middle of the marching order of the tribes and it was always covered up and carried by the Levites. The ark symbolized to Israel the very presence of God; it was the visual icon God had given them of His presence. It was His seat, His chair, His throne, as it were. But this time it was to go in front of them, to lead the way. And it was to be carried, probably uncovered, by the priests, denoting what an important occasion this was. It literally symbolized God Himself leading the way forward and:

b. the people were to follow behind Verse 3, "When you see the ark going forward, you are to move out and follow it!" Now they were to be careful to leave about a thousand yards between, I'm sure to emphasize the holiness of God, but also so that every Israelite could see it (remember there were probably some 2 million of them!) Nevertheless, when it went forward, they were to rise up and follow where it led. It was a command to follow God without question or hesitation and that's:

2. the lesson it taught for us. You see:

a. we do not know the way God wants us to go Verse (4) made it clear; they had never been this way before. Not a single person standing there had ever been to that region. The Jordan was not a small creek; it could not be crossed just anywhere. All through the centuries the Jordan has been crossed only at fords, at known places where the river is shallow enough to wade and the bank gentle enough to permit an easy crossing. The Israelites did not know where the fords were; they did not know which way was the right way to go to get across the Jordan or for that matter which way to go about fighting the battles they were to face in Canaan. And that's also true in our lives, isn't it? There are many ways we can go in our lives, many choices that we can make. The way most people handle life is to size up the situation in front of them and pick the way through it that looks best to them at the moment. But they haven't waded across at that exact spot before and may not realize, for instance, that in the center of the stream is a hole 12 feet deep and they're going to get swept away. Or they may be lucky and pick a good spot and get through OK. But that's not how a believer is supposed to live. The reality is that what truly matters to us is which way GOD wants us to go, His path for us, the one that will bring us to victory and Him the glory and none of us knows in and of ourselves exactly what that path is. So, the lesson is that:

b. we must willingly follow where God leads Our responsibility is not to decide which way to go but to do like Israel in verse (3), to watch carefully what God is showing us and to rise up immediately and simply follow the way that God directs as He goes before us. We are "followers" of Jesus; that is a tremendous way to describe and look at the Christian life. It means simply that we watch Him and listen to Him and then go where He says and do what He says. That's the lesson God was teaching Israel there by the Jordan. But here's the kicker:

II. God Led Israel Directly Into An Insurmountable Obstacle (6) and God said to Joshua, (8). Now that doesn't sound like much to us, but if you were standing there that day, you would realize:

1. the unsolvable predicament of crossing the Jordan (15a) Israel had arrived at the Jordan in the spring when all the snow melted on the mountains of Lebanon up north and engorged the river. The Jordan was at full flood stage, overflowing all its banks and would be so for weeks. One commentary says, *The river about Jericho is, in ordinary appearance, about fifty or sixty yards in breadth. But as seen in harvest, it is twice as broad; and in ancient times, when the hills on the right and left were much more drenched with rain and snow than since the forests have disappeared, the river must, from a greater accession of water, have been broader still than at harvest-time in the present day.* [Jamieson, Faucett and Brown] So while it may have ordinarily been, let's guess, 2 to 4 feet deep at the normal ford, on this day it was way deeper than their heads, more than the length of a football field wide and raging past them at a rapid pace. I grew up living next to a creek in Annville PA that was normally 3 or 4 feet deep and 10 yards wide. But one day in 1972 we got 12 inches of rain and that creek rose 17 feet, out of its banks, completely inundated our driveway level floor and rose 3 feet into our main living area. As I stood there at its edge it was now well over a hundred yards

wide and flowing with such force that it completely knocked down the ranch house that sat on the opposite shore from us. I would NEVER have tried to cross that water; to do so would have meant being swept away and probably drowned. That's exactly what the Jordan was like; how could more than two million people with wives and little ones and belongings and livestock ever get across? It was an insurmountable obstacle they faced. And yet God led them directly into it! But here's:

2. the inconceivable solution that God promised (9, 11, 13) God's solution was simple; Joshua said, "You get up and follow the ark; God is going to dry up the river; it's simply going to stop flowing!" Now you realize, that was absolutely inconceivable to them! If someone had told ME that, as I stood on the hill watching our creek flow through the middle of my house, I would have said, "You're nuts!" No power on earth could do that short of a bomb blast (and they didn't know about bombs!) Yes, they had seen God providing for them every day and helping them in the battles they won on that side of Jordan, but this was calling upon them for a new level of trust. It was exactly like their parents' generation, huddled on the shore of the Red Sea, having to trust God to make a way where there was no way, only with no Egyptians behind them. Could they believe that God could part the waters once again? That was:

3. the critical test: would they believe Him and follow? Would they follow His leading even though it went against their own judgment, even though it took them to a place they were scared to go, or didn't want to go, and even though it looked like God had brought them to an insurmountable obstacle, one that might sweep them away to destruction? That's the test for all of us, isn't it? When He leads us, will we believe Him and follow? *A young woman named Mildred Cable grew up in Great Britain and fell in love with a man who felt strongly that the Lord had called him to be a pastor in that country. Mildred, however, was firmly convinced that the Lord wanted her to serve as a missionary in China. So, when the man asked her to marry him, she faced an agonizing decision. One night after much praying, talking, and weeping, she told him that she could not accept his proposal, that she had to follow where Jesus was leading her. With heavy hearts they said goodbye and went their separate ways. Vernon Grounds writes, "That night she died to her own desires, her own hopes, her own humanly legitimate dreams. She died to her own will and chose to carry out the will of God. She went to China where God gave her an extraordinarily fruitful ministry."* [Yes, But How? Getting Serious About Your Faith by Vernon Grounds]. Mildred chose to rise up and follow at great cost and God blessed that choice. Will you choose that also? Will you make that your way of life? Israel chose to rise up and follow, too and look what happened:

III. God Moved The Immovable For Israel As They Followed Him (14-17) He did something so awesome, so beyond human comprehension, that we sit here reading about it today:

1. the priests set out carrying the ark and stepped into the water (14, 15b) They didn't wade in up to their knees; as soon as their feet touched the water the miracle happened. Up to that moment everything looked exactly the same as it had since they set out. But in that moment the most amazing thing happened:

2. the waters completely disappeared before their eyes (16) We often picture this like the miracle of the Red Sea as though the Israelites walked through with a wall of water beside them, but that wasn't the case. The town of Adam was some 16 miles to the north and there God dammed up the river so the waters began to mount up as though behind a huge invisible dam. But Israel never saw the waters pile up. All they knew was that when the priests stepped in, the waters started to go down instantly until they disappeared completely and all that lay before them was an empty river bed as far as they could see in either direction! It was absolutely amazing! What moments before had appeared as an insurmountable obstacle now disappeared altogether and:

3. the entire nation crossed the Jordan on dry ground (17) Did you see that? Twice it says, on dry ground! They didn't even sink into the wet muddy river bottom. God dried it and hardened it so they could all cross! What a wonderful miracle! Wouldn't you have loved to be there? The whole nation moved forward past the ark and through the riverbed and onto the shore of Canaan just as dry as if they were walking down a normal road!

Now God could simply have had them wait a few weeks until the spring melt was finished and the river went down. He could have taken them into the promised land by another route, but He chose to lead them straight through a raging river and dry it up, so I gather there was a tremendous purpose in doing such a tremendous thing. Here's:

IV. What God Accomplished By This Miracle Obviously:

1. He got Israel across the river where He wanted her She was now in position to conquer Jericho and the land of Canaan, but some more important things are mentioned here. Through this miracle:

2. He exalted Joshua in the eyes of the people (7, 4:14) He said He would exalt Joshua and He did! For 40 years the people had followed Moses, had listened to Moses because they knew Moses was hearing God. The miracles done by his hand confirmed it, but Moses is now dead. Joshua is the new man in charge and God needed to prove to all the people that He would be with Joshua the same way He was with Moses and this certainly did the trick! You don't find the Israelites grumbling against him the way they did against Moses earlier. God honored Joshua by this miracle in the eyes of all Israel. Moreover:

3. He assured a new generation that He would do ALL He said (9-10) There's an important fact here you have to remember. The Israel standing here beside the Jordan is not the same Israel that stood on the banks of the Red Sea 40 years earlier. What happened to all the men of that generation? They died in the wilderness. Only people who had been little kids or teens at that time lived through the wilderness experience. That means only those who were now over the age of 60 had actually seen God do the great miracles of Egypt, watched the parting of the Red Sea and heard His voice at Sinai. There was a whole new generation here who had grown up with the daily miracle of manna and who had been taught to obey God and had even seen God's help in battle, but by and large they had never seen a major miracle, never had a personal experience of God making a way out of no way. Look at what God calls Himself in verse 10, *the Living God*. They needed to know that God was living and powerful and would act for them, and not simply a bunch of theological truths taught them by their fathers. God knew they needed that personal experience, so He gave it to them by leading them smack into an uncrossable river. And that is what convinced them that God was able to do the rest of what He'd promised to do, to give them the land of Canaan. If God can dry up a raging river, He can surely defeat an army! And, by the way, you need that too! Hearing how God worked in your parents' time or for somebody else is not enough to prepare you for the battles of life. You need personal experiences of following God and watching Him work in your behalf to do that. That's why, as you follow Him, God will often lead you through difficulties, sometimes insurmountable obstacles, just to show you that He can ALWAYS make a way through for you! When you follow God and He leads you right into the middle of an illness or the loss of a job or some other seemingly insurmountable difficulty and you watch God carry you through and make a way for you, that's when you know that God is living and real and at work on your behalf and you're ready for battle! Then an added blessing was that by this miracle:

4. He terrified their enemies even more (5:1) If their hearts were melted, as Rahab said, from hearing about the Red Sea and about the conquests across Jordan, just think how terrified they were now! They were counting on the fact that the Jordan was uncrossable to spare them for a while! When scouts came back with reports of what happened, surely, they thought, "What kind of God can do this?" And that's the fifth thing:

5. He got glory among all peoples for Himself (4:24) God did this so that all peoples would hear the story and give Him glory as God and turn their hearts toward Him. God's heart is always after the nations.

But all of this began with Israel being willing to simply rise up and follow Him. If you will do the same, I don't promise you that it will be easy, but I do promise that you will see His glory. *Chuck Swindoll writes: "For a number of years after I became a Christian, I messed around with spiritual things. Just messed around. I ran around with church folks, I learned the God-talk, I sang the hymns, I even memorized the verses. I prayed pretty good prayers, I carried my Bible to church Sunday after Sunday, I sang in the choir, and I added to my schedule a Bible class every now and then. But my life was MY life. I did not let all that religious stuff interfere with things like my career, my home, my strong will, my pursuit of things, my determination to go my own way, or my own personal plans. I wasn't a wife beater, or a criminal, or an alcoholic, or some awful notorious sinner. No, I was just a selfish man. I knew how to get what I wanted, and nothing was going to stand in my way...including God. I was a Christian, but certainly not a disciple. Then shortly after joining the Marines (another evidence of my determination to be tough and self-assured), I was transferred overseas. For once I was faced with a major decision I could not change. Alone and lonely, I was forced to entrust my wife to the Lord, since she couldn't go to the Orient with me, and to lean on Him for numerous things I had always been able to handle myself. While overseas I met a man who saw behind my tough mask and was determined to help me come to terms with the Christ I claimed as my Savior. He disciplined me. Month after month, we met together, talked together, played ball together, laughed together, wept and prayed together, studied the Scriptures and witnessed for Christ together. Like Jesus with His men, this man took the time to help me peel off my mask of religion and absorb the authentic message of Christ. I found myself slowly changing down deep inside. I got to the place where I hated the hypocrisy of my former religious lifestyle. I got into the Scriptures on my own, and they became my bread and meat. I even addressed the priorities, the goals, and the objectives of my life. I opened each door of my inner house to let Christ in, room after room. Not suddenly, but slowly. Quietly. 'Things' became less important to me. My stubborn will came under the scrutinizing eye of the Spirit of God. And I began to meet each day with my Lord, asking Him to deal with my ugly selfishness...and did He ever!" [Strengthening Your Grip by Charles Swindoll. Word, 1982. Pages 123-125.]* Chuck Swindoll learned what it really means to follow Christ, and look at the fruitful ministry he has had all these years. What about you? Are you willing to rise up and follow Him wherever He leads? Have you learned that vital lesson and submitted your stubborn will to His? If you haven't, the enemy is winning, dear one, and you don't even realize it!

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

We Prepare For Battle Through Remembering - Ch. 4

Chapters 3 and 4 of Joshua are two halves of the same event. Chapter 3 tells us how God dried up the Jordan River so that Israel could cross into the land of Canaan; chapter 4 tells us how God concluded that crossing and returned the Jordan to flood stage as it was before. In chapter 3 God taught Israel and us the lesson of how following God prepares us for battle; in chapter 4 we will learn the lesson of how remembering what God has done prepares us for battle. God memori-

alized this landmark event of crossing Jordan in an unusual way. He could have set up an ornately carved obelisk or an ornate monument describing the whole incident in detail. He could have had a huge altar built or a fine building. But instead, God orders the setting up of the most common ordinary thing you could imagine, a pile of rocks, in fact two of them! And that is the focus of this chapter. So, let's look at:

I. The Setting Up Of Stones While Crossing The Jordan (1-5) God is still holding back the waters miles upstream and the millions of Israel have all crossed safely to Canaan's shore while the priests carrying the ark still stand in the middle of the dry riverbed. Now God orders Joshua to have 12 men, one from each tribe of Israel, who had been chosen ahead of time according to **3:12**, and who have probably been waiting on the riverbank wondering what their assignment was, to cross and pick up twelve large stones from the middle of the riverbed and carry them out on their shoulders. And they did it (**8**):

1. twelve stones were taken FROM the river and carried to the place where they made camp that night, a place they eventually named Gilgal, and there **they were set up at Gilgal as a monument (19-20)** They were set up, perhaps in a circle, maybe upon a raised mound of earth, but almost certainly in some kind of special configuration that would serve as a permanent monument left there for all to see. But that is not the whole story. There is another pile of stones:

2. twelve stones were left buried IN the river (9) By the way, I've been reading to you today from the ESV, English Standard Version, and this verse is the primary reason why. Your NIV doesn't say that but look at the **NIV marginal note**: *Or "Joshua ALSO set up twelve stones" ...in the middle of the Jordan.* The translators of the NIV chose to indicate that it is referring to the same 12 stones. By almost every other translation indicates that the Hebrew means that Joshua himself made a second pile of 12 stones in the middle of the riverbed and the text says that **they were set up where the ark had stood**, the very spot where God's presence held back the waters so they would cross. Evidently, they remained there for some time, at least through the lifetime of Joshua and probably longer, and were probably visible when the Jordan was in its normal low-water state. I wonder if they were still there when Elijah and Elisha also crossed the Jordan at Jericho on dry ground. I wonder if John the Baptist baptized near them; he was at Bethabara on the east bank of the Jordan, the side on which the priests would have stood. In fact, I wonder if Joshua didn't unwittingly mark the very spot where Jesus Himself was baptized! What a wonderful symbolic connection that would make! But what's really important is:

II. The Significance Of The Stones For Israel (6-7, 21-24) These stones were to have a perpetual meaning to the nation of Israel. Notice the two words Joshua used at the beginning of verse 6 and the end of verse 7. First of all:

1. they were a sign of the miracle God had done What is a sign? Well, remember when the Jews demanded that Jesus give them a sign? They wanted Him to do a miracle before their eyes to prove Himself. They wanted a **visible proof** that the words He said were true. These stones were the *sign*, the visible proof that God had indeed done the great miracle of drying up Jordan. If later on anyone doubted it, one could point to the monument and say, "There are the very stones that we took out of the middle of the riverbed!" and to the heap of stones in the river and say, "That is exactly where it happened!" They were a sign, a tangible object that declared that God had done this glorious thing. But they were more than that:

2. they were a memorial of the miracle God had done What's a memorial? It's a **means of remembering**. Maybe you've been to Washington and seen the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, that black wall of rock which was set up to honor the 58,267 men and women who died while serving our country in the Vietnam War. We built the wall so that we would remember, so that we would not forget the sacrifice they made. We go there and visit to remember and the wall is the visible means that jogs our remembering. On the 30th we'll celebrate Memorial Day. Did you know that every year our President makes a proclamation about that? Last year's read in part: *In honor of their dedication and service to America, the Congress, by a Joint Resolution, approved May 11, 1950, ...has requested the President to issue a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to observe each Memorial Day as a day of **prayer** for permanent peace and designating a period on that day when the people of the United States might **unite in prayer**. The Congress, by Public Law 106-579, has also designated 3:00 p.m. local time on that day as a time for all Americans to observe, in their own way, the **National Moment of Remembrance**. NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Memorial Day, May 31, 2010, as a day of **prayer** for permanent peace, and I designate the hour beginning in each locality at 11:00 a.m. of that day as a time to unite in **prayer**. I also ask all Americans to observe the National Moment of Remembrance beginning at 3:00 p.m. local time on Memorial Day.* I know most people ignore its purpose, but we have created a means of remembering each year because it's important! These stones were Israel's means of remembering. Of course:

a. they were a means of personal remembrance In years to come, whenever an Israelite would pass by Gilgal or ford the Jordan and see the stones, he would remember the miracle God had done in his life and how he had crossed over Jordan on dry ground, and no doubt worship in his heart. It was a visible symbol to jog the memory of each Israelite so they would not forget God's power. But this generation would soon grow old and pass away and then what of the stones? Well:

b. they were a means of parental teaching Parents, particularly fathers, were to teach their children about the stones and about the miracle they were connected with. They were a visible object lesson that endured. Each generation was to pass on their meaning to the next so that they would be a perpetual memorial. And so, every Israelite for all time to come could look back and be reminded of the awesome power of God, even though he hadn't been there personally. I love the pronouns *you* and *us* in vs. 23. Joshua says, "What God did for me and my generation in drying up the Red Sea, He did for you and your generation in crossing the Jordan and tell your children so that they'll know that He will do great and mighty things for them in their generation if they will follow and obey Him!" Sounds like a good sermon! But on a larger scale, these stones:

3. they show us the importance of remembering Stop and think about it a moment. This act is like a time out, like a parenthesis, right in the middle of a miracle:

a. after the stones were set up the miracle was completed (10-11, 15-18) The priests had been standing still all this time. Now they walked across the riverbed themselves and the moment they stepped out on the bank water instantly began to appear from upstream faster and faster until the Jordan was overflowing its banks once again, a mighty torrent! Think about not only the power of holding back that river, but the timing of it. The place where God dammed the river up was 16 miles upstream. For the waters to recede when the feet of the priests touched them, God had to dam up the waters ahead of time with split-second timing so that they would begin to recede 16 miles downstream at the right moment. And the same in reverse here; He released the waters 16 miles away ahead of time precisely so that they would begin to appear there at the second the priests stepped out on shore! Oh, what a mighty, all-knowing, glorious God we have! But what I'm trying to show you is that:

b. God built the act of remembrance right into the miracle! The taking out of the stones and the setting up of the stones was part and parcel of the miracle; it was smack in the middle. And I think that God is showing us just how important the act of remembering His works in our lives is! The works of God are important and He doesn't want them forgotten; He wants us to remember them. Why? Yes, so that He will get the glory He deserves, but it serves a purpose for us too. Memory is important to victory!

c. remembering this miracle prepared Israel for battle; it made her ready to go out and conquer Canaan for her King! Do you realize that it was because Israel quickly forgot the miracles of Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea that they so easily grumbled and complained in the wilderness and when they got to the border the first time, they refused to go up and take the land? If they had remembered how God dried up the Red Sea, those big tall Anakim wouldn't have frightened them a bit!

One of the reasons that you see believers who are struggling so hard with temptation or with fear or with discouragement is because they've forgotten for the moment what God has done in their lives before, how He changed them, how He rescued them, how He provided for them when they didn't have it, how He strengthened them in grief, and so on. Do a word search and you'll find that God says over and over again in Scripture, "Remember! Remember! Remember!" It is vital that we remember the things God has done, both in history and in our own lives! We need to remember the cross. We need to remember the things God did in Scripture. Those things are important! If God could do those things then, He is sufficient for my battle too! But we also need to look back and remember our own salvation, the wonderful answers to prayer and all the incredible things God has done for us personally. It helps some people to keep a spiritual diary and go back and read it once in a while! But whatever means you use, whether it is a pile of stones or a notebook or simply setting aside time to have your own personal "Memorial Day" with God, make no mistake, looking backward at what God has done is essential to getting victory in the battles you face today! Now let me show you:

III. The Symbolism Of The Stones For Us There is another picture here that you do not see at first glance. Why 12 stones? V. 8 tells us there was one for each tribe. Those stones symbolized not only the power of God, but the people of God. They tell us something about the people. Now follow me carefully:

1. the crossing has a connection to baptism Verse 23 says that what God did in drying up the Jordan was exactly like what He did in drying up the Red Sea 40 years earlier. Now what did He do? **1 Cor. 10:1-2** says, *For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.* The crossing of the Red Sea was a sort of baptism. Passing through the sea they were baptized into Moses; they were united with him. They went into the sea a people in bondage, in slavery to Egypt and came out on the other side as the people of God, united with Him and His leader. In the same sense Israel was baptized into Joshua by crossing through the Jordan, Look at **v. 14**. They were bound to him like they were to Moses and again there was a transformation here. They went into Jordan having been a wandering, disobedient people for 38 years and they came out into a new phase of their corporate life, a phase of conquest and victory instead of complaint and failure. So:

2. the crossing of Jordan is a picture that is similar to baptism for us and I am positive the Holy Spirit had that in mind when He used that word to describe it. The symbol of the stones is almost identical to the symbolism we are given in Christian baptism. Look with me at **Rom. 6:3-7**. You see, Jesus is our Moses, Jesus is our Joshua, our Savior and when we were identified with Him in salvation, two things happened to us. First:

a. our old self was buried The stones buried in the Jordan say that Israel was in type and symbol left buried there! The old Israel was left under the waters! The going under water at our baptism reminds us that the same thing happened to us when we accepted Christ. Our old self died and was buried with Christ. The person we were before we were saved, that person who was an enemy of God, a slave to sin, separated from God, spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, THAT person is dead and buried. The person I used to be died with Jesus Christ on the cross and was buried forever. But Paul said, *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live...*

b. we now live a new life (the stones erected at Gilgal) The stones erected at Gilgal say that Israel was in type and symbol living a new life from here on! The wandering was over, the manna stopped, and from this moment she was the army of God going in to take the land! The coming up out of the water at our baptism reminds us that the same thing happened to us! If anyone is in Christ, the Scripture says he is a new creation, the old things have passed away and all things have become new. I have a brand new quality of resurrection life, the very life of Jesus Christ, living in and through me from the moment of my salvation. I am raised with Him in His resurrection to a brand new kind of life, a life that loves God and walks with God and serves God. As it mirrors baptism, the buried stones remind me that I died. The set up stones remind me that I live a new life. This is a fact, both of history and of my personal experience. Are you still with me? Now here's my point:

3. remembering our "crossing" (our miraculous transformation) prepares us for battle We use remembering to prepare our minds to face the battles of life. Look with me at **Rom. 6:10-14**. To have victory, you must look at yourself, you must view yourself in a certain way.

a. to count yourself [NIV] or consider yourself [ESV] means remembering the miracle God did in you. You see:

(1) you, like Christ, died to sin once for all What does that mean? Christ died with respect to sin. He bore our sins on Himself all the way to death but having died once, the connection was severed. Sin and death no longer had any mastery, any rule, any power, any control over Him. And the same thing is true of you, dear one! That connection where sin was lord and master and exerted its power over you is severed. It's broken. You died so you're freed and loosed from the reign and rule and control of sin over you. And:

(2) you, like Christ, live a new life unto God Just as Christ rose from the dead in a new quality of life, you now have a living relationship with Almighty God as His child through faith in Jesus Christ. What I'm saying is this: remember, you are not who you were. You are a brand new person, a redeemed, justified, sanctified, glorified person, a person in relationship with God and fitted for heaven. The old you is buried there with Christ in the tomb and the you that is living is brand new. And that brings us to the second thing, if you remember who you are, it affects how you act.

b. to offer yourself [NIV] or present yourself [ESV] means choosing to act like who you are now You see, sin still lives in your body, though not in your spirit. The power of sin is still resident inside you and it is always trying to get you to bow down and yield control to it, but because you remember who you are:

(1) you refuse to allow sin to govern how you use your body You stop offering yourself for sin's service; you quit saying "OK sin, here I am, use me to do your bidding". That's who we were, not who we are. We're no longer slaves to sin. We've been set free from its power so that it cannot force us any longer to do its will. It can only rule us and control our lives if we let it, if we give it permission and offer ourselves to it. Paul says, "remember who you are. That's not you. You are a servant of Christ, so:"

(2) you continually choose to allow Christ to use it for His glory Since you passed through Jordan, since you passed from death to life, you were united to new master, Jesus Christ who is Lord, who rules and controls your life. And you need to constantly offer yourselves to Him, saying, "Here am I, Lord, use me!"

Listen, someday the battle of strong temptation is going to come along in your life. Some Potiphar's wife is going to grab you by the garment and tempt you to be immoral. Or some wedge of gold is going to come along that will tempt you to steal like Achan. Or someday suffering or persecution will come and the battle of doubt and skepticism or fear is going to come with it like it did for Job and for Elijah. And you cannot win unless you remember who you are! *I've told you before the story of St. Augustine. When he was still an unbeliever and living a really profligate life, the Holy Spirit convicted him through Paul's words in Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Augustine acknowledged his sinfulness, placed his faith in Jesus as his Savior, and became a different person. His entire outlook on life changed because of his new nature. One day he had to attend to some business in his old haunts in Rome. As he walked along, a former companion saw him and began calling, "Augustine, Augustine, it is I!" He took one look at the poor, disreputable woman whose company he used to enjoy, and he shuddered. Reminding himself of his new position in Christ, he quickly turned and ran away from her, shouting, "It's not I! It's not I!"* Now don't run away from people; witness to them, but whatever you do, in every situation remember who you are! God has done a mighty work! You died to the old way of life. You now live on the other side of Jordan! Count it that way; remember God's miracle in you. And then choose to present yourself to Jesus to be used by Him.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

We Prepare For Battle Through Complete Obedience - Ch. 5

In chapter 5 Israel has now crossed the Jordan River and is camped at a place named Gilgal about two miles from the city of Jericho. The great miracle of the crossing has, no doubt, prepared her to launch into battle with the Canaanites, but in God's eyes she is not yet ready. There is one more preparation that must be made, one more thing that must be done to make them ready for the battles to come and it is the about the most unlikely thing you would think of. In fact, it is the very last thing that you would choose to have done to an army that is all ready to march into battle. God now commanded:

I. The Circumcision Of Israel At Gilgal (2-3) Notice those first words *At THAT time...* He could have spoken to them about the need for circumcision long before, in fact, any time during the last 40 years of wandering. He could have spoken to them as they lay camped on the plains of Moab on the other side of the raging Jordan, well away from Jericho, but He didn't. God very carefully chose His specific time to command Israel to be circumcised because He had another lesson He wanted to teach them on the very eve of battle. Look at:

1. the reason for the circumcision (4-7) Did you see that? *...they did not OBEY the voice of the Lord.* The generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt disobeyed God and refused to go up into the land of Canaan and conquer it as He commanded. So, they were given the punishment of wandering for 38 more years and dying in the desert. That was bad enough, but there was something more. All the males of that generation had been circumcised according to God's law, however, during these last years of wandering:

a. Israel had disobeyed God by neglecting it During that time they had not bothered to circumcise any of the male babies who were born. When they came out of Egypt, all the men were circumcised but all those over the age of 20 died in the wilderness. That meant as they stood there across Jordan, only those over the age of 40 were circumcised. Practically every fighting man in their army was going into battle uncircumcised. And God simply would not have that!

b. God insisted upon them obeying His command before He led them into battle. Now that sounds a little bit unreasonable, doesn't it? After all, couldn't it wait awhile, at least until the land was conquered and settled? Or maybe couldn't they just start circumcising all the babies born from here on? Well, God's answer to those thoughts was no; all Israel must be circumcised! I am reminded of an incident in Moses' life back in Ex. 4. At that point in the story, God had already called Moses to be His deliverer. He had been living in Midian for 40 years and had a wife and two sons, but he had evidently neglected to circumcise one of them. So here he is, enroute to serve the Lord and do battle for the Kingdom in Egypt when this happens: compare **Ex. 4:24-26**. That looks REALLY strange, but if we read between the lines, evidently Moses' Midianite wife had given him a hard time about circumcising their son. So, he gave in to her and didn't do it. But God wouldn't let him go to Egypt and deliver the people, He wouldn't let him go and do spiritual battle against Pharaoh and his hosts until this was done, until Moses displayed complete obedience in this matter. And the same was true for Israel; God would not let them go into battle until they had been completely obedient to the Lord in this key facet of their lives. Of course, it's true for us as well. I remember back to the spring of 1974 when I was 19 and I knew God had called me to be a pastor. In fact, He had already arranged for me to start pastoring a little country church in the middle of June, but I had never been baptized. It wasn't that I was being totally rebellious; it was just that baptism was something we didn't have very often and I had never thought much about, even when I was diligently reading the Scriptures. But now it seemed those verses seemed to jump off the page at me. The Spirit of God seemed to say to my heart, "How can you pastor a church and teach others about salvation and then about baptism, when you yourself haven't obeyed My command to be baptized?" So, I went to my pastor and said, "Look, I've got to get baptized! I've only got a couple weeks until I'm the pastor of a church!" So, two weeks or so beforehand, we held a little service by a creek out on a farm and when I came up out of the water, I had this tremendous exhilarating sense that I had obeyed God, that I was now ready to serve! Listen, God **INSISTS** on obedience in your life too, if you want to make a difference in the world for His Kingdom. Now, the riskiest thing about this for me was the herd of cows wading across upstream in the pasture, but I want you to see for Israel:

2. the tremendous risk involved in the circumcision (8) Circumcision requires healing. Think about it for a moment. This:

a. it was extremely dangerous from the human perspective Nearly every warrior in the Israelite army was circumcised. An infant only days old may scream for the moment and heal quickly, but in an adult circumcision is a horribly painful, debilitating process and takes a long time to heal. Do you remember back in Gen. 34 two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, deceived the men of the town of Shechem into being circumcised. Then on the third day they went through the town and the two of them killed every man in the whole place because none could defend himself! That's exactly the condition that obeying God put Israel into; it made them virtually defenseless and Jericho was only 2 miles away! Suppose its army had ventured out to attack! They could have been slaughtered! You know, sometimes obedience to God, being completely willing to obey Him means doing something that from our perspective looks awfully dangerous. Sometimes it looks like it's going to cost you your job or cause you to lose a lot of money or in many places in the world, bring persecution upon you. But what I want you to see is:

b. their safety was ensured from the Divine perspective (1) God knew it was absolutely safe for them because he had put such a deep fear into the people of Jericho and the rest of the Canaanite cities by drying up the Jordan that they hid behind their high walls and were never coming out! From God's perspective Israel was absolutely safe when she was most vulnerable! Listen! You are never safe unless you are fully in the center of God's will. Nothing can touch you there unless God allows it. But if you're outside of God's will, if you choose to disobey, no matter how pristine and secure your circumstances look, you're not safe for a moment! It is ALWAYS safe to obey God! He's got your back! Truthfully, HE IS your safety! Now why is this such a big issue anyway? Let's look at:

3. the significance circumcision held for Israel (9) The place where they camped, they named Gilgal, "rolling", because there God said, *Today I have had rolled away the reproach of Egypt.* He had rolled away the shame, the scorn, the disgrace which the Israelites had carried. You see, circumcision:

a. it was the sign of God's covenant Listen to **Gen. 17:9-14** Circumcision was the sign of the eternal covenant between God and Abraham and all his descendants after him. To be circumcised was a sign that you were a child of Abraham and an heir to the promises God had made to him. It was to say "I belong to Jehovah, the God of Abraham; I am in covenant with Him and I worship Him alone." It was not even to be done with their normal metal knives; rather they were to make special knives out of flint to carry out this sacred ritual, just like no iron tool was ever used in building God's Temple. You don't get into this covenant by human effort. This is a holy privilege, a God thing from first to last. But in Egypt, however, the Israelites had lived lives of sin and bondage and even idolatry. Naturally they carried some of that with them into the wilderness as redeemed people, for instance, the golden calf and all the grumbling and complaining, and being unwilling or uncaring enough to circumcise their children was part of that shameful past! Of course, we do that too, don't we? We carry over some of those shameful things from our past lives right into our lives as believers, things that ought to be rolled away. And so, this circumcision at Gilgal:

b. it completed their obedience to God It was their act of total surrender to the Lord, saying, "Lord, we know this seems dangerous, but we trust you. We want to carry nothing of our old selfish sinful lives with us. We will obey!" Throughout the Old Testament, circumcision:

c. it always symbolized a state of the heart God had already told Israel when they were camped across the Jordan that it was really their hearts he was interested in. **Deut. 10:16** says, *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your hearts and be no longer stubborn.* **Jer. 4:4** says the same thing. Those who lived in Egypt lived sinful lives even though their flesh was circumcised. True circumcision was a matter of the heart, not simply of the flesh and that's what was going on that day at Gilgal: an act of their hearts, surrendering completely in full obedience to the Lord and that's why:

d. it prepared them for the battles to come Dear friend, you can't go into the spiritual battles of life, knowing there is a key area of your life where you have not obeyed God! **Ps. 66:18** says, *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* God demands holiness in His people. It is those who are holy that He listens to; it is those who are holy who can stand in His Presence and it is those who are holy that He uses to fight His battles. If you want to be prepared to face doubt and temptation and discouragement and deception and all the things Satan is most certainly going to throw at you, you've got to be completely obedient; you've got to deal with those habits and patterns of disobedience that you're still holding on to and carrying out from your past life. And that's exactly what you find when you move on to the New Testament and examine:

4. the symbolism circumcision hold for us This matter of the necessity of circumcision is, in fact, the earliest problem we know of in the early church. A group of believers from Jewish background started going around preaching that non-Jews had to be circumcised in order to enter the faith and be true followers of Christ. In essence they believed you had to become a Jew in order to follow Jesus. Paul had to fight this heresy in several locations and here's what he tells us about this issue. First:

a. outward circumcision no longer matters - Gal. 6:15, *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.* Circumcision was a physical sign given to Israel as a sign of God's covenant with them as a nation. It did not save Israelites and it does not save us. Whether we are circumcised or uncircumcised physically does not matter; what matters is a circumcised heart. Look with me at **Rom. 2:28-29**. Now Paul goes on to tell us that:

b. we all experience an inward circumcision There is a circumcision that each of us who believes experiences, whether we are male or female, Jew or Gentile. It is not outward; it is not done in the flesh. It is done inside of us, in our hearts. And:

(1) it is done by Christ Turn with me to **Col. 2:11-12**. This circumcision of ours has already been done. It was done by Christ at the very moment we received Him as our Savior. It is an accomplished fact. In circumcision a part of you gets cut off, removed and thrown away. It is "put off", completely separated from you. And exactly what is it that was put off from us?

(2) it is the cutting off of the old self ruled by sin The NIV says *the sinful nature*, and it's right. It is our old life, our old self, that person we were before we were saved, that old, dead spirit in us that loved and served and was enslaved to sin. That old man, that nature that I got from Adam, was cut off and cast away and a brand new nature was put in its place. I am literally a new man. You see how:

(3) it is a parallel symbol to baptism Remember Ch. 4 last week, how the stones in the river symbolize that my old self is dead and the stones at Gilgal symbolize that I live a new life, just the way baptism symbolizes that for us? Notice that it is at Gilgal, the very same place the memorial stones were set up, that they were circumcised, that the reproach of their old life was rolled away! A dual symbolism! God was saying, "You're not who you were! You are brand new! Now get out there and live like it and fight My battles!" I am a brand new person in Jesus Christ from the moment of my salvation. I am not the same person I was. My old life is cut off and cast away. But the point is that:

c. this cleansing, therefore, enables and obligates us to obedience - Look down to **Col. 3:5-10**. There are still things, wrong habits, neglected duties from the old life that cling to us after we're saved, that we still carry around with us as redeemed people, even though our old self has been crucified with Christ and we're not the same person any more. We have to do like Israel. We have to stop living like what we used to be and start living like what we are! We've got to repent of those things and remove them by God's grace so that He will be ready to use us in His service. That's what Israel was doing at Gilgal, surrendering the last vestige of their old life that they had clung to, coming to a place of complete obedience to the Lord. That's exactly where we have to come to before we're ready to face the battles of life.

Now, returning to our text, after the circumcision of Israel at Gilgal we find:

II. The Celebration Of The Passover At Gilgal (10-12) Circumcision wasn't the only thing they hadn't done for the last 38 years. They hadn't kept the Passover either, not since they were camped at Mt. Sinai in Num. 9. The overall impression is that:

1. God had suspended Israel's life purpose in the wilderness When she refused to go into Canaan, it's like she was now set aside. She wandered aimlessly about in the wilderness focused on her daily needs waiting to die instead of serving God. She didn't circumcise her children, didn't celebrate the Passover, didn't accomplish anything of the Lord's purpose. You know, that's how life is when you're disobeying and you're out of God's will! It's this aimless round of working and eating and sleeping and hobbies and family and whatever else, but you don't accomplish anything of value for the Kingdom! But at Gilgal, once they came to a place of complete obedience:

a. He now qualified them for Passover through circumcision - **Ex. 12:48** says that no uncircumcised person may eat of it. So now, through obedience to His Word, at long last they enter back into the joy of their salvation from Egypt. And here at Gilgal:

b. He now kept His Word to them after 40 years God told Israel when they disobeyed Him in **Num. 14:30-35** that they would wander about in the desert for 40 years, a year for each day they spied out the land, until that entire generation was dead and then God would bring their *children* into the land. The tragedy of the whole thing is in **Deut. 1:2-3, 2:14-15**. Did you see it? When they left Sinai, they could have been in the Promised land in 11 days. Instead, they arrived 38 years later when all of that generation was dead. What a waste of time and life! But right on His timetable:

2. God now launched them forward into the conquest of Canaan And as He did so, notice two things. The first is that evidently:

a. He healed their bodies in supernatural way. **4:19** says that they crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and here they celebrated the Passover on the 14th day, three days later. On the third day, not a single Shechemite could defend themselves against Simeon and Levi, as we said before. I read somewhere that the recovery time from adult circumcision is more like 3 weeks! There's no way they could have celebrated a normal Passover the third day unless God honored their step of obedience by supernaturally speeding up their healing process. Yet at the very same time:

b. He stopped the manna and began providing food by normal means All the inhabitants of the region around Jericho had fled into the city, leaving their houses and grain bins at Israel's disposal. Plus, God had brought Israel into the land at harvest time, in the very beginning. That whole year they reaped the harvest of the land of Canaan which was standing there ready for them to gather in. So, the manna, the supernatural daily bread from heaven stopped; it wasn't needed any more, yet His daily provision continued. God can provide for us either way, by supernatural means or by simply arranging very natural means, but either way, HE does it as He sends us forth on His mission!

Well, has God spoken to your heart this morning? Is there some reproach you're still carrying that needs to be rolled away? Don't waste your life. Give it to Him this morning and get rid of it. *There's an old story about a chicken, a pig, and a*

cow who were going to a carry-in dinner. The chicken said "I'll bring the eggs. Cow, why don't you bring the milk? And Pig, why don't you bring the ham?" The pig thought a moment and said "Wait a minute, for you to bring the eggs and for Cow to bring the milk is involvement; for me to bring the ham means total commitment!" That's exactly what God is looking for: complete obedience.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

The Battle Of Doubt: Jericho - Ch. 6

When we come to chapter 6 of Joshua, all the events of preparation have been completed and Israel now begins to face her enemies. I can't help but remember King Théoden's line in *Lord of the Rings* as he stood on the wall at Helmsdeep looking at 10,000 enemies and said, *So it begins*. The King of the city of Jericho may very well have said the exact same thing as he looked down upon the 600,000 fighting men of Israel arrayed against his city. At the point where Israel crossed the Jordan, Jericho was the gateway to the land of Canaan. This is a view of the modern city of Jericho. It lies on the low plain of the Jordan River, but look at the ridge behind it. Here's another view looking from the Jordan west toward the city. Again, look behind it. This is what lies to the west of Jericho, a huge mountainous ridge that extends for miles north and south. There was but one major rift, one ravine, one path, that led 5 miles up from the plain along the Jordan to the top of the ridge where Jerusalem was situated, and it was still there 1400 years later when Jesus walked that Jericho road. The city of Jericho stood directly in Israel's way, between them and the conquest of the promised land. Yet actually it didn't. You see, God knows no obstacles! Nothing stands in His way; nothing threatens to thwart His plan! What threatens to stop His people is actually a battle that occurs within their minds; they begin to doubt! They look with their eyes at the circumstances and they begin to doubt His ability, to doubt His wisdom and the battle is lost before it ever begins. The story of the battle of Jericho is the perfect illustration of the kind of:

I. The Situation Which Satan Uses To Create Doubt in our lives. The first thing that you need to understand is:

1. the impenetrable security of the city of Jericho (1) Other translations say it was *tightly shut up*. Now Jericho is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and has provide archaeologists with much valuable information. Many ancient cities in this region were built on mounds; as there was destruction or fire, the next generation built on top of the old until there was a mound or *tel* many feet high. The site of ancient Jericho is today called *Tel es Sultan*, the Sultan's hill and here is an aerial view of the site of ancient Jericho looking south. You can see the marks of the various digs that have explored it over the last century and what archaeologists have discovered is that:

a. it had an unbreachable system of 3 tiered walls that looked something like this. The city of Jericho was surrounded by a great rampart or embankment of earth. At the base of it was a retaining wall made of stone that was 12-15 feet high. Standing on top of that was a second wall of mud bricks six feet thick and 20-26 feet high! So, as you stood at the base of the wall the first obstacle was between 32 and 41 feet high, much higher than the ceiling of this room. And that only got you onto the embankment (which did seem to be inhabited in that day, however). But then at the top of the embankment was another mud brick wall similar to the one below! From the bottom, it's base would have been some 46 feet above your feet and it's top some 70 feet, that's like looking at the top of our steeple from the street and wondering how you're ever going to get an army over that! Here's another drawing to give perspective. No wonder the doubting spies reported to Moses 40 years earlier, *...the cities are large with walls up to the sky*, and gave up all hope of conquering them! To make matters worse:

b. it had only one strongly fortified gate The New York Times reported in 1998 that an archaeological expedition had finally located the gate of Jericho and was convinced that it is the "only one". Here's a picture of the spot, of the base of one of the ancient towers. They reported, "The gateway is on the southeastern side of the site.... it was built in a zone with difficult access and was protected by two towers with walls about 23 feet thick, and a base about 10 feet wide." When it was shut, there was truly no going in and no going out! It could be easily defended against any force. It didn't matter that the army of Jericho was heavily outnumbered:

c. Israel's resources were totally inadequate to take the city Jericho had a good-sized spring inside the walls for water and it was harvest time; their coffers were filled with grain. They could simply outlast any siege laid against them! To get in there you'd need an army like the Roman legions, one that could build a long earthen ramp to breach the walls like they did at Masada centuries later, a professional army that had siege engines and catapults and battering rams and ladders. Israel was an army of shepherds with swords and spears; what good are they against stone and brick walls, from the top of which archers can shoot! Now let's turn to look at:

2. the orders that Joshua was given Look back to (5:13-15) Joshua must have been sitting alone out there that night, looking at the city in the distance and contemplating how on earth to attack it when suddenly there is this man standing there, holding a drawn sword in his hand. Now I don't know about you, but my first reaction would be to draw mine! But Joshua doesn't; he can sense there is something supernatural going on, and when he approaches and asks, "who are you?", the answer is, "take off your shoes; you're standing on holy ground." Now where had Joshua heard those words before? From Moses when he told the story of his own encounter with God in the burning bush! This strange man was:

a. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, the One who takes on human form, who **appeared to him personally in a theophany**, an appearance of God Himself as a man. He did this many times in the Old Testament. He walked up to Abraham who was sitting at the door of his tent; He wrestled all one night with Jacob and put his hip out of joint; He showed up to walk around with the 3 young men in the fiery furnace in Babylon and kept them from being burned. And here He came to Joshua and said, "I am the commander of the armies of God! That is, I am the LORD of Hosts! And I am neither for you nor for your enemies; I am for ME! I am here to get glory to Jehovah!" So, Joshua fell on his face and worshipped and took off his sandals. Then he was told the battle plan:

b. Jesus ordered him to simply march the army around the city (2-5) It was just like when they crossed Jordan, the priests were to carry the ark, the very throne of God around the city wall, to let the inhabitants see it and know who was opposing them, and blow trumpets to announce His presence. The army was to follow without shooting an arrow or saying a word. They were to do this for a week and then on the seventh day to do it seven times and then:

c. Jesus promised that HE would collapse the wall and give them the city They would have to exert NO effort to breach the wall at all He would knock it down and all they would have to do is go up the hill and slay the terrified and confused inhabitants. David knew the same truth Jesus told Joshua and shouted it to Goliath: *the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands.* - 1 Sam. 17:47.

Now right there is where doubt comes in. When we find ourselves facing a roadblock in life like Israel did, we look at the circumstances and we doubt that the battle is the Lord's and that He can make a way through for us. Your Jericho might be facing a terminal illness or an accident that disables you. It might be the loss of your job and the inability to find another. It might be the traumatic death of a loved one or the heavy responsibility to care for an elderly parent. It might be the calling of God to go to the mission field or enter the ministry, but whatever it is, the obstacles appear overwhelmingly insurmountable. That's when doubt creeps in and here are:

3. the ways that Satan tempts us to doubt God First:

a. he tempts us to doubt the greatness of God's ability "Can God really knock down walls that reach up to the sky? Can He really provide for me as He says? Can He really provide enough for all my bills if I give Him a tithe first? Can He really sustain me through this awful ordeal and give me strength to face it? Can He really heal my mind after what I've lost? Can He really protect me from the enemies who are trying to hurt me? Can God really do what He says He's going to do? Is He really God enough to be God?!" Or if we're too pious to allow these kinds of thoughts, then Satan:

b. he tempts us to doubt the wisdom of God's methodology "Walls can't possibly fall simply by walking and shouting; I've got to DO something! Does God really realize what I'm up against? How can He possibly meet my needs when I give this much away? How can He ever solve this conflict by me forgiving the other person when they don't even want it? How can He ever make a way for me to do that when I don't have X or Y or Z?" God's ways are never our ways! He never does things the way that we would choose to do them; His methods almost always seem to be the exact opposite of normal human sense! That's why we're tempted to doubt them, but remember this:

God is never the author of doubt; Satan is and he's been using it against man ever since the garden. "Did God actually say this? You will not surely die! God is just trying to hold you back and keep you from knowing what He knows! Eat! Enjoy! How could eating one little piece of fruit kill you?" He comes to you today exactly the same way, but fortunately, we have:

II. The Weapon Which God Has Given Us To Defeat Doubt What knocked down the walls of Jericho? Look with me at what the New Testament says in **Heb. 11:30**. Did you see it?

1. the walls of Jericho were felled by faith, not by effort, coincidence or positive thinking, but by faith. And what exactly is faith? Let me give you a simple definition: *Faith is (1) believing what God says is true and (2) acting on it.* It is not some magical, mystical thing; it is a simple choice. It is choosing to believe what God says is actually true and choosing to act on any instructions He gives, period. Look at Joshua:

a. Joshua believed the Lord without hesitation (6-7) He didn't blink an eye. He didn't ask a question. He didn't hesitate to think about it. The next morning, he called the priests and the people to get marching! He chose not to listen to any doubts that may have been floating in his mind the night before; He believed Jesus, period. And began to do what he was told to do **(8-15)**.

b. Joshua and the army obeyed the Lord repeatedly Every day they got up and marched around that city, even though it looked like nothing was happening, even though the people on the wall may have been jeering at them by this time! Now the area enclosed by outer wall of Jericho was approximately 9 acres, so to walk around the perimeter of the city was a walk of almost exactly half a mile. Israel had 600,000 fighting men and if they all followed the ark, even walking several abreast, the column would be streaming around it all day long! Only a portion of them could possibly have walked the circle 7 times on the last day, but they obeyed the Lord's instructions to the letter and when they did, God did exactly what He said He would do, vs. **(20)**:

c. God supernaturally collapsed the walls and Israel conquered The walls simply collapsed, crumbled and fell down, and the army which surrounded the city simply clambered up over the rubble from every direction and in short order the city was theirs. How? God could have used an earthquake, but it doesn't say so. Or He could simply have swished His finger like you do on the touch screen of your phone and knocked them down. It was no problem to Him. Corrie ten Boom said, *God has no problems; only plans!* He has plans to glorify His Name in all the earth and our problems are simply opportunities for Him to do it. Turn with me to **Eph. 6:16**.

2. God has given us faith to use as a shield against doubt You see:

a. Satan shoots doubting thoughts into our mind like flaming arrows I just finished reading a Zane Grey novel about the attack by Indians and the British on Fort Henry in what is now Wheeling, WV in 1782. One of them managed to get close enough to shoot a flaming arrow into the dry roof of the block house and it caught fire. It would have burned the whole thing down had not a willing volunteer run out across the roof through a hail of rifle fire, kicked the arrow loose and doused the flames with a bucket of water. If you don't put the fire out, your whole fort will burn down! If doubt lodges in your mind and you let it there, it will systematically destroy your faith one aspect at a time. But:

b. we can extinguish those doubts through faith before they wound us The Roman soldier had a shield, a wooden frame covered with leather in the shape of a door, about 2 1/2 by 4 ft. When the arrows began to fly, he could hide his whole body behind the shield and the arrows would glance off or stick in it and none of them would touch him! That's what faith is like! That conviction that every word of God is true, that God has both the power to do everything He says and the wisdom to know what we should do, will put out the fire every time. However:

c. we must choose to exercise it in each circumstance by obeying We must raise the shield! We must choose to stand on our conviction. Paul said, *Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."* - Rom. 4:18. Humanly it looked like God could never keep His promise of a child. Abraham was 100 years old! But Abraham lifted up the shield and chose to say, "God said it so I believe it!" and God made him the father of many nations. It's a choice. That's what Israel did. Despite everything their eyes could see, they believed God and marched as He commanded and the wall fell! So must you if you want to know victory! And just in case you want more:

III. The Evidence That God's Word Can Be Trusted

1. archaeology confirms all the details of this story (20b-24) tells us that the wall collapsed and the army went straight up the hill into the city but that Rahab's house, which was evidently built into the outer wall remained standing and they brought her out safe and afterward they burned the city. Do you know what the archaeologists have found in their digging? All the collapsed brick from wall number two fell down over the lower retaining wall and formed a ramp by which the Israelites could easily clamber up over and ascend the hillside. However, one small section of that second wall including the remains of several houses remains standing today on the north side closest to the mountains; it could very well be Rahab's house! And further, at that level in the mound of the city there is an entire layer of burned ash and debris three feet thick. This is no fairy tale, no myth of ancient history. God actually DID this thing, this tremendous miracle, and left it lying there buried for us to find and declare His glory! For years scientists shouted loudly that there was no proof that Jericho had walls during this time period. They're not shouting that today! Let God be true and every man a liar! The last detail of the story is a curse, actually a prophecy, declared by Joshua on that occasion **(26-27)** Do you know what?

2. history confirms God's fulfilling of Joshua's curse - 1 Kin. 16:34 says, *In Ahab's time [600 years later], Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun.* Listen, **Prov.**

30:5 says, *Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in him.* If you will choose to believe that and act on it in your life, you will see the glory of God!

Alexander the Great, the Greek general who literally conquered the world by the time he was 30, is said to have had complete confidence in his personal physician, even when he had reason to question his loyalty. On one occasion, when he was ill, he received an anonymous letter advising him that the medicine which his doctor prescribed contained a poison. (Poisoned food or drink was a common way of trying to assassinate kings for centuries and all important officials were wary of it). However, when the physician arrived and gave him the drug, Alexander said, "Friend, I trust you," and drank it all. So thorough was his reliance that, despite the doubts placed in his mind by the letter, he was willing to risk his life by doing whatever his doctor recommended. Even though he had no concept of the true God, Alexander's example demonstrates the lesson God is trying to get across in our text. The shield of faith in his doctor whom he trusted quenched the doubts an enemy was trying to put there. Whatever Jesus says to you, whether it is a word from the Bible or a personal word you hear in your heart, say, "Lord, I trust you" and act on it, whether it seems reasonable or not. Choose to lift up the shield of faith. All the doubts will be extinguished and you will see the glory of God revealed in your life.

Archaeological info and most PowerPoint pictures from these sites:

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

The Battle Of Temptation: Achan - Ch. 7

The second type of battle that we face in living the Christian life is a very obvious one: the battle of temptation to sin, the urge to do what we know God has commanded us not to do. Satan's oldest scheme is to set before us some forbidden object or opportunity and to make it seem so desirable that we will rebel against the will of our Heavenly Father, and thus create a rift between ourselves and God. He did it with Eve in the garden. First, he induced doubt, *Did God really say...?* And then when he had her doubting God's integrity, she only had to look at the forbidden tree and *...when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.* So did Adam, and immediately they were cut off from God. Therefore, it is no surprise that as we come to chapter 7 of Joshua, we learn that, even as the walls of Jericho were falling in that tremendous miracle of Ch. 6, Satan was hard at work using this very attack of temptation in a bid to separate them from God. And it worked! Let's look together at:

I. The Story Of Achan Yielding To Temptation At Jericho But first we need to understand something that happened before the walls fell. Look at **(6:17-21)**. Together with all the people, Joshua made:

1. the vow that Jericho was devoted to destruction before God This is a special term in the Hebrew, *cherem*, and in the Law in Leviticus it is mentioned as a vow that a person can make. It is a vow that means the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD. The vow was applied differently depending on the object of dedication. A clean animal, for instance, would be killed and offered as a sacrifice. Gold or silver would be put into the Lord's treasury at the tabernacle. In the case of persons, a firstborn would be redeemed by a sacrifice, but an enemy would be killed. And the idea was that once the thing or person was dedicated, it belonged to God and was holy; it was banned from personal use. In the case of Jericho, it is possible that Jesus told Joshua to make this vow, but we don't read that in the text. God's clear instructions in Deut. 20 said that Israel could normally keep the spoils from the cities they conquered but in the cities of Canaan all the persons were to be under the vow and devoted to destruction. So I rather think Joshua was voluntarily vowing all the plunder of Jericho to God as a kind of first-fruits offering, that he wanted the first city they took to be given completely to God in every aspect. In Jericho:

a. all living things were to be killed, all perishable things burned and all precious metals placed in the treasury of His Sanctuary. So, Joshua warned the soldiers to be careful not to take any plunder for themselves or they would break the vow. All the items in the city, no matter how valuable, were banned from being kept for personal use. And Joshua explained specifically to them that:

b. violation of this ban meant both personal and corporate destruction God takes this vow very seriously. To take a devoted thing would set God Himself against them and bring about their own destruction. To take what should be destroyed or given, meant YOU should be destroyed! And in some measure, it merited the destruction of the whole nation because Joshua was making this vow collectively for all Israel and they were acting together in it. Now while I'm on the subject, let me say:

c. a word about the morality of the destruction of the people of Canaan The question that often comes up in modern 20th century minds is, "Wait a minute; how is it right that God commands his people to invade a whole land and completely wipe out every person? Isn't that genocide?" First of all, God clearly says in the 10 commandments that murder is wrong and He declares that the penalty for murder is death so He clearly values human life. However, under certain conditions, He also declares that human life MUST be taken, not only for murder, but for witchcraft, idolatry, kidnapping, rape, as well as all kinds of sexual sins. Certain things are an abomination to God and their practitioners deserve to and must be killed. When God told Abraham that his descendants would go down to Egypt, become a great nation and be brought back again to the land of Canaan 400 years later, He gave his reason for that delay in **Gen. 15:16**, *And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.* The seven peoples who lived in the land of Canaan were descending deeper and deeper into idolatry and abominable practices of all sorts. You know how bad things got in Sodom and Gomorrah, so bad that in Gen. 19 God wiped them out Himself! The other cities of Canaan were fast following in their footsteps, growing deeper and deeper in iniquity, until by this point in history they reached the epitome of what God was willing to tolerate in a society and:

(1) God used Israel as an instrument to punish their sin. This invasion by Israel was an act of Divine justice upon the Canaanites, just as God used Babylon to punish Israel for her idolatry centuries later. God has always been at work through history raising up nations and judging others with destruction based on the moral level to which they fall. It is part of His governing of the universe and if He didn't do it, the world would be overwhelmed by evil as it was before the flood! But is it right? One need only ask, "Who made whom?" God created the hu-

man race and He has the ultimate right to demand standards and to destroy those who violate them! But why destroy every last person? Wouldn't destruction of their cities and reducing them to servants be enough? Look at **Deut. 20:16-18**.

(2) God knew the Canaanites would corrupt Israel if left alive. That's exactly what had just happened not long before in Num. 25 where Israel was camped in Moab on the other side of Jordan. Moabite women invited Israelite men to the sacrifices of their gods and they dove right into the idolatry and the sexual debauchery that went with it without hesitation. 24,000 Israelites died in that disaster. God knew how prone Israel was to idolatry and rebellion and that she would quickly turn her heart to become like those she took captive so He declared them all under the ban, all the inhabitants of Canaan to be devoted to destruction for the sake of His people and of His purpose on the earth and He had both the moral and the Divine right to do it.

OK, let's return to our story and look closely at:

2. the violation Achan committed by yielding to temptation (1) When his offense is revealed later on, Achan himself describes what happened **(20-21)**. This ought to sound very familiar because this is the same process that happens to us when we are tempted, isn't it? First of all:

a. he saw In the rubble of Jericho he stumbled across some things that caught his eye. He must have been in some rich man's house because there was this beautiful imported Babylonian robe lying there that must have cost its owner a bundle. And there was a 5 pound chunk of silver. Today that would be worth \$35 an ounce or nearly \$3,000. And near it was a pound and a quarter wedge of solid gold. At \$1,530 per ounce today, that would be worth more than \$30,000! I have no idea how much they were actually worth then, but I think it's safe to say that for a guy who had lived in a tent in the desert all his life, he had stumbled upon a veritable fortune. You know he didn't just glance at it; you can see him staring and doing all the mental calculations and imagining what life would be like if these things were his. He **looked at and considered forbidden things**. That's how temptation always starts. We turn our eyes on the forbidden fruit and think about what it would be like to eat it. King David was strolling on his palace roof in the cool one evening when he looked down on the roof next door and saw a beautiful woman bathing. But he didn't avert his eyes; he looked! He stared. He pondered. If he had binoculars, he got them out! And soon he wanted! Job knew how that worked and he said, *I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? - Job 31:1*. He said, "I have a habit. I made a vow to myself. I change the channel. I shut down the computer screen. I turn my head away at the beach. I don't gaze; I don't stare; I don't ponder." *In his book Three Steps Forward Two Steps Back, Charles Swindoll wrote, "Do not try to co-exist peacefully with temptation ...If you are weakened by certain kinds of music, you are playing into the hands of Satan himself to listen to it. If you're weakened by certain ...pictures that bring before your eyes things that build desires within you that you can't handle, then you're not counteracting sin and temptation. You're tolerating it. You're fertilizing it. You're prompting it. If the newsstand [or the internet, I might add] is something you can't handle, stay away from it! Quit clucking your tongue and shaking your head as you linger over the pages. If you're weakened by relationships with certain people, abstain from them ...There's a word for those folks who linger and try to reason with lust: victim."* Achan stared and pondered at the expensive things he'd found and as he did:

b. he coveted them. That is, **he developed a strong desire for them**, a lust for what he knew he shouldn't have. That's how temptation works. Look with me at **James 1:14-15**. It's desire that's the problem. The problem lies inside me. Looking stirs up desires that reside in my flesh; when I look, I want! I want the things. I want the person. I want the recognition. I want, I want, I want, and the longer I look, the stronger that want becomes. And when desire gets strong enough, it's like a baby growing inside the womb, it has to come out, to be born. It gets too strong for us to control, to stop. That's why, thirdly, Achan:

c. he took. He **chose to act out his desire**, to take the robe and the silver and the gold that he wanted so badly. There was the act of sin. He took for himself what belonged to God; he stole from God just as surely as if you had emptied the offering plate into your pocket this morning when it passed by. David looked until he wanted so badly that he abused his privilege as King and sent a servant to go get Bathsheba, who was another man's wife. Under God's law, the penalty for that was also death and he knew it, just like Achan did, but at the moment the desire was so strong that he chose to act anyway, to sin. And then Achan:

d. he hid the things he'd taken in his tent. He buried them underneath it. He **covered up his act so it would not be known**, just like David tried to cover up what he'd done and ended up committing murder. For a whole year David lived a lie, pretending to be a righteous king to everyone but knowing in his heart what he really was. You see, sin always has consequences and you can see here in the story:

3. the vast consequences of Achan's act First of all:

a. it caused irreversible collateral damage Joshua and Israel, not knowing what had occurred, set out to attack the next little city, the town of Ai **(4-5)**. Achan's sin prevented God from helping Israel. They lost the battle and 36 men died. 36 wives became widows. 36 sets of children had no fathers to care for them. All because one man

wanted a bar of gold! When you yield to temptation, your sin affects others! God only knows how deeply affected children are when their families split up because someone yielded! And then, it's kind of hard to bury something under the bare floor of your tent without your family at least asking, "What's with the fresh dirt?" They had to know and he led them into sharing in his sin, into helping him cover up and in the end, they died with him. And none of this was reversible. Going back and saying "I'm sorry" couldn't bring those men back to life. When you yield to temptation it does irreversible damage to your life, to the lives of your family, to your church and to others. And while you can always be forgiven, most of the time the damage is already done! Second:

b. it created intense spiritual confusion (6-9) Not only did all Israel's hearts melt in fear from losing the battle, but even Joshua, who had just met God face to face, ends up on his face in despair and asking God why He hasn't kept His promise! Oh, the confusion that is created when someone who is openly known as a believer, especially as a spiritual leader, chooses to yield to temptation. Nonbelievers scoff and say, "so much for that religious mumbo-jumbo." Children say, "If that's where this road of Christianity leads, I don't want any parts of it." Others leave the church or give up their faith and God gets blamed for it because people can't reconcile what you've done with what you professed to believe and be. Third, notice that:

c. it was inevitably discovered (10-12) Listen, here's a tip: whenever God doesn't do what He SAYS in His Word He will do, the problem ISN'T HIM! God is faithful. He can't lie. He can't forget. He can't fail. He can't change His mind. He's God! So, when it looks like He's shifted, you can bet that *...the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear - Is. 59:1-2*. And He will be quick to show you! **(13-19)** The whole time Achan stood there silent, just hoping against hope that somehow someone else would get blamed as the lot got closer and closer and finally landed on him! Remember **Num. 32:23**? *...be sure your sin will find you out!* God knows what you did and sooner or later He will point it out and reveal it no matter how deep you bury it! And finally, notice that:

d. it led to eventual destruction (22-26) Now it is possible that he was repentant but I doubt it. He only confessed under duress. He persisted in the sin till the last possible moment. And when you do that, it may not kill you physically like it did him (though it might), but it will ruin and destroy your life in many ways. I know a young man who was a manager in a large store chain for years but one day Satan caught him at the right moment and he stole \$2400. He was taken out of the store in handcuffs and hasn't been able to find a real job in several years. Yielding to temptation will destroy your service to God and probably your family along with you. That's why Satan loves it so much. It's so powerful and so effective in ruining lives and stealing God's glory! But, praise God, we are better equipped than Achan was for:

II. The Battle Of Temptation We Face because we have better promises than any of the Old Testament fathers had. First we have:

1. the external promise of God concerning our temptation - 1 Cor. 10:13 There are two astounding facts in that verse concerning temptation itself. It says:

a. God always regulates the temptation God is faithful. He's on the job. He will never allow you, His child, to be tempted by Satan in a way that is too strong for you to endure. He controls it; He regulates it. Like He did with Job, He says "Satan, you can only do this much and no more!" So, you can rest in this as long as you're walking obediently with the Lord: whatever is in front of you that might tempt you, God knows you can resist it, if you rely on Him. And what's more:

b. God always provides a way of escape He always makes a way out. And the way is often that of v. 14, "FLEE from it!" He always makes an exit from the situation. David could have run inside and covered his eyes and been with his own wives instead of standing there lusting after Bathsheba. If you're tempted to steal, you can quit your job! If you're tempted sexually, you can get away from that person. God always has a way of escape made for you. You can never say "I couldn't help it, I had to sin, it was too much for me!" Externally God supervises and controls any temptation you face and makes a way out. There are no excuses. But we have something even better than that:

2. the internal weapon God has given us to face temptation - Eph. 6:14b says we're to stand against the enemy *...having put on the breastplate of righteousness*. You see, since we have God's Holy Spirit and have been born again:

a. God has placed HIS righteousness in us - Col. 3:9-10 says *you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*. **Eph. 4:24** adds *put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*. There is a new nature inside us, one that is righteous like God. It hates sin. It wants to be pure and holy. So, Satan is now really working against odds. He has to tempt us to do something that at the core of our being we really DON'T want to do! That's our breastplate! That's our true protection against temptation, but how do we put it on? **Rom. 6:12-13** says, *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instru-*

ments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. Our part is simple:

b. we must invite Him rule our bodies We must present them, devote them to Him as a living gift, a living sacrifice and say, "Lord, this body is yours. I don't want to do this thing that Satan is suggesting to me. I don't want him to use me. I will not depend on my own strength. Holy Spirit, you are stronger than this temptation. I yield myself to you. Fill and control me right now. Let your power flow through me. Deliver me from the evil one. I ask You by your power to strengthen me right now to look away and to walk away and to bring glory to your Name!"

That's the key to winning the battle of temptation. When you are tempted, you immediately stop looking and start praying! Yield yourself to the Holy Spirit within you and His power will carry you through. *Two years after receiving Christ, Jean Zeiler was still shackled by a habit of chain-smoking. Repeated attempts to stop had failed miserably. Finally, she decided, as she said, "to lay my cigarettes at the foot of the cross." In a church service she told the people she was surrendering her all to Christ. For three months Jean felt no serious craving to smoke. But then one beautiful July morning the test came. As she entered the kitchen, there on the table was a package of her husband's cigarettes. Instantly the most powerful craving consumed her. Jean recalls, "I stumbled toward the table. I knew I was going to smoke. I ached with the craving and began to whimper like a child. Then suddenly I went to the floor on my knees and began praying, 'O dear God, I can't take it. Do something!'" Lady, her big black Labrador retriever, had come to her side, sensing that something was wrong. By now Jean was crying her heart out, hugging Lady. Then followed an unusual stillness. As Jean got to her feet, everything seemed the same. The cigarettes were still on the table. Then it hit her--the craving was gone! "Oh, thank you, Lord!" she exclaimed. That victory had lasted 28 years at the time this story was written down.* I tell it to you not because smoking a cigarette is evil in itself, but to show you what to do when you're tempted, whether it is money or sex or alcohol or drugs or lying to your boss or cheating on a test, the method is still the same. Stop pondering sin and pray. Cry out to Jesus! He understands your temptation and tells you to come boldly to Him for help in time of need. He is able to strengthen you, to empower you, and to quench your burning desires with His presence so that your true righteousness shines forth.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

The Battle Of Discouragement: Ai - Ch. 8

Let me remind you that life for us is war. We are engaged as soldiers in Christ's army in a worldwide campaign to bring the human race under His rule, to advance His Kingdom against the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan. And we're studying the book of Joshua because it illustrates for us in the literal experiences of Israel in conquering the land of Canaan, the kinds of spiritual battles that we face. In their first battle at Jericho in chapter 6 we saw how Satan will attack us with **doubt** and how we overcome that by holding up the shield of faith. Then in chapter 7 we saw how Satan attacked Achan at Jericho with **temptation** and how he caused Israel to lose their first battle against Ai. Plus, we learned how we overcome temptation through asking the Holy Spirit to empower us with our breastplate of righteousness. Now through that defeat, Satan launched a third attack against Israel, and it too is one that he attacks us with, the attack of discouragement. We need to begin by going back to chapter 7 and studying more closely:

I. The Defeat Of Israel At Ai (7:2-5) Joshua's scouts started their exploration from their camp at Gilgal by the Jordan up through the mountain valley behind the smoldering remains of Jericho. The next place they came to was a smaller town called Ai, about 10 miles to the west. The exact location of Ai has been debated and still is not settled conclusively, but the best candidate for it appears to be a *tel*, called today Khirbet Nisya, which is situated in this valley and was excavated extensively by David Livingston who happens to be a relative of our Saurman family. The circled area is the mound of the ancient city. Here's a closer look. Almost all of the cities of Canaan were walled cities and this one enclosed about 7 acres and housed about 12,000 people according to 8:25. As Ai's army came out to fight and Joshua's 3,000 men began to lose, they turned and fled eastward down the rocky valley, the *Shebarim* [NIV margin], until it closed to a narrow passage, the *morad*, in English the *going down* or *slopes*. There they had to turn and hold off the enemy while their army squeezed through and 36 men died in the attempt. Just picture thousands of men fighting desperately with swords and spears and shields hand-to-hand in this terrain! What an awful day it must have been! They dragged themselves the long miles back down to the camp at Gilgal with their heads hung to report their defeat. Sometimes in life, we too, as believers experience defeat. Albert and his wife Aigul were SO excited to be the second set of Kyrgyz missionaries sent by into China. They and their 2 young children couldn't wait to get there; for 5 long years they prayed and saved and at last they entered their promised land. They didn't last a full year. Things were more expensive than they'd thought; they ran out of money; their kids had some problems. They ended up barely existing and had to come home in defeat. Bob Givens shared with me about the pastor of his home church who served there faithfully for many years. Because of a financial crunch he took over as the administrator of the church's Christian school for the last year in addition to his pastoral duties. And recently they called him in and told him they were letting him go, that they didn't think he was the one to lead the church forward. He had no inkling that was coming, especially after pouring his heart into service, and he and his family are just crushed. Defeated. Maybe you know what that's like. Maybe you've put your heart into something, maybe training your children, or reaching your loved one who is unsaved, maybe working hard for a promotion at work, or teaching your class and giving

your all to reach them, maybe trying to defeat a dread disease, but nothing has worked out as you hoped. The very prayer of your heart has seemingly gone unanswered. You've been defeated. And if you haven't been yet, don't hold your breath because you will experience this somewhere in life somehow. Now why does that happen to us? Well:

1. sometimes we are defeated because of obvious sin That was the case here (7:1). Achan's sin had caused their defeat. Now listen carefully: this does not mean that every time you are defeated you have necessarily sinned; nor does it mean that every time you suffer defeat you have to search your life for some hidden sin that you can't quite think of. I am simply saying that when you do sin, you can expect that defeat will come as a result of it. And, as in this case, it may be in the life of someone else who is partnered with you and you don't even know about it. But there are other reasons for failure:

2. sometimes we are defeated due to self-direction When they went to Jericho, God had given Joshua instructions. But here in verse (2) Joshua gives his own instructions. God had not told them to go up nor how to go up. Simply failing to seek God's will in a matter will lead to failure, if you have directed yourself to some place He doesn't want you to be. Then:

3. sometimes we are defeated due to self-confidence Having succeeded against impossible odds at Jericho, the spies in verse (3) looked at little Ai and thought, "We can handle that! It's so small that we don't need many men at all!" Joshua himself didn't even bother to go with them, it seems. Somewhere along the line they forgot Who knocked the walls down at Jericho. They began trusting in their own ability which was obviously far greater than that of Ai. And when you do that, God often lets you fail just to show you how much you need Him! And:

4. sometimes we are defeated due to self-imposed ignorance In verse (3) they said, "They are few!", but as I mentioned, 8:25 mentions 12,000 men and women at Ai so there had to be at least 5,000 fighting men and they only sent up 3,000. They made the odds nearly 2:1 against themselves simply because the spies came back with an under-exaggerated guess rather than a count! Sometimes we are defeated simply because we don't do our homework; we don't count the cost; we don't prepare properly; we don't take the time to find out all we need to know or to do things in the right way. Israel failed at Ai for all these reasons but what about when you haven't sinned and you are following God's direction and depending on Him and you've done the best job you can possibly do using everything you have, and you still suffer defeat. What then? Well hear this:

5. sometimes we are defeated because it is the will of God - Peter encouraged persecuted believers in **1 Pet. 4:19**, *Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.* Sometimes it has nothing to do with you at all; it is simply God's will. His choice. His plan. He has something in mind that you have no idea of. He needs this defeat to happen and He needs you to suffer through it for His glory. The problem is not really the circumstance itself; it is how you choose to react to it!

II. Israel Became Discouraged Through Her Defeat Verse 5 says their hearts all melted like water! Joshua fell on his face and said, "God, why have you done this! Why have you failed us? Now our cause will be lost!" HE was discouraged. But look at the first thing God says after the situation with Achan was taken care of. **(8:1a)**

1. God does not want us to be discouraged Stoning Achan did not remove their fear and their discouragement. They were still afraid as they thought about going off to another battle. The Hebrew word for *discouraged* here means literally to be broken, to be confused and dismayed and demoralized. That's what Satan wants, but God does not want us to sit and wallow in our discouragement! That's what my friend Albert is doing today after his China experience. He goes to church but he has no heart to serve God at all. He no longer has passion to see the world reached. He has given up and is living in a state of discouragement. That's exactly what Satan wants to do with this attack, to immobilize you, put you out of commission in the service of God through deep discouragement, but that is not what God wants!

2. God wants us to go forward using all the resources He has given us (8:1b-2) God says, *Go back up to Ai and take the whole army...* You know, sometimes God tells us to go right back into the situation where we have been defeated, right back to the place where we've been suffering, but even if it is not there, He still wants us to get up and go forward and serve Him! And He wants us to do it with all the resources at our command, to use everything we've got. Furthermore:

3. God wants us to go forward knowing He is in control He says, *I have given Ai into your hand...* "Go on and serve Me and trust that I am in control. I let you be defeated the first time. This time I will not. Know that your success or defeat is absolutely in My hands. Go ahead and do what I tell you and trust Me with the outcome!" And notice this:

4. God wants us to go forward obeying His every command "Destroy all the inhabitants of Ai just like you did at Jericho; only this time you can keep all their stuff for yourselves! And, by the way, here's the way I want you to beat them this time: set an ambush!" This time God didn't want them to march around the walls and shout! He gave them a different plan. The idea is to be sure you've got the plan from Him as to what He wants you to do next and then carry it

out to the letter! That's what He wanted of Israel and that's what He wants of you! "Get up off your face, Joshua! Go back up there and do it MY way all the way and watch what I will do in the end!" And that's exactly what they did:

III. Israel Pressed Forward Through Discouragement And Defeated Ai We are not going to take the time to read all of (8:3-28); I will try to summarize the battle for you the best I can. First:

1. Joshua explained the plan of attack to the army in vs. (3-8). 600,000 fighting men wouldn't fit into that little valley and if they did, the men of Ai would never open the gates and come out against such a superior force. Joshua hand-picked 30,000 of his best troops to go. The blue oval in the middle is Ai. By night he and the main body of his troops went up and set themselves in the valley on the north side of the city. But off to the west of the city, there is a ridge and Joshua had 5,000 of his men go around and hide there on the back side. When Ai's army marched out to meet the main army, they would run away down the valley just like last time and the men of Ai would chase them. Then the soldiers in ambush would rise up, run into the city, take it, light a huge fire and rush out into the valley. Ai's troops would end up trapped between two large armies with no place to run. Well:

2. the ambush was successful in vs. (9-23) Israel's army got into place that night and in the morning Joshua and his elders and his army stepped out into the open on an open area, an obvious challenge, "Come out and fight us!" The men of Ai, still riding high on their previous victory, all came running out of the gates. It seems as though they had also gotten reinforcements from neighboring Bethel on the hill across the valley and out they came; every last man wanted to get in on the battle. But Joshua and his troops turned and ran down the valley with the men of Ai on his heels. But when they were far enough away, he put some kind of signal flag on the end of his javelin and waved it on high and the ambushers rushed up over the ridge into the undefended city and lit some of it on fire. When Joshua's men suddenly stopped running and turned around to fight, the men of Ai knew something was up. They turned around and looked and black smoke was pouring up from inside their city and here was an army of 5,000 men running at them from behind, screaming the battle cry! They were caught in a circle of enemies six times their own number and they were slaughtered to the last man. Now:

3. Israel obeyed God completely in vs. (24-27). After finding the last of the soldiers trying to climb out of the canyon, they went back to the city and destroyed all its inhabitants, exactly as God had told them to do. But they kept the live-stock and the other plunder because this time God had told them they could. And, according to verses (28-29):

4. Ai became a heap of ruins He burned the city and while it was burning, he impaled its king on a stake as a sign and then took him down, threw his body in a hole and raised a heap of stones over it. Ai remained a heap of ruins throughout Joshua's lifetime, at least. A village was rebuilt there for a time; we read its name again nine centuries later after the captivity, in Ezra and Nehemiah's day, but that did not last and you see what it looks like today, a perpetual mound of ruins, which, incidentally seems to be the meaning of its name.

In one day, Israel's discouragement was gone because in the face of defeat, they pressed forward and were careful to do it in complete obedience. This lesson so impressed itself on Joshua and his army that right after this battle they did something extraordinary. Joshua took the whole body of Israel on an overnight journey. They marched up past the ruins of Ai onto the path that leads north through the mountains toward Galilee. They boldly went about 20 miles further on until they came to a pair of mountains, Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, with the town of Shechem in front and there the whole nation held a special ceremony:

IV. Israel Renewed Her Commitment to God's Word As He Had Commanded (30-35) Here are the two mountains, Ebal on the right and Gerizim on the left with the little town of Shechem, later called Sychar in Jesus' day, at the foot of Mt. Ebal. On the southern summit of Mt. Ebal Joshua built an altar. Today you'll find this one standing there which dates to about 200 years after Joshua's time, but when archaeologists excavated underneath this one, there on the bedrock of the mountain was a round circle of stones which, as Joshua set them up, may have looked like this. Joshua offered sacrifices to God there and he wrote portions of Moses' writings on the stones. Then he went back to the valley. Between the two mountains there is a hollow, a sort of natural amphitheater a mile wide in which sound can be heard amazingly well from one side to the other. And there, with half the tribes in the hollow against one mountain and half against the other, the Levites proclaimed out loud the blessings and curses written down by Moses in **Deut. 27-28** and all the people on one side and then the other shouted "Amen!" "So be it!" This was a pretty impressive, extensive thing, but they did it because they were commanded. You can read it for yourself, but God told them when they crossed Jordan to go to this exact place, to make this altar and to confess their commitment to doing the Word of God. And once the way was clear after Ai, they lost no time in hastening to do it. Their discouragement was replaced with a peace and a calm that emboldened them to walk 20 miles into enemy territory with all their wives and little ones and obediently worship the Lord. And never again in this whole war do we read of them shrinking back from battle in fear or see them wallowing again in discouragement. The secret was the simple thing they learned at Ai: find out what God says to do and do it, trusting Him. Period. Now we can't leave this story without mentioning:

V. Our Weapon Against Discouragement - Eph. 6:15 says that we're to stand against our enemy like this: *as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace*. The Roman soldier didn't go into battle barefooted. He wore sturdy fighting sandals which had thick leather or wooden soles studded with nails on the bottom bound securely to his feet with leather thongs about the ankles. A soldier with his shoes on was ready for battle. And Paul says that what makes us ready for battle is **God's Peace**. It is true that through believing the Gospel we have peace WITH God, but I think what Paul is saying here is that we can also have the peace OF God. Look with me at **Phil. 4:7**. The same peace that God has is given to us for spiritual battle, to guard our hearts and minds when we are defeated and discouraged and broken. It defies human understanding. It is the very confidence and assurance that God Himself has when He looks at a situation, that everything is alright and He has it under control, even though it doesn't look that way at the moment! And this peace is given by God to us for those very times when Satan would discourage us! So how do we put it on? Well just back up three verses to **Phil. 4:4**:

1. to have it we must rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances This is a matter of focus. You may have nothing to rejoice about in your circumstances; there may be only failure, defeat, frustration, and fatigue. But God hasn't changed. His love for you hasn't changed. The cross hasn't changed. All the wonderful answers to prayer and provisions all of your life haven't changed. You can still rejoice in HIM and keep your mind fixed on Him rather than your circumstances. That's the first key; the second is **Phil. 4:6**:

2. to have it we must replace our anxiety with prayer Stop being anxious and start praying. In practical terms that means every time you start to get frustrated and discouraged, you stop right then and there and talk to the Lord about it and thank Him for what He's already done for you and tell Him your problem. And if you feel discouraged again five minutes later, do it again and again and again. Do it all day long, until the discouragement gives way and the peace of God comes, until you have the assurance that even in your defeat and your discouragement with your circumstances, God has it all under control and is working it all together for good somehow.

On October 29, 1941 Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain visited Harrow School, his alma mater, to hear the traditional songs he had sung there as a youth, as well as to speak to the students. Britain had already been the prime target of Hitler's war machine for some time and the US had not yet entered the war. Here is a portion of that famous 4 1/2 minute speech: "The ten months that have passed have seen very terrible catastrophic events in the world--ups and downs, misfortunes-- but can anyone sitting here this afternoon, this October afternoon, not feel deeply thankful for what has happened in the time that has passed and for the very great improvement in the position of our country and of our home? Why, when I was here last time we were quite alone, desperately alone, and we had been so for five or six months. We were poorly armed. We are not so poorly armed today; but then we were very poorly armed. We had the unmeasured menace of the enemy and their air attack still beating upon us, and you yourselves had experience of this attack; and I expect you are beginning to feel impatient that there has been this long lull with nothing particular turning up! But we must learn to be equally good at what is short and sharp and what is long and tough.... for everyone, surely, what we have gone through in this period... this is the lesson: **Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never--in nothing, great or small, large or petty--never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.** Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.... These are not dark days; these are great days--the greatest days our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race." I don't know whether Churchill was a believer but his leadership kept Britain from discouragement and enabled them to persevere unto victory. His advice is nearly like scripture: When dark days happen refuse to be discouraged. Thank God for how He has sustained you; rejoice in the Lord. And pray through to peace. Then keep on going forward as He directs. Never give in!

Archaeological info and pictures from: <http://davelivingston.com>, www.bible.ca

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

The Battle Of Deception: Gibeon - Ch. 9

The spiritual war that we face as believers invading the world of Jesus Christ to turn all nations to Him is every bit as real as the physical invasion that Israel made against the nations of Canaan who occupied God's promised land. So, we can learn lessons for our battles by looking at theirs. At this point in our series of studies, Israel has crossed the Jordan River from the east side and destroyed first Jericho and then Ai there in the center of the map. Then they marched north all the way up to Shechem and held a special celebration of the law of God at the end of chapter 8 and returned to their camp at Gilgal by the river. The land of Canaan is not a big land; the whole is maybe 170 miles long and 50-60 miles wide. You could fit it into the state of Pennsylvania 5 times side by side and have space left over. The major cities are only a few miles apart with smaller towns in between; you can see them from each other. News traveled fast. So, it is no wonder that in chapter 9 we begin to read about:

I. The Reaction Of The Canaanites To Israel's Invasion (1-2)

1. the Canaanite peoples were all uniting to fight against Israel Canaan at that time was a land filled with little independent city-states. Each city was ruled by its own king. In normal times they would quarrel and fight with each other to assert dominance, but with the threat of the Israelite invasion upon them, they saw the size of Israel's army and realized there was no single city in the whole land who could stand before such a force. You can see on the map the various areas where the 7 ethnic peoples lived throughout the land. Messengers were sent out and kings who disliked each other made pacts to join forces. You can also see by this arrow God's strategy with Israel. He brought Israel into the land from the middle and by taking them from Jericho by the Jordan to Ai up on the ridge and now up over the top to Gibeon He was driving a wedge straight through the middle of the land and dividing it in half so they could not all unite together. However, in their line of march, in the center of the hill country was this city called Gibeon which decided to take a different approach. Look for a moment at **10:2**. Gibeon, like Jerusalem or Jericho or a number of others, was one of the larger cities in the land and it had a powerful army. In fact:

2. Gibeon led a 4 city alliance (9:17) Chephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim were smaller towns who looked to Gibeon for protection. Here is the hill on which Gibeon was built; in that day the city occupied the bare south side which is toward us in this view and the others were close by. Here is a better view. I'm not sure what the other towns in view are today, but you can see how they are clustered on the hills and in sight of one another. Now these Gibeonites somehow **knew fighting was futile (9:3-4a)**. They did not miss the significance of what had happened at Jericho when the massive walls fell down! I'm sure they heard about the drying up of the Jordan too before that! They did not miss the clever leadership that drew out the men of Ai by an ambush. Plus, it appears that they had done their homework. In their own words they later tell us that:

a. they heard what God had done in Egypt and across Jordan (9-10) Even though it was 40 years beforehand, the story of the destruction of the land and the army of Egypt by the God of Israel had made a deep impact upon them. And then when Israel conquered the two kingdoms of Sihon and Og on the other side of Jordan, it was clear to them that the God of Israel was still acting in all His power, that Israel was an unstoppable force. They reasoned, "If Egypt couldn't stop them and two kingdoms couldn't stop them and the river and the walls of Jericho couldn't stop them, then we won't be able to either!" And somehow:

b. they knew God had commanded Israel to wipe them out (24a) I don't know whether spies were listening in when Joshua had them read the law shortly before at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal and they got the report, but amazingly they know that Israel's God had commanded Israel to destroy them. They knew information from our book of Deuteronomy and instead of proudly brushing it off because of their size and all their valiant warriors:

c. they believed Israel's God and became desperate to save their lives (24b) They saw the handwriting on the wall and they didn't ignore it. It terrified them. They believed they were going to die and in some sense that was an expression of faith in God. However, the solution that came to their minds was not simply to flee their cities and find places to live outside the land, nor was it the honest response of peaceful surrender to Israel and willingness to leave the land in which case they surely would have been spared. But rather Satan suggested to them:

II. The Ruse Of Gibeon Which Deceived Israel (4-13) They decided to deceive the Israelites using Israel's own commitment to the law of their God against them.

1. they developed a well-informed plan (6) They pretended to be from a far-off distant land instead of from close by. Now the fact that they would even think of that is incredible. Somehow, they had knowledge of God's plans for Israel. Look at **Deut. 20:10-11, 15-16**. With a distant nation they could make a peace agreement but not with the cities of Canaan. Somehow the Gibeonites knew that and based their plan on it! Listen! Satan is not stupid. His attacks against you are well-informed and when he lays a trap to deceive you, he does his homework! That's why there are so many New Testament warnings that tell us to be alert, be vigilant! Constantly remember that he's out there and after us and scrutinize the landscape of your life carefully! So, knowing this:

2. they carefully crafted a false appearance (4-5) These Gibeonites really put on an act. They made it look like they'd been traveling for weeks when it was only hours! Everything about them appeared to be legitimate and to verify that they did indeed live far, far away. We don't expect that. We expect people to be what they seem to be but there are plenty of them that aren't! That's why we teach our children not to go with strangers, but we don't always realize it in the adult world for ourselves. And, of course:

3. they cleverly rehearsed an appealing story (7-13) From the first:

a. they adopted a submissive attitude (7-8) They said that twice in their speech and they based it right on the Deuteronomy passage. They voluntarily offered to become servants to Israel, to be under her rule and do forced labor or whatever she deemed right, if she would offer them her protection in a treaty of peace. There is something really appealing and attractive about humility, isn't there? Our hearts go out to the person bowing before us. And the Gibeonites knew to use that. Then look again how clearly:

b. they professed a reverence for Israel's God (9-11) They expressed a belief in the power of Israel's God; what better way to endear themselves! But notice how careful they were in what they said. They professed to have heard of the old events, of Egypt and the battles on the other side of Jordan. Now we saw in verse 3 what really moved them, the defeat of Jericho and Ai, but they tailored their words to hide their location. A nation far away couldn't possibly have known about Jericho and Ai yet. Even though they were telling the truth about this, they were hiding behind it by omitting part of it. And, naturally:

c. they presented compelling evidence for their claim (12-13) "Look, look, look! See with your own eyes! How could we be from nearby? Does anybody travel with worn out stuff like this and eat old dry bread like this if they have a choice?" Oh, Satan will lie to you! I've been lied to many times, by businesses, by church members, especially by telephone salesmen! Satan will be quick to tell you things that are not true, things that seem to have all the evidence in the world behind them, but things that will endanger your soul and wreck your life!

So, through these tools of deception, Satan made it look to Joshua and the leaders of Israel like signing a treaty with these people was very much the will of God. But I want you to underline this next verse. Here is:

III. The Mistake Through Which Israel Believed The Deception (14)

1. they trusted in their own perception They looked at the bread and the clothes and the wineskins. They even ate some, which was a sign of friendship. So often we do this. We go by outward appearances; we go by what we hear and see. The only problem with that is that, as we've seen, Satan is a master of disguise. Appearances are often deceiving, especially when he has something to do with it! So, our perception may well be wrong. But here's the point:

2. they failed to ask God for His direction They could have asked God. They had access to Him through the high priest who carried the Urim and Thummim in the ephod. He would have told them. But they didn't bother to ask, even though they had just learned that lesson about not asking at Ai! And there are Christians upon Christians today, and I daresay that it would include some of us all the time and all of us sometimes, who make decision after decision, major decisions without ever stopping to seriously ask God about them, decisions about important things like dating and marriage, like making a large purchase, like taking a job, like leaving a church, and on and on, without ever bothering to ask God! So often, we simply trust our own perceptions!

IV. The Consequences Of Israel's Wrong Decision (15-21, 26-27) Eventually the ruse was discovered, as all ruses are sooner or later. The Gibeonites did live nearby in the land, but now Israel could not attack them because of the oath they had made to God. And the lesson of Achan disobeying God was still fresh in their minds. They were not about to break an oath they had made in the name of the Lord, even if it was based upon a lie, so:

1. Israel ended up having to disobey God because of their oath The result of trusting their own perceptions and not asking God was that now they were bound in a situation that God didn't want them to be in and they couldn't get out of. I can't tell you how many believing women I know that are stuck for life in a difficult marriage through the vow they made because at the time they weren't interested in listening to God and went ahead on their own perceptions. How many believers have ended up in a mountain of debt that now they are obligated to pay and are struggling, because at the time they bought the house or the cars or took the loan, they didn't really bother to listen to God. It just seemed like such a good idea at the time! The consequences of not bothering to listen can be disastrous and lifelong! On the flip side of the coin:

2. the Gibeonites ended up in a life of perpetual servitude Their ruse worked, but not as well as they'd hoped. Joshua did spare their lives, but he took them at their word and they literally became perpetual servants to the rest of Israel and particularly to the Tabernacle, assigned to gather firewood and carry water. One commentary pointed out that both of those activities were normally "women's work". So here you have all these strong warriors of Gibeon doing for the Israelites the very thing they were used to expecting their wives or children do for them. They lived their lives in a perpetual state of dishonor and were never really free again. Keep that in mind when you're tempted to resort to lying or deception yourself! It will never really get you what you hope it will, even if you think it does. Ponder that one a moment. Then let's turn to the New Testament now and look at:

V. The Weapon God Has Given Us To Conquer Deception: the weapon of **Truth** Paul warns us clearly that:

1. Satan commonly disguises himself in false appearances - 2 Cor. 11:13-15 Satan many times disguises his servants as *apostles*; he disguises his servants, his workers as people sent by God! He won't send you somebody who looks like a gang member and uses foul language to deceive you as a believer. It wouldn't work. Rather he will send somebody who looks like a good godly person to teach you false truths that will kill your soul or will lead you astray and, in the end, keep you from serving God. There are millions of godly-looking and sounding people who are busy doing Satan's business and many of them are so deceived themselves that they don't know it and think they're doing God's work! The dear Jehovah's witnesses and Mormons that knock on our doors are agents that Satan is using to lead people AWAY from genuine faith in Christ alone, yet they so sincerely believe they are serving God with all their hearts! So are the thousands of Protestant pastors who don't believe the Bible is true and Jesus is the only way of salvation. These folks appear as messengers of light and truly believe that's what they are and they need our love and

prayers to rescue them from that because they themselves are deceived. But that's the kind of person Satan will more likely send into your life to deceive you! And he so often disguises what they are doing as *righteousness*, having them do things that look right and good and, indeed, much of what they do may actually BE right and good in and of itself, yet the effect of it is to take people AWAY from faith in Christ and cause them to trust in their own good works. Lies that are obvious don't fool many people; lies that look like truth, that are half-truths or contain a piece of truth, those are the most effective! Jesus warned us in the New Testament time and time again that many false Christs and false prophets are out there in the world and many of them have actually been part of the church at one point and left and some are still part of it organization-wise! So how can we recognize them? **Eph. 6:14** tells us, *Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth...*

2. God has given us a belt of truth which we can put on The Roman soldier wore a belt, a broad leather belt around his waist. It held the bottom of his breastplate in place. It held up his sword and scabbard. And when approaching action, the bottoms of the soldier's tunic could be tucked up under it to give him increased mobility and readiness for action. God says we have a belt that we should put around us so we'll be ready for Satan's attack of deception and that belt is truth! Now we have God's truth in two forms. First of all:

a. we have the written truth of God's Word God has been gracious enough to give us His own words in a written form that can be preserved accurately from generation to generation. Look at how Jesus prayed for His disciples in **John 17:15-17**. How is God going to set us apart from the world and keep us from being absorbed by its lies? How is He going to protect us from the deception of the Evil One? By the Word of God! We can measure anything that anyone tells us against this precious book and if it doesn't measure up, it is not truth, but a lie! This is our first line of defense. You will not be easily deceived if you read your Bible and know it well and determine that you will truly make it your final authority for everything. But in many of the things we face in life, there are choices where we need personal guidance that goes beyond the clear principles of Scripture and for that:

b. we have the living Presence of God's Spirit to guide us Look back at **Jn. 16:12-15**. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and He now lives personally inside each one of us who believes. He is there to take the thoughts and the will of God and make them known to us. He is there to help us understand and apply the truth of the written Word and He is there to guide our hearts and minds to the truth of what God wants us to do, to enable us to actually live out the will of God for our lives. Now turn over with me to **1 Cor. 2:9-12, 15-16**. Did you hear that?

c. we have the mind of Christ Himself available to us, living inside us. And it is ours **if we but listen!** The prerequisite on our parts is simply seeking it. The very mind of Christ is ours if we want it. We can know everything He wants us to know about our situation. Every day in every decision, in every situation, we need to do what Israel failed to do; we need to stop and take the time to seek His will, to ask Him what His mind is, to give Him the opportunity to speak to us and reveal His will. And if we truly seek that kind of wisdom, James 1:5 promises us that we won't be denied! God will give it to us freely! In fact, He is more willing to tell us than we are to ask Him!

Neil Anderson tells the story of a young pilot who had just passed the point of no return when the weather changed for the worse. Visibility dropped to a matter of feet as fog descended to the earth. Putting total trust in the cockpit instruments was a new experience to him, as he had only recently qualified for instrument flying. His destination was a crowded metropolitan airport that he was not familiar with. In a few minutes he would be in radio contact with the tower. Until then he was alone with his thoughts. Flying with no visibility, he became aware of how easy it would be to panic. Twice he reached for the radio to broadcast "Mayday!" but he forced himself to go over the words of his instructor instead. His instructor had practically forced him to memorize the rule book. He did not care for it at the time, but now he was thankful. "Finally, he heard the voice of the air traffic controller. Trying not to sound apprehensive, the young pilot asked for landing instructions. 'I'm going to put you in a holding pattern,' the controller responded. 'Great!' thought the pilot. However, he knew that his safe landing was in the hands of this person. He had to draw upon his previous instruction and training, and trust the voice of an air traffic controller he could not see. The words of an old hymn, 'Trust and obey for there's no other way,' took on new meaning. Aware that this was no time for pride, he informed the controller, 'This is not a seasoned pilot up here. I would appreciate any help you could give me.' 'You got it!' he heard back. For the next 45 minutes, the controller gently guided the pilot through the blinding fog. As course and altitude corrections came periodically, the young pilot realized the controller was guiding him around obstacles and away from potential collisions. With the words of the rule book firmly placed in his mind, and with the gentle voice of the controller, he landed safely at last. Neal comments: "The Holy Spirit guides us through the maze of life much like that air traffic controller. The controller assumed that the young pilot understood the instructions of the flight manual. His guidance was based on that. Such is the case with the Holy Spirit: He can guide us only if we have knowledge of God's Word and His will established in our minds." [Walking Through the Darkness by Neil Anderson. Regal Books, 1989.] Listen, be like that pilot. Don't trust your own perceptions. In all your ways acknowledge Him, ask Him to show you, and He will direct your paths.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

The Battle Of Reliance: The Southern Campaign - Ch. 10

Success breeds self-confidence. When you try something challenging the first time, you're nervous and you ask for help and you pray a lot, but if you succeed in it, the next time you tend to be less anxious and less ready to ask for help. And if you keep on succeeding a few times, you soon begin to relax and feel confident in your own ability, that you're pretty good at it and that you'll always succeed. Of course, in more mundane things like changing your oil or using your new computer or balancing your checkbook or finding your way to a new job, that's pretty normal. But when you're in a war, self-confidence is a dangerous way to live. Dropping your guard and trusting in your own strength and skill leads to a false sense of invincibility that can kill you! Imagine what it would be like if you lived in a city in Afghanistan right now. You'd live in a consciousness that the enemy is out there all the time. You'd pray every time you left the house, even for a routine trip to the market. Well, as believers, we live in a war zone spiritually. Through us God is advancing His rule and Kingdom into the whole world, but our adversary, the devil, is always prowling about looking for the opportunity to devour us. We must live in an attitude of moment-by-moment reliance upon God. Israel might have been tempted by this time to start relying on herself. She had taken first Jericho and then Ai. Gibeon, a major city, and its three smaller towns had already surrendered without a fight, and made a treaty of peace with Israel, even though they did it through a deceitful ruse to protect themselves. She could easily have begun to let her guard down and develop confidence in her own abilities. But thankfully, she didn't. Even though Israel had a really large army, there were dozens of cities in the land of Canaan. While her army was way bigger than that of any one city, if they all united together as we read in Ch. 9 they were trying to do, they could have presented a truly formidable opposing force. So, God used Israel to drive a wedge through the middle of the land as I showed you last week and this separated the southern cities from the northern ones. Now as we enter chapter 10:

I. An Alliance Of Five Canaanite Kings Attacked Gibeon (1-5) Here are the 5 cities. Jerusalem is only 5 miles or so from Gibeon so no wonder their King got worried and called for help from other major cities. He figured he was the next in line and he wanted help. Hebron was about 20 miles south of Jerusalem, Jarmuth was about 16 miles west, Lachish about 25 miles southwest and Eglon is down there somewhere too. These kings readily joined together to help him because:

1. they were greatly alarmed at the defection of the Gibeonites Gibeon was a major city with lots of seasoned soldiers. Not only would that lessen their own defensive capability against Israel and possibly lead other cities not to fight, but now the Gibeonites would be obligated to fight WITH Israel against them! They were cut off from help to the north and afraid for their very lives! So, while Joshua's army was back down in the camp at Gilgal resting, they decided to attack Gibeon quickly and eliminate its potential threat to them. Their troops gathered from city to city and camped in the valley below the hill of Gibeon ready to attack it. And immediately:

2. the Gibeonites appealed to Joshua and Israel for help (6) They sent swift runners down to Gilgal to the camp to plead with Israel to uphold their end of the treaty and come to their rescue. And Joshua responded immediately **(7)** Now I want us to think for a moment about:

II. The Disadvantage Israel Faced In Entering This Battle First of all:

1. they faced a multiplied enemy greater than any previous To this point they had faced one city at a time; this was 5 at once, and together their army was larger than any that had opposed them. Satan has a way of doing that, of causing the people and the things that stand against us to in some sense join forces, of multiplying problems against us so that we may be facing a physical illness at the same time we're facing the loss of our job and the death of a close relative and a rebellious teen who gets in trouble. Life does not tend to come at us in a nice organized linear set of difficulties that can be handled one at a time in neat succession. Or to put it another way, when it rains, it usually pours! If we are relying on our own strength instead of God, the next wave to hit might be the one that sweeps us under. Secondly:

2. they lacked the energy needed to engage in the battle Gibeon is some 20 miles away from Gilgal and in that distance, there is an uphill ascent of over 3,000 ft. It's an 8–10-hour strenuous march and verse 9 tells us Joshua's army marched all night to make it up there in the morning with no time for rest. When they arrived at dawn, they were foot-sore and weary, having had no sleep, and they faced an army fresh from its tents. Left on their own, they would almost certainly not have had sufficient energy to rout the foe or if they did, they absolutely wouldn't have had the energy to chase and destroy them for another 25 miles over the next 36 hours without sleep. Many times, we just don't have the energy to fight the battle Satan faces us with. He wears us out physically, mentally, emotionally and if we don't depend on God, there will be no energy to make it through without becoming a spiritual casualty. Third:

3. they lacked the time to accomplish what needed to be done There was no time for a routine march to battle. If they didn't get there by morning, Gibeon would fall before the invaders and there would be no Gibeonites left to rescue. Plus, it appears that even as the battle was going on, Joshua figured out by noon that there was not enough time

left in the day to stop the fleeing enemies in their retreat. Isn't that one of our biggest issues in facing the problems that come to us in life? There is just not enough time to deal with them! There are deadlines that we can't meet. We don't have time using our own energy to accomplish all the things that must be accomplished in the time we have. That's why we need God so much! Thankfully, Joshua and Israel seemed to be keenly aware of the difficulties they were facing at this time and:

4. they entered the battle at God's instruction and trusting in Him (8) They talked to God! They consulted Him right away! And God spoke this reassurance to Joshua personally. They were not to be afraid to enter this battle, but to go and trust that God would do what He said, that not a man of them would be able to remain standing against them! God promised He would fight their battle, that He would defeat their enemies through them. So they marched up trusting His Word and:

III. God Acted Mightily On Behalf Of His People Even as they arrived:

1. He threw the enemy into confusion and routed them (10) When suddenly the sound of Israel's trumpets rang out and the lines of their soldiers began running into the valley at dawn, the Canaanite army stumbled up out of their sleep in a panic. They had not dreamed that Israel could get there that day! They grabbed their weapons but there was no time to form a battle line or organize. They were utterly confused and didn't know what to do. Some stood and tried to do battle but many were slain right there in the valley. Others who were left began to run and soon the whole army was fleeing for their lives. They ran away uphill out of the valley to Beth Horon, over its pass and down the road to lower Beth Horon and turned southward and downward into the valley of the Aijalon River Israel, of course, gave chase, but having marched uphill all night, when they hit the downhill the Canaanites began to pull away and God stepped in again:

2. He sent a hailstorm that killed many (11) As Israel topped out the pass and looked down on their fleeing enemies the very heavens opened and it began to hail huge hailstones, the type that fell in Egypt and killed man and beast. I don't know how long it lasted, but in that wave of hail thousands fell, though not a single Israelite was hit. The survivors fled faster down into the valley which was a huge open area and from the height at noon Joshua could see that they couldn't catch and destroy the rest of this army by nightfall. So, Joshua prayed and then God did something that ranks as probably one of the greatest miracles of all history:

3. He answered prayer and lengthened the day (12-15) At this spring season the sun was behind him toward Gibeon and the crescent moon was still visible at the edge of the horizon in front of him over the valley of Aijalon and Joshua prayed that God would have them stand still, that God would lengthen the day so that there would be time to catch their enemies before they reached the safety of their cities. And God heard him and did it. These verses are a quote which Joshua inserts in his record here from another ancient book that is now lost to us, the book of Jashar, but they are inserted as fact. God literally lengthened the day about the length of a full day. Of course, skeptics and critics have attacked this passage as proof that the Bible is a man-made hoax. "Stop the sun? Or halt the earth's rotation? Come on!" And defenders of the Bible have advanced all kinds of theories desperately trying to give some kind of explanation that fits with scientific reasoning somehow. There was even a hoax that is now widely circulated on the internet about NASA's computers finding a "missing day" in the spectrum of time, one believer's attempt to create "evidence" for this miracle. Don't ask me how God did it; I would only submit that if you can believe that God created the entire universe out of nothing simply by speaking, it is no harder to believe that He caused the sun to stand still in the sky for a whole day! Is it? What IS interesting is this, primitive societies in many places in different areas of the world in the lore of their ancient myths have stories that indicate that in the long ago at some point there was (and this is the neat part) either a long day that was about twice as long as normal or a long night where it stayed dark that long! Peoples in that area of the world have legends of a long day and the native peoples on the opposite side of the world have legends of a long night. And the icing on the cake is two peoples in the Pacific Islands who have legends of a long sunrise! It seems that Joshua's long day was noticed all over the world and ancient peoples all made up their own stories to explain it! But as in any miracle, you either believe God or you don't; the point is that God heard and answered Joshua's prayer and He bent the very rules of the universe to do what cannot be done. And in the end:

4. He vanquished their enemies so thoroughly all opposition ceased (19-21) I like that last phrase, *not a man moved his tongue...* Nobody even cursed them from the walls of their cities or out of the door of the houses in the villages they passed by. Everyone hid from their presence. The upshot of the great victory that day was that:

IV. Israel Conquered The Whole Of South Canaan In One Campaign which is summarized for us in (40-42a) We don't have time to read all the details this morning but in the process of that first long day:

1. they killed the five kings who had joined against them. **(16-18, 22-27)** The kings hid in a cave and Joshua brought them out and put the feet of his generals on their necks and encouraged them to trust God, saying, "This is what God will do to all your enemies!" And before sunset of the long day, they were slain. Then Israel camped at Makkedah and rested and over a period of some days:

2. they conquered and destroyed six cities one after the other in verses **(28-39)** Some were part of the confederation and some were not, but by taking out these key cities, Joshua basically removed all the military opposition in the southern part of Canaan in one campaign. God arranged it faster than anyone could have imagined it. Of course, the land remained to be occupied. They did not invade every village and people who hid out from their army certainly came back after they were gone, but there would be no more great battles from this direction. The backbone of the opposition was broken in one fell swoop. But what's important is:

V. The True Reason For Israel's Victory You'll find it if you look back again to vs. **(42):**

1. God Himself fought for Israel Yes, in much of it He used their arms and legs, their swords and spears, but He did the fighting through them. And He also fought through circumstances and the use of nature for His purposes and even bent the rules of time. Friends the taking of the battleground of this world for Jesus is GOD's campaign. HE fights through us. He uses our feet and hands and mouths. And He arranges our circumstances and coordinates the very weather and even does supernatural miracles to aid us in our task at times. But the key is that:

2. Israel remained continually conscious that God was fighting as they fought and relied on Him (8, 12, 14, 19, 25, 30, 32, 42) Look at all these verses in the record. From moment one Joshua knew it and all Israel knew it. The LORD fought this battle; it was His, not theirs. They were just to be willing instruments and rely completely upon Him. And that, dear ones, is how He wants us to live too! Now look with me at:

VI. The Weapon God Has Given Us To Keep Us Reliant Paul describes every piece of armor God has given to protect us: truth, righteousness, peace, faith and then he closes by saying these words in **Eph. 6:18**. This armor must be put on with the weapon of **Prayer!** We rely upon God consciously by praying, by bringing to Him all our feelings, our inadequacies, our problems and relying on Him to do what needs done! First, Paul says:

1. it must be exercised in every circumstance ...at all times A person who is really depending on God prays all the time, not just at the table after meals, not just at bedtime, but all through the day. And he prays about everything, big and little. When praying becomes as automatic as breathing, then I'm really depending on God. When I can't find a parking place and I automatically pray or when I can't get through to somebody that really needs my help and I automatically pray, then I am beginning to live a life that is dependent on God moment by moment. Then:

2. it must be exercised in true communion ...in the Spirit True praying doesn't simply mean telling God what I want over and over again until I get it. It means listening to God and looking for what God really wants to do in my life. It means coming with the attitude that I don't really know what to pray for as I should but that the Holy Spirit in me really knows God's mind and I need Him to guide my prayer and to make intercession through me according to that will. Prayer born of the Spirit seeks God's glory and asks that His will be done. When my praying is not characterized by the word "I" but by the word "You", then I am really learning to depend on God to plan and arrange my life instead of trying to do it myself. Third:

3. it must be exercised in an attitude of combat ...keep alert I must be alert when I pray. I must be always looking for what Satan is doing and praying against it. I am stopping his work; I am defeating him when I pray. And when I see myself praying "Lord, Satan is really trying to blind Fred to the Gospel or Satan is really trying to stop Sally in her walk with you and make her drop out of church, or Satan is really trying to discourage me with this or to tempt me with that," then I'm really praying; I'm depending on God to bring His power to bear against the enemy instead of my own feeble strength. And finally:

4. it must be exercised steadfastly ...with all perseverance Real prayer is not once and done. It does not give up; it does not quit. I must be patient and persistent and keep on praying whether I see immediate results or not. Many times, defeating Satan in some matter takes weeks or months, even years and I must pray on! When I find myself not giving up on God's ability but willing to pray and pray and pray until His answer comes, then I am really relying on God in the way He wants me to.

Now my friend, when you and I learn to pray like that, all the time, seeking the help of the Holy Spirit, battling Satan and keeping on and on, then we will be living a life that is truly relying on God. *Every digital device you own, and that includes your CDs and player, iPad, computer, phone, TV and just about anything else that communicates, you owe to the tedious research and work of one man, Samuel F. B. Morse, who patented the first commercial telegraph. His invention changed the world and made possible rapid long-distance communication for the first time. Samuel was the son of a pastor and his faith governed his life. Following the deaths of his wife and parents he became determined to find a means of long distance communication using electricity. After long experiments to create the device and then struggling for years to find funding, congress finally saw the value of his invention and gave him the grant he needed. The very first message he sent over the telegraph from the US Capitol Building to the B&O railway office in Baltimore was the last phrase of Num. 23:23, "What hath God wrought!" The last one he sent at the age of 80 to offices the world over simultaneously was, "Greeting and thanks to the Telegraph fraternity throughout the world. Glory to God in the Highest, on Earth Peace, Goodwill to men." Four years before his death he wrote, "The nearer I approach to the end of my pilgrimage, the clearer is the evidence of the divine origin of the Bible, the grandeur and sublimity of God's remedy for fallen man are more appreciated,*

and the future is illumined with hope and joy." The true secret of his life was revealed on one occasion when he was asked by Rev. George W. Hervey, "Professor Morse, when you were making your experiments at the university, did you ever come to a standstill, not knowing what to do next?" "Oh, yes, more than once." "Then what did you do?" "I've never discussed this with anyone, so the public knows nothing about it. But now that you ask me, I'll tell you frankly--I prayed for more light." "And did God give you the wisdom and knowledge you needed?" "Yes, He did," said Morse. "That's why I never felt I deserved the honors that came to me from America and Europe because of the invention associated with my name. I had made a valuable application of the use of electrical power, but it was all through God's help. It wasn't because I was superior to other scientists. When the Lord wanted to bestow this gift on mankind, He had to use someone. I'm just grateful He chose to reveal it to me." The early years of his life were a tremendous struggle, but his life bears all the marks of a person who has learned to rely on God and to cultivate a habit of prayer. That's what God wants for you so that He can accomplish through you what He wants to do in the world.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

The Battle Of Fear: The Northern Campaign - Ch. 11

Our study today completes the story of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan. It is the story of the last major battle Joshua fought and of the prolonged campaign that followed it. We're studying these battles because they illustrate for us the very strategies that Satan uses to attack us as we take the world for Jesus Christ to make it His Kingdom. So far, we've looked at his tactics of inciting us to unbelief, discouragement, deception and reliance on self, all of which will have extremely serious consequences in our lives. This last battle illustrates for us Satan's attempt to use the weapon of fear to intimidate God's people and keep them from doing His will. We saw last week the story of the Southern Campaign, how in one fell swoop God had divided the land of Canaan down the middle and given Joshua and Israel military control over the entire south. But news of that went quickly throughout the northern region and while Israel was resting and regrouping back in Gilgal, the north was quickly preparing to defend themselves. As we enter chapter 11, we read first of:

I. The Northern Army That Massed Against Israel (1-5) A little geography lesson: the chief north-south passage in this region is the valley of the Jordan River which is 156 miles long. We often don't realize that it begins way up in Lebanon on the slopes of Mt. Hermon and flows in a 47 mile run down the Huleh Valley into what for centuries was a shallow marshy lake known as Lake Huleh, or Merom in biblical times. It covered about 12 mi² and in the 1950's Israel got the brilliant idea to drain it all for agriculture. They soon realized the negative impact on the ecology of the region and ended up re-creating several artificial dams in its place. Out of Lake Huleh it flowed another 15 miles through the valley into the Sea of Galilee or Chinnereth (as it was also known). From Galilee it meanders another 65 miles down the valley past Gilgal and Jericho into the Dead Sea which, as you know, has no outlet. It is the lowest elevated river in the world and today 70% and more of its water is diverted by Israel and Syria for agricultural purposes. Now the dominant city in this entire region in Joshua's day was Hazor, which was located on the west side of the Huleh Valley, on high ground overlooking Lake Merom. It was very large and covered about 200 acres, as compared to the 9 acres of Jericho, with an estimated population as high as 40,000 or more. Now:

1. Hazor forged a confederacy of dozens of armies from the entire region These were usually all independent groups, squabbling and vying with one another, but they recognized their common danger from Israel, so literally the entire region laid aside their differences and each sent all the men they could to Hazor to form a common army to oppose Israel and they camped on high ground by the waters of Lake Merom. Chapter 12 lists the names of 31 kings that Israel defeated. 8 of them were defeated in the southern campaign, so 23 cities with kings were part of this confederacy, along with many troops from peoples whose cities are not mentioned. In the end:

2. the size of their combined numbers approached that of Israel It was huge. Joshua says it was like looking at the grains of sand on the seashore, that is to say, it was too large to count easily. Josephus, a Jewish historian from just before the time of Christ, when he tells the story of this battle, guesses that the Canaanites had 300,000 foot soldiers alone. How he would know, I can't say, but it is not beyond reason. Israel's men numbered 600,000 from age 20 to 60, but some were left across Jordan with the women and children of the 2 ½ tribes who were to receive their inheritance there and I'm sure some of the older no longer went out to battle. This is the first time Israel faced an enemy that was anywhere near their own size. The kicker is that:

3. they had weaponry vastly superior to Israel They had very many horses AND chariots! In fact, Josephus stated that they had 10,000 mounted troops on horses (i.e., cavalry) and 20,000 chariots! Even if his numbers are exaggerated by double the actual number, that was still a significant force. Israel had no horses and they surely had no chariots. That may not mean much to you, that is until you're the guy standing there on the plain with a line of horsemen like this charging straight into you! Picture the charge of the horsemen in the third Lord of the Rings movie and how they swept through the enemy infantry. A Syrian or Hittite chariot was the ancient equivalent of a tank. It was drawn by two horses and carried three men, one driver and two armed to the teeth with bows and spears and swords all stored nicely inside. Picture a line of thousands of these coming at you full force and you on foot! Israel was a bunch of shepherds with spears and swords; they had nothing to go against this! Now you can imagine:

II. The Fear That These Circumstances Could Have Produced Notice the first words God says to Joshua in v. (6). *DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEM!* That would be the natural reaction! Josephus' interpretation of this verse is, *the multitude of the enemies affrighted both Joshua himself and the Israelites; and they, instead of being full of hopes of good success, were superstitiously timorous, with the great terror with which they were stricken. Whereupon God upbraided them with the fear they were in, and asked them whether they desired a greater help than he could afford them; and promised them that they should overcome their enemies...* You see:

1. we become afraid when we focus on the weakness of our ability Fear comes when you compare your small self to the size of your opponent, when you compare your own meager abilities to the size of the task God has asked you to do, when you compare your faltering strength to the requirements of the problem you have to endure. You seem so little and insignificant and weak, so you become afraid! And:

2. we become afraid when we focus on the scarcity of our resources Fear comes when you compare your income against the size of the debt you have to pay, when you compare the size of the job you have to do with what little time and energy you have to do it with. You seem to have nothing or at least not near enough in comparison and so you become afraid! And when we are afraid:

3. Satan tries to use that fear to keep us from obeying God When we are afraid, what do we do? Sometimes we do nothing. We are too afraid to move, too scared to take the next step in the direction God is pointing. 400 years later in Saul's day the army of Israel was encamped in another valley, the valley of Elah, and the battle line was drawn up against another coalition of enemies, the Philistines from the coast. Every day this 9 ft. 6 in. giant soldier named Goliath would come out and taunt them to fight and what did they do? They stood there! The Bible says they were dismayed and terrified. For 40 days this giant came out morning and evening and challenged them and they made no movement to attack! They were too paralyzed by fear to do anything! Sometimes that's us! In our life, in our marriage, at our work, in our ministry, we are scared by the challenge that faces us and we just sit where we are and don't do what we know God is telling us to do. Elijah, one of the greatest prophets who ever lived, gave up his ministry because he was afraid. After all his mighty miracles and his triumph over all the prophets of Baal where he called down fire from heaven, Satan attacked him with fear and it worked. When wicked Queen Jezebel sent him a note containing a death threat, He fled for his life. He ran away and got out of the will of God. He forsook God's plan; that's why 40 days later when God spoke to him down at Mt. Sinai, the first thing God said was, "What are you doing HERE, Elijah?!" "You're out of My will, out of My plan." Sometimes fear makes us run away, literally. We may run away from our marriage, run away from a relationship, run away from a job or from an opportunity that God is calling us to. That's what happens if Satan can get you to compare YOURSELF to the challenge before you. But that's the wrong comparison! God continued in v. 6, *...tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them slain to Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.* You see:

4. our fear disappears when we compare what we fear to God God repeatedly told Joshua, "Don't be afraid, I will do it..." He said it in 1:9, 8:1, 10:8 and again here. "Don't compare yourself to the challenge of conquering the land, of taking the city, of facing the enemy, focus on ME!" You see:

a. God does not need numbers God had already told them this. He had told them: *You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. - Lev. 26:7-8.* Numbers mean nothing to God. "Gideon, so what if 22,000 of your men were afraid and went home! Your 300 are more than enough for me to use to defeat the Midianites who are thick as locusts and their camels like the sand on the seashore!" Brave Jonathan saw this when he and his armor bearer attacked a whole outpost; he said, *... nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.* As the old saying goes, ONE WITH GOD IS A MAJORITY! God is vastly bigger than any task He gives you, than any barrier you face, than any problem you have. And moreover:

b. God does not lack resources When everybody else stood by quivering, a teenage shepherd boy named David went up against that giant Goliath with only a rock and a sling and here's what he shouted: *You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand. - I Sam. 17:45-47.* God doesn't need spears and shields and bows or horses and chariots to defeat the enemy. He even told Joshua not to keep the horses and chariots but to burn the chariots and disable the horses so Israel wouldn't get dependent on newly found weapons! It doesn't matter to God what you have on hand. He can make your little jar of oil and handful of flower feed you until the drought is over!

Fear comes from making the wrong comparison. Compare your problem to God and you will find Him vastly superior, in fact, supreme! And that focus is what will take away your fear. You can do anything He asks! You can face anything He brings your way! He is big enough to handle it! And that is demonstrated in:

III. The Victory That God Gave Israel (7-12) Joshua and the troops marched up the Jordan valley from Gilgal. Josephus says it was a five day march.

1. they thoroughly defeated the huge army (7-9) They ran away for miles to the north, some up along the coast toward Sidon, some to the north and then east toward Syria. But it was to no avail; the Israelites caught and killed them all. There would be no army left to mass against them again. Then:

2. they totally destroyed Hazor and took all the other major cities (10-14) Now it is easy to say all of that in a few sentences, however in reality:

3. it was a long campaign that gave them control of all Canaan (16-18, 23) The conquest lasted 7 years in total so it took years to get to all these cities and destroy them. But the end result was that the whole of the land from the farthest point south to the farthest point north was now under the military control of Israel. They didn't live in it all yet; it still remained to be occupied, but there was no military opposition left to them; the land was completely theirs. And even:

4. the very peoples they first feared were destroyed (21-22) In Num. 13:32-33 the original 12 spies talk about this race of huge people, the Anakim, the ancestors of Goliath, who lived in the hill country and how, "we seemed like grasshoppers in their sight!" Fear of them kept Israel from invading at their first opportunity, but now Joshua conquered and destroyed even them through the power of God. But what's important is:

5. the reason God gave Israel this complete victory On one hand verses (19-20) tell us that:

a. God justly punished the intolerable iniquity of the Canaanites He hardened their hearts to come against Israel so they would be destroyed instead of running away. He accomplished His purpose. But on the other hand:

b. God graciously rewarded the complete obedience of Israel (15) Joshua OBEYED every single thing God told him to do. He didn't let Satan use fear or unbelief or discouragement or anything else stop him from obeying God. And so, he accomplished God's purpose for his life.

Now let's to the New Testament and look at:

IV. The Weapon God Has Given Us To Repel Fear - Eph. 6:17 tells us as soldiers of Christ to ...*take the helmet of salvation*. The Roman soldier's helmet was especially important. It was in essence a metal shield that protected his head from stray arrows and from the blows of the enemy's sword or battle axe. The Scripture never speaks of the head as being the seat of your spirit, but rather the heart. So, when God is talking about protecting your head, He's talking about protecting your mind. And what I think He means is: *Our mind is shielded by the helmet of the complete assurance of our salvation*. And you and I have that same assurance! Look with me at what our Bible says:

1. we are SAFE in His hand - John 10:27-30 Our relationship with Jesus has placed us in God's very hand and nobody, not the devil himself, is strong enough to pry open God's hand and take us out of it! They can kill our bodies but after that there is no more they can do. We are safe! Further:

2. we are SHIELDED by His power - 1 Peter 1:3-6 From the moment we are born again, we are guarded, we are shielded by the very power of God all the way to the end, to the day we receive that glorious eternal inheritance that has our name on it and is waiting in heaven for us. God Himself guarantees we will get there and see it even though we have to go through many trials, many battles down here! And then listen to this:

3. we are SECURE in His love - Romans 8:31-39 There is not one thing in all creation big enough or strong enough to take me away from His love. His love for me is greater than anything in the whole universe, no matter what my circumstances tell me!

And John wrote that perfect love casts out fear. God loves me with that perfect love. There is absolutely no room for fear; I do not need to be afraid! So where do I end up? At verse 31! If God is for me, who can be against me? If I know that I belong to God, then when I have a problem or a difficulty or a trial. I just look at Him and how great He is and know that He can handle it and I cease being afraid and I am free to keep on doing what He says one step at a time. Listen to David's thinking: *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.* - Psalm 27:1-3. David's mind was shielded from fear because of his absolute assurance in his relationship with the Lord. A boy who lived in Holland when it was occupied by the Nazis during World War II wrote the following entry in his diary: "Last week three German officers stopped my dad in the hallway. They held him at gunpoint and forced him to open the steel door leading to the basement. One of them ordered Dad to show him the crawl space under the hallways. He said if he didn't tell him where the hidden weapons were, he would be shot. Dad usually is not a great hero. He's even afraid of the dentist. But this time he was not afraid at all. One of them cocked his Luger and held it against Dad's temple. Dad recited the Bible verse that was on his mind, 'And fear not them who kill the body, ...but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body

and soul in hell.' The Germans looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and then left. The steel heels of their boots made a clanging noise on the iron stairway." You can't intimidate and control people who are not afraid to die. Listen, whatever situation you face today, no matter how difficult and frightening it may seem, look at Jesus, look at His great love for you, look at His great power over all things and go forward to the victory He has planned.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

We Must Guard Against Division - Ch. 22

Though we have completed the story of the battles Joshua and Israel fought in conquering the Land of Canaan, we have not yet completed our study of the book. From our last study in Chapter 11 we are going to skip all the way to Chapter 22 where the narrative of the story picks up once more, however I do want to briefly outline for you the content of:

The Intervening Chapters:

1. the summary of the conquest - Ch. 12 It lists the 2 kings Israel conquered on the east side of Jordan and their land plus the 31 kings they defeated in the land of Canaan. There were many more small towns and villages to occupy but they now had military control of the whole land.

2. the dividing of the territory - Chs. 13-19 Moses had already given the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh the conquered land on the east side of Jordan. Joshua now divided the land of Canaan between the other 9 ½ tribes and designated the boundary lines. Then he designated:

3. the cities of refuge - Ch. 20 These were cities where a person who killed someone accidentally could flee for protection and get a fair trial, 6 of them, 3 on either side of Jordan, within easy reach of each part of the land. Then he designated:

4. the Levitical cities - Ch. 21 Israel actually has 13 tribes because Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh were each made a tribe. The tribe of Levi was set apart for the service of the Lord at the Tabernacle, but they needed places to live and 48 cities were given to them out of the allotment of the other tribes.

So now the victory was won, the land conquered and the territory divided. But the final three chapters of the book teach us important lessons about maintaining the victory in our spiritual lives. Let's consider first of all:

I. The Contented Situation At Which God's People Had Arrived - 21:43-45 They were gathered at the city of Shiloh and in a wonderful place spiritually.

1. God had fulfilled all His promises to them After 7 years of battle, they had no more enemies in sight and all the provision that they needed from the spoil of all those cities; the war was over and it was time to go home and focus on their families and farms and houses. It was a time of rest and peace and joy and the discovery of all that God had in store for them. It was particularly so for the soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh. Back in **Num. 32:16-22** Moses had told them that they could have their inheritance over there on the east side of Jordan, but ONLY if they would send their men over with the army of Israel to conquer the land of Canaan. And they did it. They left their families in walled cities with some men to guard them and, *The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. - 4:12.* And now:

2. the 2 ½ tribes had fulfilled their commitment to fight They stuck at it for 7 long years until the war was over without going home and:

3. they were now to return home to their inheritance across Jordan (1-4) Oh the joy of going home, now that the war was over! These guys hadn't seen their families in 7 years, can you imagine? On the internet I found a Life Magazine photo gallery of soldiers coming home from war and being greeted with wild hugs and tears by their loved ones. Some of you have experienced this personally and it was no different back then. You can just imagine all that these men were looking forward to as they broke ranks and headed back down to the Jordan and home.

This was a good day! This was a high point in the life of Israel! This was the day they had waited and prayed for so long. The goal was not to win the battles; it was to live in the new land flowing with milk and honey, to live free and worship in peace as God's people under their vines and fig trees, to grow old and watch their children and grandchildren come along and enjoy a better life than they had known. You know the kind of season in life that I'm talking about, when everything is going right and you're close to the Lord and there are no real problems in sight, a season when you're just full of joy and peace and the devil seems a million miles away. But he wasn't! Paul, having spent time talking about examples from the life of Israel in **1 Cor. 10**, summarized his thoughts in verse **12** by saying, *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.* And then comes that verse 13 about temptation coming upon us. These kinds of seasons are when we are naturally the least cautious, yet they are when Satan can sometimes do his most devious work and we need to exercise continual vigilance. No matter how peaceful things may look, the world we live in is still a war zone with Satan's own demonic "Al Qaida operatives" at work everywhere all around us, seeking the opportune moment to strike. This joy-

ous going home day led Israel dangerously near to the brink of a civil war! This day of celebration nearly divided Israel right down the middle and pitted brother against brother. Chapter 22 is really a deep lesson about:

II. The Potential For Division That Exists Among God's People Divide and conquer is one of the oldest battle strategies known to man. Satan has used it against God's people ever since Cain and Abel and he sure has used it in the history of the church, hasn't he? In that same letter Paul wrote the Corinthians, *...in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. (11:18)*. They were divided in whose leadership they wanted to follow. Some said, "I follow Paul"; others said, "I follow Apollos" or other people. They were divided when they came to celebrate the Lord's supper and Paul warned them sternly about it. From that day to this division has plagued the church of Christ. It plagues the church today! The church that our team helped in Gloucester MA is suffering because of a division where a group left with antagonism some years ago and started their own church and only recently is there beginning to be real reconciliation between the two. Imagine the tremendous negative effect on the witness of that body before a watching community! The church I came to serve here in Glenside in 1979 nearly went under through an awful division just before that time. There was tremendous pain and hurt in the body; friends turned against friends, harsh words were said that were remembered for years! We seem so easily to turn a deaf ear to the plea of our Savior's heart the night before He died, *[I pray] for those who will believe in me ...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. - Jn. 17:20-21*. Dividedness is not the heart of our Savior, whether it's in the church or in a marriage or in personal relationships, but the potential for it is constantly among us, so now let's turn to the story and look at some of the factors Satan may try to use to divide us. First of all:

1. physical separation can become a source of division (7) The Jordan River was a big dividing line geographically. Canaan was the promised land; the land on the east was a gift of God but not THE land. God's house would be in Canaan; it would be very easy for the tribes IN the land to feel superior to the tribes across the river or the others inferior; even the tribe of Manasseh itself could be torn in two, with relatives living on either side. Absence, being apart from each other, not seeing each other can take our hearts away from each other if we're not careful! Certainly that's true in marriage! And it's true in the church also; that's why the writer of Hebrews warned us strongly not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together! Then notice in verse (3) that:

2. time can be a factor in creating division The warriors in those 2 ½ tribes had been away from home 7 years; they had not seen their families in 7 years. They had fought side by side as equals with the rest, but they had made a sacrifice the others did not have to make to the same degree. Fortunately, they did not let that growing ache of time away cause them to desert the army and go home but rather remained faithful. When something drags on and on and we grow weary of it, it is then that Satan loves to tempt us to throw in the towel and give up and walk away from our brothers. Of course:

3. growing lax in spiritual things will certainly create division (5) Joshua warned them not to let their spiritual fire go out, to stay close to the Lord. If you begin to lose your zeal for the worship of the Lord and begin to let other idolatrous things take His place in your life, it will certainly drive a wedge between you and those for whom Christ is everything. Ramesh, one of the evangelists who pastors two small village groups of believers with Hebron Believers Assemblies in India, has a wife who left him because he felt called of God to be in ministry and she did not want him to be in it. I think she is actually a believer but her heart did not love the things of God like his did and she left months ago while he still plods forward alone. (Marriage is traditionally rather loosely held among the Yenadi.) Pray for her heart and for this marriage, but it is true in any relationship: the closer you are to Christ, the closer you will be to one another. Then:

4. jealousy over material things can create division (6, 7b-8) The homeward bound warriors were laden with spoils to take back for themselves and their families and Joshua solemnly warned them to divide the spoil with their brothers who stayed behind to guard their families. Imagine what would have happened if they had refused! There is nothing that can divide people, even Christians, like money! Those that have nothing so easily resent their brothers whom God has blessed with things and those who've been blessed are so easily tempted to hoard what they've been given and not share it. Generosity goes a long way toward preventing division! Now here's a biggie:

5. lack of communication always creates division (9-10) They had been at Shiloh, but on their way home before they crossed the Jordan, the departing soldiers stopped and built a huge altar there by the River. We don't actually know what it looked like or exactly where it was but it was very large and obviously intended to last through time. And we later find out that they did it for a very good reason; the only problem is they didn't tell anybody! They kept the reason to themselves, went on home, and that left others to draw their own conclusions, which they did, only they drew the opposite conclusion. A struggling mother gives her child up for adoption out of sincere love because she can't care for her. But nobody tells the child who grows up thinking her mother gave her up because she didn't love her! One act; two interpretations. Unless we communicate, unless we share our hearts with others, our actions are always prone to be misinterpreted and misunderstood. And the reverse side of that coin is that:

6. drawing conclusions without information always divides (11-12) You see, God's Law said clearly that Israel was only to have ONE altar for sacrifice and that was the altar at the Tabernacle. The Israelites jumped to a conclusion, that the 2 ½ tribes intended to use this altar as their place of sacrifice because they were too far away from the Tabernacle. It seemed to them like an act of idolatry, of disobedience to God and rebellion against His command! So, they all gathered ready to make war based on a false assumption. It seems to me that we are always ready to make war with somebody based on false assumptions! We're always ready to assume the worst instead of the best about someone. We're always ready to repeat what we think to others, even if we have no valid information to base it on. Now praise the Lord, there was NOT a civil war that day! And the reason is because the children of Israel decided to use a very wise process that we would do very well to imitate. There is a:

III. The Process Which Prevents Division Among God's People Jesus talked about it in **Mt. 18:15-17** and again in **5:23-24**. Jesus' command to us is to actively seek reconciliation with the other person rather than to allow ourselves to be divided from them. And His first word in both passages is "Go!"

1. we must approach the person rather than ignore the problem That's what the Israelites did in **(12)**; they chose to do something rather than ignore it and hope it would go away. They may have been thinking wrong, but at least they acted! So many times we are content just to let things go and let our wrong assumptions cut us off from fellowship rather than counting the relationship worth restoring. Then look what they did when they began to act in **(13-14)**. Wasn't that wise? They sent a commission to investigate the matter, to find out what was going on and to plead with the others to change their minds! Listen:

2. we must investigate with an open mind before reacting We must go to the person and tell them how we feel and what we think because of what they have done, before we make war, before we react, before we do something we will regret later when we find out the truth! We must seek to understand the truth of the matter completely and make sure that we are reacting based on truth and not assumptions. Not only that, but:

3. we must speak openly about the problem and how we see it (15-18) "Here's what we think you did and here's how we feel about it and how we think it will affect us!" You can't say, "You know what you did!" and make the person guess at the nature of their offense and simply yell at them. That's not going and showing them their fault. We have to explain clearly in a way they can understand why we are upset, what hurt us, and why we think they did it! Furthermore:

4. we must be willing to offer a solution that shows we care (19-20) The Israelites said, "Look, if you're feeling cut off from God by being over here, come on over and we'll divide everything we have with you!" They were willing to make a sacrifice to keep the relationship! We can't come to a person simply expecting them to grovel and apologize when we point out their fault. We have to come saying, "I want a relationship with you; I don't want this to divide us. What can I do to help you so that together we can change the way things are and be one!" And, of course, for the process to work:

5. we must be willing to listen, to understand, to believe the other and even to change our minds (21-29) The Israelites found out they had it all wrong! They found out the Reubenites and Gadites weren't trying to rebel against God; they were afraid that their children would be driven away from worshipping God by Israel's children! They were not trying to divide; they were trying to prevent being divided! They built a monument to stand as a witness to all generations that they worshipped the same God as the Israelites on the other side! It was an expression of their unity in the faith! Whew! Sometimes when you take the time to investigate and be honest, you find out you were dead wrong; in fact, YOU were wrong rather than them and have to apologize! But that will never happen unless you're willing to actually listen to what the other tells you and to believe what they're telling you. If you go with your mind made up and are unwilling to change, reconciliation will never happen. And that leads to the last point:

6. we must be willing to fully reconcile, releasing all hard feelings (30-34) Once there was true understanding, both sides praised God and dropped the matter, once and for all. There was genuine forgiveness. The 2 ½ didn't blame the 9 ½ for jumping to conclusions and the 9 ½ didn't harp on, "You should have told us what you were doing!" They let it go. They released it totally. They went on as brothers serving the Lord side by side, put the incident completely behind them and that altar stood there for generations as a monument that bound them together, an imposing silent witness that said to both sides, "the Lord is our God".

George Whitefield and John Wesley were the brightest stars in a widespread movement where multiplied thousands came to Christ in the mid-1700's. They were in school together and both were converted near the same time and served together in ministry. Whitefield became a renowned preacher, a "Billy Graham" who preached to crowds of thousands both in England and America. He persuaded John Wesley to preach in the fields to the common people and out of that began the Methodist awakening that swept England and later, America. However, as time went on, George Whitefield and John Wesley diverged on the theology of grace. In 1740 John Wesley published a sermon "Free Grace," saying that Christ's atonement was universal, that He died for ALL, rejecting the concept of divine election. But Whitefield was a Calvinist. He once wrote, "God, himself, I find, teaches my friends the doctrine of election. If I mistake not, my dear and honored Mr.

Wesley will hereafter be convinced of it also." Whitefield thought Wesley's preaching implied universal redemption whereas Wesley thought Whitefield's preaching implied Christians need not take moral responsibility. They parted ways and ministries and out of conscience wrote treatises against each other's works, but managed to the end, to maintain a respect for each other in that their hearts were the same in terms of unity in Jesus Christ. In 1740 Wesley wrote, *for a time you are suffered to be of one opinion, and I of another. But when his time is come, God will do what man cannot, namely, make us both of one mind. Then persecution will flame out, and it will be seen whether we count our lives dear unto ourselves, so that we may finish our course with joy. I am, my dearest brother, Ever yours.* Whitefield responded, *God only knows what unspeakable sorrow of heart I have felt on your account since I left England last. Whether it be my infirmity or not, I frankly confess, that Jonah could not go with more reluctance against Nineveh, than I now take pen in hand to write against you. Was nature to speak, I had rather die than do it; and yet if I am faithful to God, and to my own and others' souls, I must not stand neutral any longer. I am very apprehensive that our common adversaries will rejoice to see us differing among ourselves.* The two men never did agree on divine election throughout their long ministries. Whitefield died in 1770 and John Wesley preached a memorial sermon honoring Whitefield's life and ministry. His text was Num. 23:10, *"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"* He said, *...the name of GEORGE WHITEFIELD will long be remembered with esteem and veneration.* What an example of the heart that Jesus wants in us, never truly dividing despite our differences, never holding things against one another, faithful together in serving the Lord until the end! Pray that the Spirit of God may give each of us such an attitude that we may constantly guard against the spirit of division.

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

We Must Guard Against Forgetting - Ch. 23

It is hard to believe that today 10 years have passed since the awful tragedy that happened to us in America on Sept. 11, 2001. It is a day on which we have chosen to consciously and deliberately remember our past. You see, forgetting is easy; remembering is tough. Forgetting comes naturally to us; it happens without any effort on our part; it happens without us thinking about it or even noticing it many times. But remembering requires conscious effort! Remembering is something that we must choose to do deliberately, something that we must choose to do repeatedly. And God's timing is so awesome because the day recorded in Chapter 23 of Joshua was for Israel a day much like today and the lesson that Joshua teaches the leaders of Israel in this chapter is the one we are trying to put into practice ourselves this very day: we must guard against forgetting! Look with me at vs. (1-2). On this day Joshua called together all the various leaders of Israel to one place, representing the whole nation, because he wanted to talk to them seriously about this very thing. But before we look at what Joshua actually said, let's pause to consider the situation in which Israel found themselves that day and think together about:

I. The Factors That Continually Work Against Our Memory First of all, you should know that between the end of chapter 22 and the beginning of chapter 23 there is a time gap. Caleb and Joshua, two of the twelve that Moses chose to spy out the land, were the only two men over the age of 20 that God allowed to survive Israel's wilderness journey. When Caleb was given his inheritance in 14:10 at the end of the conquest, he says, *...I am this day 85 years old.* If we assume that Joshua was roughly the same age as Caleb and we know that Joshua died at 110 in the next chapter and these words were spoken in perhaps the last year of his life, then "*a long time afterward*" means probably between 20 and 25 years (you might want to make a note of that in your Bible). And there is the first reason Joshua called this meeting:

1. the passing of time tends to dull memory Ten years ago at this time we were in the church office when we heard the news that a plane had flown into one of the World Trade Center buildings. We got hold of a little TV and put it on the counter and watched in horror as the news tried to report what was going on. Then a plane flew into the second tower and by the time they collapsed someone had a camera on it and we saw the towers fall. And then came the news of the Pentagon and of Flight 93 crashing. That whole day was consumed with wondering what was going on, who had attacked us and how many had died that day. It was vivid, it was shocking, it felt like it was life-changing. Ten years later, those feelings are gone for most of us and 9/11 seems more like a piece of history, like an event in our past to be recited and talked about. Well, it was now twice that long since Israel's war of conquest. The younger men who had fought in that war now had grandchildren; the older ones were nearing the end of their lives. The tremendous events of that season in their lives were fading slowly. Plus:

2. the current difference in our circumstances tends to dull memory Back then they were soldiers in an army living in a war, concerned about their very lives every single day. But for 20+ years they had lived civilian lives. There had not been a single battle anywhere and no enemy was on the horizon. Their lives were peaceful and enjoyable. They cultivated and harvested their crops; they sheared their sheep and tended their cattle. They practiced their trades and they offered the yearly sacrifices to God. There was nothing to remind them of what they had lived through; life was different now. The memory of that seven year war was gradually buried deeper and deeper in the memory vaults of their minds, much the way that the memory of the Vietnam War has been buried in most of ours. And, obviously:

3. the aging process tends to dull memory, does it not? The older you get, the harder it is to remember things, even important things, the more you have to deliberately do to make SURE that you remember them. You should see the

notes I write myself for every little thing! If LuAnn calls and says, "Bring home some milk." and I don't write a note and paste it on my computer bag, I promise you no milk will arrive! Well, in marked contrast to that, here stands Joshua at the age of nearly 110 to remind Israel and us about:

II. The Important Things That We May Allow Ourselves To Forget Verse (3):

1. we may forget how powerfully God acted for us Twenty years ago they had seen the Jordan River at flood stage literally dry up for them and let them pass! They had seen the impenetrable three-tiered walls of Jericho fall down at their shout so they could take the city! They had seen huge hailstones rain down from heaven upon their fleeing enemies while they stood untouched and they had seen the very sun stand still in the sky for the space of a whole day so they could vanquish them completely! They had literally seen God fight for them! In seven years of battles in hand-to-hand combat they hadn't lost a man that we know of, except the 36 who died at Ai as a result of Achan's sin. After 20 years these precious things were now becoming dim memories. I cannot begin to tell you how many powerful things God has done in my life, how many times He has been there in tough moments when I cried out to Him, how many times He has answered my prayers in specific, even miraculous ways, that I never expected. I couldn't begin to count them, but the sad thing is that many of them I can hardly remember anymore! The place that we've arrived at now in life is a place we've gotten to through many battles where the Lord fought for us and it is important that we never forget that. God has given us those powerful experiences of Himself for a reason; they are an incredible gift that we have to be careful to preserve! Then as memory fades:

2. we may take for granted the blessings God has richly provided us (4) Joshua says, "Look at all God gave you! Look at all the land! Look at the houses you live in and the fields and the vineyards you cultivate! All of this belonged to your enemies! You were homeless shepherds living in tents and God literally gave you everything you enjoy this day as your inheritance from Him!" Moses warned Israel about taking their blessings for granted years before, *You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.... - Deut. 8:17-18.* I can't count how many times God has provided for us, how many times money has come for school, for trips, for cars, even for things we just wanted! But how easily we can forget that it was God and not us that got us here to this good place in life where we are! And what's worse:

3. we may lose sight of the mission that God has given us (4-5) Joshua was saying that, "In 20 years you still haven't finished the job God gave you! You took the key cities of the land and occupied them, but you still have not driven out the Canaanites from all the villages and all the corners and all the boundaries of the land! You've grown content to let them live there; you've grown used to conflict-free life and have avoided taking the whole land which God is planning to give you just as surely as He gave you those initial victories!" They forgot what they were about; their lives became about them instead of about accomplishing the assignment God had given them. How like us! Jesus gave us a commission to take the Good News of salvation to every person on the planet, to every tribe, language, people and nation. But we forget what we're here for, what our lives are really about and we live for us, thinking God exists to meet our needs and give us a nice life! How easily the Church has forgotten its purpose over the years; how easily WE forget it personally! Now here is:

III. The Effect That Forgetting These Things Could Have On Us if we let it happen. First of all:

1. we will be tempted to turn aside from God's commands (6) Joshua knew that if they kept on forgetting what God had done and taking their blessings for granted and not pursuing their purpose that the next step would be to gradually stop following the commands that God had given, to turn aside from them to the things that our flesh incites us to do. If we forget Whose we are, when our neighbor's wife appeals to us like Bathsheba did to David, we will be tempted to engage in immorality like he did rather than to run like Joseph did from Potiphar's wife because he could not do such a thing and sin against the Lord his God! If we forget, we will be tempted to keep back part of the money for ourselves and lie about it like Ananias and Sapphira did. If we forget how much we have been forgiven and the great debt Jesus paid to save us, we will be tempted to hold a grudge like the unmerciful servant in Mt. 18 who would not forgive someone else who merely owed him a little bit. Staying true to God's commands requires staying spiritually strong and that requires remembering. Secondly, if we forget:

2. we will be tempted to give allegiance to the idols that others serve (7-8) When you actually see an idol, a stone statue or a painted figurine like we did in India, you think, "Who would ever worship that?" Especially when you've heard the very voice of God speaking out of a cloud from the midst of a fire that burned the entire top of a mountain! Yet before they crossed into Canaan, Israel did just that in Moab. The Moabite strategy was simple, to have the young women invite the young men of Israel to their feasts before their idols and show them a good time and before long they were doing all that the Moabites did and bowing down and worshipping the gods of Moab. When we forget who we are and begin to not care about God's commands, it is not long before we begin to adopt the practices and the morals and the behaviors of the people around us; we begin to live like they live and live for what they live for. New idols rear their heads in our lives and we bow down to them, idols like money and pleasure and self, meeting our own needs. And certainly, if we forget:

3. we will be tempted to allow our love for God to diminish (9-11) When we forget what He's done in our lives, we tend to stop loving Him! When Jesus wrote a personal letter to the church at Ephesus, in **Rev. 2:4-5** He said this: *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first....* The believers there were busy; they were still doing lots of good things, but they had let their passionate adoration of Jesus wane and die. Oh, what zeal you and I had when we were first saved, when we first understood the great thing that Jesus had done for us in saving us. Oh, how we loved Him and wanted to talk to Him and wanted to obey Him! Oh, how passionate we were when He healed our sickness or saved our lives or showed Himself so powerful and strong in our lives! But oh, how easily we let that love that drives our lives fade into the empty shell of going through the motions of good things. So, what's the remedy? How do we keep this from happening? Jesus says what Joshua was saying, **REMEMBER!** Memory is the key to passionate love, the key to unwavering commitment, the key to complete obedience. And finally, here is:

IV. The Warning That God Gives Us Through Joshua (12-13) His point to Israel was to remember their purpose and get busy and pursue their charge to completely drive out the inhabitants of the land, rather than dallying and beginning to ally themselves with the Canaanites. If they didn't, their commitment to the Lord would wane and they would suffer dire consequences. Likewise, if we choose NOT to remember and let our passion die, then we will suffer:

1. the awful consequences of allying ourselves with nonbelievers as well. Paul lived in a different age but in the midst of a pagan society that was filled with unbelieving idolaters. Look with me at what He said in **2 Cor. 6:14-7:1**. Now what does that mean? Well, we don't have time to take it apart this morning, but it's something like this: "You are God's holy people and your love and worship belong to Him alone. But you live in a world full of people who worship ungodly things and live in ungodly ways. Unlike the Israelites, you can't physically be separated from them, but God's goal is still the same. You can't join yourself to them and adopt their values and follow their practices and live the way they do! You must live among them, live in a pure and holy fashion, because God dwells in you and He wants to win them to Christ the way He won YOU to Christ! So, you must be different! You must be the people of God!" But if we forget who we are and we plunge together with them into the same flood of debauchery (as Peter put it), Joshua warned that three very serious things would happen. The first in verse 13 is:

a. desertion - Not that God will throw us away and stop caring about us, but **God will no longer fight our battles** for us. If we're engaged in doing His will, He is willing to underwrite the full ride. He is committed to provide and strengthen and sustain and see us through. But when we strike out on our own against His will, the whole tab is on us. God says, "OK, let's show you how well you do without Me so you can see how much you need Me!" And in that process will come:

b. discipline - The very things we run after in verse 13 become whips to chasten us and thorns to prick our stubborn will. In other words, not doing things God's way is ALWAYS painful; the way of the transgressor is HARD! And **God will use the pain of circumstances to draw us back**, to drive us back to Himself, if we are willing. But if we aren't, it may actually lead to:

c. death - Joshua said Israel would perish from the very land God had given them. What a waste of the life they had been so graciously given. The Apostle John wrote, *there IS a sin that leads to death [1 Jn. 5:17]* and says it can be committed by one who is a brother, i.e., a believer. God is not above actually taking his children off this planet because their lives have fallen so low and they have so stubbornly persisted in their ways that He maintains His own honor by allowing them to physically perish as a result. What a waste of the precious gift of life He has given us. But the saddest thing is:

2. the certainty of these disastrous consequences (14-16) In other words, "You've personally experienced the fact that God ALWAYS keeps His promises. Not one of all the good promises has failed; He keeps every one! And that means that just as certainly He will keep the promises of discipline that He has made!" There is no "maybe" about this. There is no, "well, He might choose to discipline you, but He might not..." *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises EVERY son whom he receives.* - Heb. 12:6. You can count on it. So there in verse **(14)** is:

V. The Point of the whole chapter, of the whole meeting, of the whole speech Joshua gave on that occasion: **You KNOW, So REMEMBER!** Guard yourself against forgetting what Christ has done for you and who you are in Him! Heed Joshua's words in verse 11, *Be very careful to love the Lord your God!* The Hebrew says *take exceeding care to guard yourselves*. Make sure you keep loving Him! And do you know what the best way to do that is? It's simple. Make sure that each day you're having a fresh experience of being with God so that there is no real lull, no real spiritual down time. Meet with God every day and listen deeply as you read His Word and spend time in prayer, both talking and listening. Ask Jesus to make your time with Him each day living and powerful and beseech Him to give you the sensitivity to know when you are becoming forgetful. If you don't remember daily, in time you won't remember. But it also doesn't hurt every once in a while, on days like today to simply stop and look back over your life, thanking God for what He's done. Don't think you won't forget! *On August 7, 1974 a young Frenchman, Philippe Petit, committed the artistic crime of the century. In an elaborate plan, he and two teams of accomplices snuck into the two completed, but not yet occupied, buildings of the World Trade*

Center and strung a cable across the 200 foot span between the towers. At 7:15 AM he stepped out on that highwire 1368 ft. in the air with no net underneath and for 45 minutes entertained a growing crowd by crossing eight times and in the process sitting, lying down, jumping and even running and dancing on the wire. Everybody was spellbound watching it. You can see pictures of it on the internet [Do a Google image search for "Philippe Petit world trade center"] and even video of the original news clip on YouTube [<http://youtu.be/IAVj2IVC9ko>]. Of course, he was arrested afterward, but was immediately forgiven and it became a world-renowned feat, one that can never be repeated. However, sometime later he joined the circus as the headline act in the Ringling Brothers' original Greatest Show on Earth. It was there that Philippe had the first and only fall of his long career. He fell during a practice walk in St. Petersburg from 45 feet up, broke several ribs and suffered internal injuries. As he lay there, he is reported to have said, "I can't believe it! I can't believe it! I never fall!" In 2008 a documentary was made about his story and he insisted to a Newsweek reporter, "It was practice. And practice is a very different field. Wire-walking in performance is one thing - I never fell, of course. If I had, I wouldn't be here talking about it." Listen, thinking it will never happen to you, is the first step in assuring that it will, because your guard is down. Thinking you will never forget what God has done and who you are in Him and what your life is all about, that your passion for Him will never wane, is a huge mistake. The Bible says the exact opposite: guard yourself extremely carefully; forgetting can happen to you!

The War We Live In: The Book Of Joshua

We Must Guard Against Idolatry - Ch. 24

Today we come to several "ends", the end of the Book of Joshua, the end of our series of studies through the Book and the end of Joshua's life. Chapter 24 is the record of the very last thing Joshua did **(1)**. This time he gathered not only the leaders of Israel, but the entire nation together at Shechem in the middle of the land. You remember this place! It is the very place where Israel had gone in Ch. 8, immediately after defeating Jericho and Ai when they came into the land 20+ years earlier. Shechem is the town located between the two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, the very place where the all the tribes of Israel had stood to renew their covenant with God by standing on both sides of this natural amphitheater and saying "Amen" and agreeing to the promises and blessings of the Law. And now, just before his death as an old man, Joshua calls them all back here again. It seems like he may even have had the tabernacle moved here for this special occasion (it's mentioned in verse 26). Before he died, Joshua wanted to call God's people one last time to surrender themselves fully to God and give them a final warning. His message to them and to us? We must guard ourselves against idolatry! If we are to continue to live in the place of blessing and service that God intends for us, we must guard ourselves against division as we saw in chapter 22, we must guard ourselves against forgetting as we learned last week in chapter 23, and now we learn that we must guard ourselves against idolatry. Joshua began that day by reminding all Israel, and us by extension of:

I. What God Has Done For His People (2-4) He speaks on God's behalf, in the first person, as though through him God Himself is telling us what He has done. First of all:

1. He has drawn us to conversion Here we learn something we read nowhere else in Scripture. Abraham's ancestors had fallen away from the truth and were already worshipping false gods. Abraham was raised to adulthood in a pagan idolatrous home in a major urban center called Ur, somewhere in northern Iraq and was in all probability an idolater himself, when God appeared to him in some sort of vision and spoke with an audible voice, commanding him to leave his city and family and follow Him a thousand miles to a new land and become a shepherd living in tents. God drew Abraham to give up idols and worship only Him; it wasn't his doing! We don't often think about it, but those of us who are white Europeans, our ancestors were pagan forest-dwellers worshipping trees and spirits and nature gods until God sent the Gospel to Europe and drew people to worship Him! Those of us who are black, our ancestors did the same thing in Africa, and those who are Asian, ours worshipped their false gods there. If God had not done something, ALL of us would be without hope and without God in the world; Jesus said, *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...* - John 6:44. I don't know about you, but I wasn't raised in a Christian home and if God hadn't stepped into my life in the form of a Christian friend in seventh grade to draw me to Himself, I would be out there with the rest of the world giving my life to the same gods the rest of our culture follows! It wasn't my idea; it was His! God gave us the immense privilege of the knowledge of Himself which so many in the world don't yet have! Then Joshua goes on speaking for God **(5-7)**:

2. He has provided our redemption The people of Israel were slaves, chained to a living death in the land of Egypt, the mightiest power on earth, when God broke in to rescue them. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, He destroyed the whole land of Egypt, leaving it completely devastated, and when the chariots of Egypt tried to go after his people and take vengeance, He opened the waters of the Red Sea and drowned every last one. He provided a great salvation for His people. Likewise, through the cross we who were dead in our trespasses and sins, cut off altogether from God, have been made alive together with Christ! We have been redeemed at a great cost; we have crossed over from death to life; we have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, and it is all His doing, not ours! To use the words of Hebrews, it is *so great a salvation* that no human being can escape if they don't receive it! Then God continues through Joshua **(8-10)**:

3. He has given us protection When they drew near to enter Canaan from the east, Sihon, king of the Amorites, came out and attacked them and God defeated his army. Then Og, the king of Bashan, attacked them and God defeated his army. And when Balak, the king of Moab, tried to have Israel cursed, God only let Balaam bless them. Time after time God protected His people, just as He has protected us all through our lives to this day! How many of us would not be here this morning if God had not intervened somewhere in our lives to protect us from a serious illness or a fire or a flood or an accident or even an enemy bullet, from any one of a thousand things which could have claimed our lives, but for His grace. I dare say that many of us could testify directly to that and I'm confident that ALL of us have been protected on many occasions we're not even aware of. But Joshua's not done **(11-12)**:

4. He empowered us to do all His will Now Joshua called back to mind all the events of the great war of conquest, the crossing of the Jordan, the falling of the walls of Jericho, the great battles at Ai and Gibeon and all the cities of the south and then Hazor and the northern campaign, the conquest of seven nations, of peoples mightier and stronger than they were. God says, "You didn't do this with your weapons! I did this! I sent my hornets of the fear and dread of you [*compare Ex. 23:27-28*] ahead to terrorize and weaken their armies before you even attacked, and when you did, I gave them into your hands. All that you have accomplished in your lives to this day, I did it!" How true that is for us as well! In all your years of service to Him, in all that you have done as a believer, all that you have accomplished in His work, all that you have endured for His sake, the life of Jesus was being revealed in your mortal body, as Paul said. It was not you! And finally, Joshua said **(13)**:

5. He has given us abundant provision That was so literally true for Israel. For 20 years they had been living in houses they did not build, in cities they did not create, eating fruit from vineyards and trees they did not plant. God literally handed it all to them as they drove out their enemies. Yet Paul reminded the Corinthians, *What do you have that you did not receive? [1 Cor. 4:7]*. Of all the good things we enjoy, family, friends, church family, material possessions, job, the very air we breathe, you name it, everything we have is a gift of God!

Joshua's monologue is like the André Crouch song we used to sing, *How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me? Things so undeserved yet you gave to prove your love for me. The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude. All that I am, and ever hope to be, I owe it all to thee. To God be the glory, to God be the glory, to God be the glory for the things he has done! Hallelujah!* But all of this was building to a punchline in verse **(14)**. Over these 20 years, in spite of ALL that God had done, Joshua had observed:

II. The Continuing Presence Of Idolatry Among God's People and he called this special meeting of the whole nation to challenge it! The insidious creeping presence of idolatry has always been a problem for God's people. You hear in Genesis about:

1. the household idols of the patriarchs Jacob went to Syria and married Rachel. Her father Laban and his family were believers, but they had *teraphim*, little household figurines which in that culture often signified the right of property ownership and sometimes were consulted about the future. If you remember, when Rachel and Jacob left Haran, Rachel stole her father's household idols **(Gen. 31:19)** and hid them. Later on in **35:2-4** God called Jacob to go up to Bethel and he commanded his whole family to get rid of the *teraphim* they had and they buried their idols under the oak or the terebinth tree near Shechem. It could have been the very tree by which Israel was standing this day hundreds of years later (verse 26). These are our ancestors in the faith and they were committed worshippers of the true God, but somehow they still made room in their homes and lives for the other little gods followed by their culture. In his speech to the Sanhedrin, Stephen made reference to:

2. the downward-spiraling idolatry of Israel - Acts 7:41-43 ...*they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: "Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon."* The first thing Israel did at Mt. Sinai while Moses was up receiving the law was to break the second commandment and make a golden calf idol to represent God, because that's what they were used to back in Egypt! And here God says, "I know that during those 40 years in the wilderness you secretly had other gods. You had little images of Moloch, the bull god, hidden away in your tents and little stars because you secretly worshipped the planet Saturn, even while you were following Me." Here, after the conquest of the land, Joshua tells Israel to throw away the gods they still had among them, just like Jacob did centuries earlier on that very spot! Israel's history is filled the worship of other gods, many times openly, but often in secret, even when they were following God. Saul's household had *teraphim* in it and her daughter Michal who married David had a person-sized one in the house that she put in their bed and pretended it was him to save his life. Wise Solomon tolerated the idolatry of his many wives and foolishly joined them in it in his later years. Of course, Israel's worship of other gods eventually became so open, pervasive and evil that God sent them into captivity to Babylon to break them of it, but lest we feel too superior, the New Testament makes reference to:

3. the virtual idolatry which can creep into the church The idols we give allegiance to while we claim to follow Jesus are not generally the physical kind our Hindu friends worship. Paul said twice **[Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5]** that greed is

idolatry. The love of money is not only the root of every kind of evil; it is serving a false god! Materialism, seeking after fame, pursuing our own pleasure or the American dream, are all forms of idolatry. In some men's lives a sport or a hobby claims their allegiance while some women may be obsessed with beauty and appearance. Whatever you choose to serve with your life is truly your god. Does that make sense? Look with me at **Mat. 6:24**...or sex or golf or the sports channel or shopping or anything else! You can't serve two masters; you will ALWAYS choose one; you'll always end up loving one over the other; you will always end up being devoted to one rather than the other. That's why Joshua was pointing out to Israel:

III. The Choice God's People Have To Make Now read **(14-15)**. Now you know what he is saying. "Make the choice. Determine to serve God ALONE. Throw away your idols! Make up your mind. You've seen all that the true God has done in your lives; if you want to go back and serve the worthless gods your fathers served or the powerless gods you used to serve back in Egypt or the impotent gods of the nations you just conquered, go ahead! Waste your life if you want! But don't sit on the fence and say, 'I follow the Lord God' and expect that He is going to tolerate you using your life for the other things that have crept in!" The Lord is a jealous God; He will not see His glory go to another; He will not let the praise of His people which belongs to Him be given to idols!

1. we must choose as Joshua did, as Israel did on this day, to serve HIM ALONE! That's what we are called to and: **a. we must be really SURE because He will hold us to it! (16-22)** When they said, "Of course, we want to serve the Lord!", Joshua said, "Are you sure? Are you double-dog dead-strait sure? Because if you tell Him that, God is going to hold you to it!" It's like being married. God is not going to tolerate you going out with other people when you feel like it once in a while. His discipline will fall! It has to be Him and Him alone. Whatever He asks, whatever He wants, our answer must be "Yes, Lord!" And if it is:

b. we must throw away the idols that we have retained (23-24) Throw the teraphim away! Ask yourself: What is it that I choose over and above God in my life? Is it my job? Is it my financial security? Is it a hobby I have? Is it pleasure? Is it a person, a man or a girlfriend or even a spouse? Is it perhaps a ministry that I have developed on my own and come to take much pride in? What is the thing on which I'm spending most of my time, my thoughts, my money? What is the thing which always wins when I have a choice to make between it and something else? Whatever it is, that's my idol. That's what has begun to take God's place in my life. And it has to go. It has to be removed from its place of idolatry and put back into whatever normal place it should occupy in my life, if any. Moreover, it can't be mechanical. Look at **(23b)**:

c. we must give our very hearts to the Lord The sacrifice that God truly desires is not some outward offering but a broken and a contrite heart, one that truly loves Him above all else. He doesn't want you to just follow His rules! He doesn't just want you to DO what He says even though you don't want to. He wants you to come to Him and say "OK Lord, here's my heart, here's my deepest affections, here's the center of my life, now fill it with Yourself"! That's what Joshua called Israel to do that day, and that's what they did **(25-27)**:

2. Israel made a covenant with God and they sealed it **in writing and with a monument**, a huge stone that they set up next to the tree where the idols were buried so they would always remember. We use the phrase, "drive a stake"; do something that will mark this as the time and the place here and now where you decide once and for all that you are going to give God His proper place in your life!

That's what Joshua had done with his whole life. As the book closes you can see:

IV. The Tremendous Impact Of Joshua's Life And Leadership (28-30) Pious Jews still go to Joshua's tomb today to honor him and pray to God for their nation, even though Arabs have covered the tomb with graffiti. And then there is a note in vs. **(32)**. You see, Joshua:

1. he died at 110 having passed the faith to a new generation The faith that came into Egypt with Joseph nearly died out but was revived by Moses who handed it off to Joshua and he passed it to the whole new generation who would live in the land as God had promised. Joshua was the one to bury Joseph's bones in Canaan as he had asked by faith. Joseph's tomb is also still honored today. My point is that by his undying, unwavering, wholehearted, no-idols, commitment to God, Joshua:

2. he kept a whole nation faithful to God during his life and beyond (31) Eleazar, Aaron's son, the High Priest was his friend and coworker and outlived him by a little bit, verse **(33)** His tomb also is still visited 3,000 years later. The contribution made by these men of God has not been forgotten to this day.

If you want your life to impact your generation like that, if you want your faith to be embraced by those around you as well as those who come after you, your life has got to be like Joshua's, single minded, like Paul, determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Nothing else can be allowed to take His place, no teraphim. *William Booth was born in 1829 in relative poverty in a suburb of Nottingham, England. His parents were not religious and his father died when William was just 14. By that time, William was helping to earn the family income as a pawnbroker's apprentice. But sometime during his fifteenth year, William was invited by a Wesleyan couple to attend chapel, where he was converted to Jesus Christ. At the age of 23 he entered full time ministry in the Methodist Church and became an evangelist. However,*

in 1865 he gave up settled ministry and began to preach to the poor in East London wherever he could in the face of harsh and often violent opposition. The work was slow but in 1878 the movement he was leading took the new name of The Salvation Army. By the time Booth was promoted to Glory in 1912 the Salvation Army was at work in 58 countries. After he died, 150,000 people filed by the casket over three days, and 40,000, including Queen Mary, attended his funeral. He was called "the world's best-loved man". The Mayor of South Shields had described him as "The Archbishop of the World." King George wrote: "Only in the future shall we realize the good wrought by him for his fellow creatures. Today there is universal mourning for him. I join in it." He was truly another Joshua in his own day, but if you would like to know the real secret of the impact which he had on his generation, I believe it is the same as Joshua's. Sometime after his conversion at the age of 15 he wrote in his diary, "God shall have all there is of William Booth." I leave you with the last words of the Apostle John in his first letter which are remarkably like those of Joshua, Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges An Age Of Compromise - Chs. 1-2

In describing the period of the French Revolution, Charles Dickens wrote these famous words: *IT WAS the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us....* He could just as well have been referring to the age of the Judges. From the death of Joshua around 1350 BC to the crowning of Saul as Israel's first King around 1050 BC stretches three hundred awful years of Israel's history that could easily be called "The Worst of Times". These years were an up-and-down seesaw combination of spirituality followed by apostasy as you'll quickly see in our study of the Old Testament Book which bears the name and contains the record of this period. But all that said, could not Dickens have just as easily been writing about our own time and people, about 21st century America? We too live in a real time of wisdom and foolishness, belief and unbelief, light and darkness. In fact, that's why we're going to study the Book of Judges together! So, before we begin let me just share with you three:

I. Ways In Which The Time Of The Judges Is Like Our Time so you don't tune out, thinking Old Testament stories like this are irrelevant! What kicked off this period for Israel was:

- 1. the passing of a spiritually-oriented generation and culture - 2:7-10** A great die-off occurred. You see:
 - a. the previous generations had experienced the reality of God** Moses' generation had all experienced the mighty power of God in the nation of Egypt. They had watched the very hand of God destroy Egypt until it was left a de-foliated desert with its entire army lying dead upon the shore of the Red Sea. But that generation all died in the wilderness as they wandered for 40 years. Joshua brought the generation of their children into the Promised Land. They too saw the power of God dry up the Jordan River before their feet and the walls of Jericho come tumbling down at the shout of their voices. They had won mighty military victories over strong cities and mighty alliances of Canaanite armies formed against them. They knew God and they had experienced first-hand the mighty things He had done for Israel. But:
 - b. the current generation had not lived through the same experiences** Once those generations were gone, when Joshua and all the elders who outlived him were gone, the generation of their children did not have the same personal knowledge and experience of God and all the mighty works He had done were in their past and quickly forgotten.

And I would dare to say that the culture we live in today is much the same. You can trace the impact of the Christian faith upon generation after generation of Americans from the earliest days of our country. Christian values were built into the very fabric of our society. They were printed on our coins, framed in our Constitution and hung in our public buildings. And the first generations went through difficult and bloody wars that shook our whole land and kept driving them back to their faith, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, WWI and at last WWII. The impact of the experience of God at work in that terrible war lasted 20 years, into the 1960's, but gradually another generation was born and moved into the mainstream of life that did not have the Christian base of the generations before it. Taken as a whole, they knew not the Lord nor the things He had done! Our American culture is rapidly adopting a different world view from all of the generations before us, a view without God at the center of life. Now at the same time Israel suffered from a second factor:

- 2. the lack of a strong central leader** The phrase *In those days Israel had no king* is repeated four separate times in **17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25**. I think God's trying to make a point! Moses had led Israel strongly at the direction of God. He had been followed by Joshua. These men and their personal connection with God and Divine leadership had held the people to their faith and to obedience. But now there was no strong central leader, no person commanding authority to follow. With proper respect for our current President who has shown both faith and strength, these years in America have been in many ways "leaderless" years for us. Leader after leader in all spheres of life falls from grace. Presidents resign or are investigated and shown to be immoral in public office. Key, well-known clergy do time for embezzlement or themselves fall into immorality. There's nobody to trust, to look to, to follow. Where are the leaders; where are the heroes; where are the outstanding men and women whose footsteps will lead us to faith and righteousness? They're sadly lacking. And that has led to a third factor:

- 3. the embracing of relativistic individualism** -Twice the writer says, *In those days Israel had no king and everyone did as he saw fit* - **17:6b, 21:25b** Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, the King James says. Relativism. What's right is what I think is right, what's right for ME. Stealing is right if you can get away with it. Sex outside of marriage is right as long as you're not hurting anybody and YOU want it. In these years for the first time, I'm running into younger people who genuinely believe that it is normal to have sex with people you're not married to and honestly

don't know God says that it's wrong. That's scary! There are no standards, no absolutes; everyone does what seems right to him.

So you see, while materially we're prospering just now, we could well be living in our own "Worst of Times" before long! But how did Israel fall into this terrible 300 year period? What sent them into those troubled years? Well, chapters 1 and 2 tell us plainly that:

II. It Was An Age Entered Into By Compromise And by compromise I don't mean that kind of innocent meeting the other person half way that we have to do in relationships to get along. LuAnn wants a red car and I want a blue car so we buy a two tone. You want a banana split and I want a cheesesteak so we go to Dairy Queen where both of us can get what we want. You like hymns; I like praise songs, so we sing some of both. That's not compromise; that's consideration for the needs and desires of the other person. By compromise I mean: **Incomplete Obedience**, obeying God, but not fully, not carrying it all the way, starting out to do what He wants but ending the matter really by doing what you want. That's the danger a time like this one holds for us. In the case of Israel the instructions were clear. Moses gave them:

1. the command of God - Deut. 7:1-6 When they conquered the remaining peoples of the land of Canaan their instructions were summed up in the phrase: ***destroy and drive them out***. Sometimes people object that this sounds very cruel, but remember two things. First, these peoples had become exceedingly idolatrous and immoral and it was God's time to bring judgment upon them so He was using Israel to do this. And second, all they had to do to spare their lives was leave! Go live somewhere else! But they wouldn't; they kept standing against God and His people and God's instructions were to destroy them totally, to not show mercy or let them stay. The reason is in verse 4. *YOU will fall into THEIR idolatry* if you don't! You were chosen to be set apart to God from among all the nations, to display His glory to the world and you won't do that if you intermingle with them (verse 6)! Well, that sounds much like our own calling, doesn't it? 1 Pet 2:9 says, *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*. God has set you and I apart to Himself, to show all the peoples of the world the holiness and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, to declare His praises. And the thing that endangers that process is the same thing God was warning Israel about. And look what they did, look at:

2. the compromise of Israel (1:28): God said *destroy and drive them out*. Israel's actions were the opposite: ***tolerate and live among them***. Let's take a quick tour through chapter 1. It begins with:

a. the initial victories of Judah and Simeon (1:1-20) You can see:

(1) their initial obedience to the Lord (1-3) They even inquired of Him who should go first and obeyed what He said. And look at:

(2) the victories they won (4, 8, 9, 11, 17) As they trusted the Lord and obeyed Him time after time they won victories. Their enemies fell before them and they drove them out of their cities. But it did not last long before compromise began. Almost immediately we read of:

(3) the incomplete obedience of Benjamin (21) And please don't think *failed* means *tried but failed*. The Hebrew simply says, *they did not drive out the Jebusites*. They didn't do it! They didn't carry out what God said to do but chose to live among them instead. Next, we read of:

b. the victory of Joseph (22, 25) Joseph, you may remember, is the name for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons. Initially they took Bethel and were obedient in destroying it completely. But right away notice:

(1) the incomplete obedience of Manasseh (27) It was too hard, too difficult. Their enemies in those cities were too determined. So they left them there. And two verses later we read of:

(2) the incomplete obedience of Ephraim (29) They did the same thing at Gezer! And the rest of the chapter reads like a veritable catalog of compromise. You have:

c. the incomplete obedience of Zebulun (30)

d. the incomplete obedience of Asher (31-32)

e. the incomplete obedience of Naphtali (33)

f. the incomplete obedience of Dan (34-35)

It seems to me that they followed one another's example. Each tribe seemed to say, "If they can let that city go, we can let this city go. If they can live among those people, we can live among these people." And so, compromise spread. They attacked and won but they did not destroy and drive out. They mingled with their enemies and lived among them. And that led to:

3. the chastisement of God (2:1-4) He sent His Angel (who was really Jesus appearing - notice how he speaks in first person!) to warn them: ***your compromise will become a trap!*** A snare! Since you live among them, you'll become LIKE them. Your sons will marry their daughters and vice versa. And eventually they'll influence you to worship

their idolatrous gods! You'll be caught in a noose of your own making! Your incomplete obedience will lead not only to direct disobedience, but to the worst imaginable thing: *they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles....They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised.* - Rom. 1:23, 25. God said, "If you're going to choose that, I'm not going to help you anymore! You're on your own!" No wonder they wept and named the place "Weeping"! And so it is that this practice of compromise led directly to:

4. the cycle of defeat into which Israel entered for 300 years (2:11-19) The text spells it out for us. First:

a. God's people would fall into sin (11-13) They started to worship those other gods, the Baals, the other "lords". But God could not tolerate that in His people so secondly:

b. God would allow suffering as a consequence of their actions (14-15), great suffering. They were conquered and ruled over by their enemies. Some were killed. Others had their goods and possessions taken. They were forced to pay tribute and some to live as slaves. God allowed the consequences of their actions to bring deep pain upon them. but when He did, thirdly:

c. God's people would offer supplication when distressed (15b) It doesn't say so directly here but compare **3:9**. They would cry out to the Lord. Pain jogged their memories. Baal would never help them. But they remembered the Lord God and what they had done and they repented and cried out to Him. And when they did, God would have mercy on them and, fourthly:

d. God would provide salvation by sending a leader or judge (16) God would send a Gideon, a Deborah, a Samuel, a strong leader with trust in Him. And the leader would gather them and lead them to victory and they would be free again! But you know what happened every time?

(1) they would serve God during the life of the leader (18) As long as the judge was around to lead them and to remind them who the Lord was, they would serve Him, but:

(2) when the leader died the cycle would repeat (19) Sin, suffering, supplication, salvation, over and over and over again. Up and down, up and down, up and down, spiritually. For 300 years!

Now surely there has to be a lesson in there for us somewhere! Compromise, incomplete obedience, is a trap that will lead to this horrendous cycle of spiritual ups and downs, of not obeying all the way and falling into sin and suffering because of it and crying out to God for forgiveness and being helped, only to repeat it all over and over and over again. Sadly, doesn't that sound like the way many people live the Christian life? They're serious about God, but then they compromise and sin and they suffer for it and then they're sorry and then they're serious again. And round and round they go for a lifetime. When Paul thought about himself living like that in Romans 7, he cried out: *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* (24) And his answer was, JESUS will! He said: *...through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.* - Rom. 8:2! The very Spirit of God lives in me and I choose to live according to the Spirit! I choose to listen to the Spirit, to do what the Spirit tells me to do, to depend and draw upon the power of the Spirit to do it. And that's what frees me from that awful cycle! When I am completely obedient to the Spirit, I walk in continual victory. When I compromise, when I do not fully carry out what the Spirit has said and instead stop short to do what I myself want (which is idolatry!), the door is opened for that awful cycle of up and down to begin. Now before I quit, let me just make two applications. First:

To the American protestant churches of our time: A century and a half ago, virtually EVERYBODY believed the Bible was a Holy Book, the very Word of God and true in every way. But about a century ago, the false teaching began to creep into the church that the Bible was merely a book written by men, inspirational, but NOT verbally without error. And when the church confronted this issue, she made a choice. She did NOT drive out those who held this heresy and destroy their teaching. Rather she decided to tolerate those who held it and live among them. They were too nice; they were too educated; they had too much influence. It was too hard to call them what they were and send them out. So gradually we became like them. The church adopted in large measure the idolatry the world had introduced. The Episcopal diocese in this area has a bishop so liberal that he would deny the absolute Deity of Christ and the fact that He literally rose from the dead. He openly advocates ordaining practicing homosexuals to the ministry and blessing marriages between persons of the same sex. When one local church in Huntingdon Valley refused to serve him communion because he is a heretic, they were forced out of their own denomination and lost their building! A United Methodist governing body decided recently to de-frock an openly-announced practicing homosexual pastor in this area; her local church fought to re-hire her! The Lutheran Church in America is wrestling at its highest level with this identical issue of recognizing same-sex unions. Their publishing house is dying on the vine and they are losing a million members a year! Even the Southern Baptist Church nearly lost all of its theological schools to this kind of teaching in recent years but the grassroots people and churches and people rose up and voted out those folks at the last minute. They called it an "evangelical takeover"! And yes, I know that there are genuine believers and pastors who love truly love the Lord Jesus in all these mainline denominations and I pray weekly with several of them, but in our day compromise, the failure to obey completely, has nearly sunk entire denominations, hidden the message of eternal life from millions and, worst of all, it has marred the name of Jesus Christ in the

same way that Israel marred the name of Jehovah by its behavior so long ago! But before you wipe the sweat from your brow and say, "I'm glad that's them and not me!", let me just apply this:

To you and I personally: *"As a young executive, Charles Olcott seemed to have it all--a loving wife, three strapping boys, and all the perks of a successful corporate career. But when the family was transferred to Miami in 1983, they discovered the one element that was missing in their otherwise full lives-- Jesus Christ. As Charles' spiritual life was beginning to blossom, his professional career was soaring. In 1986, at the age of 39, Charles was named president of a five-billion-dollar corporation. In the ensuing months and years, Charles set about making company changes based upon his commitment to Christ, however, just two years after becoming a Christian, Charles' faith was put to the test. Rumors of the takeover had filled the company break rooms for weeks, but that day the word became official. The parent company was negotiating with a British corporation for control of the fast food empire. As president, Charles was assigned the task of substantiating certain figures that the company would use in conjunction with their defense posture, but something was wrong. The numbers didn't work, and Charles knew it. 'The next day the management team gathered in New York to make final presentation plans. Charles recalls the scene with vivid clarity, 'Here I was at the top of my career... I'd waited a long time and worked hard to get to that position. Suddenly, I saw my whole career about to vaporize in front of my face if I didn't go along with the management defense strategy.' During the course of the planning session, Charles again voiced his concern about the numbers that were to be presented. The visible response of those at the table made it clear that he alone held this opinion. The meeting dismissed and Charles was told to 'sleep on it.' 'I didn't sleep that night. I went back to my room and prayed, 'Dear Lord, I didn't know that I'd be asked to do something like this. I ask You to direct my feet, my lips, my mind.' 'The next morning came and so did the ultimatum. 'I remember walking into that room,' says Charles, 'with the total and perfect peace that only comes from your relationship with Christ. I told the chairman that I wasn't able to support the figures, and he said, 'You're off the team.' I turned and walked down the stairs and called my wife and told her I just got fired.' 'A dramatic brief moment, a few short words, and it was over. Charles refused to support the questionable figures and severed all claims to his career, his title, and the 'golden parachute' that would cushion his fall. Charles admits that before his relationship with Jesus Christ, he easily could have rationalized the numbers and participated in the huge severance package offered to those who stayed. He says, 'I learned that the God of the Bible is 100% trustworthy. I'm not going to say 'Why me?' but rather 'What can I learn from this?'" [Market Place Perspective, First Quarter, 1994. Page 2.] OK, so you're not an executive but where is God calling you in your life to obey completely, to stand for Him fully? In what area are you being tempted to compromise? Is it in your work? Is it with your friends? Is it with your girlfriend or boyfriend? Is it in what God has called you to do or to be in life? Does it have to do with your honesty? With your sexual purity? With your money, perhaps your giving? Of course, if you stand for Him and obey completely, it will cost you something. But if you will yield to the Spirit of God, call upon Him for His strength and trust Him, you'll find that He is absolutely trustworthy. If you won't, get ready for that awful cycle; the consequences will catch up with you and around you'll go. Learn from the Judges; don't let this become "the worst of times" for you. Choose wisely.*

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges

An Age Of Mercy - Chs. 3-5

The 300 year period of the Judges was truly for Israel "the worst of times" as we saw last week in chapters 1-2. It was an age that displays for us Israel at its worst, going off into the sin of idolatry and experiencing God's discipline time after time. Yet ironically this age also displays for us God at His best, showing mercy, forgiving and delivering His people. One writer expressed it like this: *"The Christian life is like the dial of a clock. The hands are God's hands, passing over and over again-- the short hand of discipline and the long hand of mercy. Slowly and surely the hand of discipline must pass, and God speaks at each stroke. But over and over passes the hand of mercy, showering down a twelvefold blessing for each stroke of discipline and trial. Both hands are fastened to one secure pivot: the great unchanging heart of our God of love."* The age of the Judges was an age of mercy and as we celebrate our own country's anniversary this weekend, the fact of God's mercy gives us great hope for our own time. In chapters 3-5 we find:

I. The Story Of The First Four Judges of Israel. And remember that four step cycle we learned about last time? It occurs three times in these chapters. Let me briefly review the story for you.

1. Cycle 1: is associated with a Judge named **Othniel** and occurs in **3:5-11**. First you see:

a. the sin Israel committed (5-7) They did the very thing God had warned them against. Instead of driving out and destroying the Canaanite peoples of the land, they tolerated and lived among them and eventually intermarried with them and eventually forsook the Lord and worshipped their gods. Then you see:

b. the suffering God allowed (8) God caused them to be **oppressed** by the king of **Syria** to the north for **8 years**. That's how long it took for them to realize their sin and come back to God! Then you see:

c. the supplication Israel made (9a) They cried out to the Lord in their suffering. But did God fold His hands and say, "Well, you made your bed; now lay in it!" No, He had mercy on them; He displayed compassion and next you see:

d. the **salvation** God provided (9-11): He raised up a godly leader named Othniel who led their army and through Him God brought **deliverance that led to 40 years of peace**. As long as Othniel was alive, his leadership kept Israel faithful to the Lord but when he died the cycle began all over again and we have:

2. **Cycle 2:** is associated with a Judge named **Ehud** and occurs in **3:12-30** Again you see:

a. the **sin** Israel committed (12a) which means they were back to idolatry again and, of course, next you see:

b. the **suffering** God allowed (12-14) God caused them to be **oppressed by** the King of **Moab** to the east across Jordan for, not 8 but this time **18 years!** It's strange how this time it took them more than twice as long to realize their sin and come back to God. But they did and you see:

c. the **supplication** Israel made (15a) And did God fold His hands and say, "Well, I rescued and forgave you once, that's all the mercy you get!" No, His mercy was still there and even greater! You see:

d. the **salvation** God provided (15-30) [read 15 and 30] He raised up a godly leader named Ehud who gave them **deliverance** from the Moabites and brought them **80 years of peace**, twice as long as the first cycle! Now do note in verse 31 that this time of peace was:

e. **extended through** a third judge named **Shamgar** who may have taken over leadership as Ehud grew older (31) Evidently there was trouble with the Philistines who lived on the coast to the southwest and Shamgar defeated them. The only thing said about him is that he killed 600 Philistines with an ox-goad, i.e., a long pointed stick used to poke an ox in the back end to make him walk! Sounds like Samson and his jawbone! God must really have been at work in that one! But eventually Ehud died as did Shamgar, I imagine, and Israel spiraled down again into:

3. **Cycle 3:** is associated with a Judge named **Deborah** and occurs in **chapters 4-5** And just like the first two, you can see:

a. the **sin** Israel committed (1) Back to idolatry again. And then, of course:

b. the **suffering** God allowed (2-3) God allowed them to be **oppressed by Jabin**, a Canaanite King from the city of Hazor, north of Galilee for **20 years**, even longer than last time. He had a technological advantage; he had iron chariots, the assault vehicles of their day! But eventually Israel once again awoke out of their spiritual stupor and you see:

c. the **supplication** Israel made (3b) Again they remember the Lord and cry for help, but does He say, "Well, twice is enough, don't you think? I'm getting really tired of this!" No, His mercy is still there and you can see:

d. the **salvation** God provided (4-23, 5:31) [read 4, 5:31b] He raised up a godly leader named Deborah, a woman, through whom He eventually brought Israel deliverance and another **40 years of peace**. Now in chapter 5 you have:

e. **Deborah's song of deliverance - Chapter 5** which describes the story poetically and actually adds to it the missing details. You see, through Deborah:

(1) **God raised up a leader** or commander named **Barak and an army to fight (12-15)** Barak gathered an army of 10,000 men out of several of the tribes on the slopes of Mt. Tabor to fight against Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army whose chariots were gathered on the plain of the Kishon river which flows west from Tabor to the Mediterranean Sea which was below them. Israel's troops followed Barak and rushed down the mountain to meet their enemies, however what really happened is in the song:

(2) **God actually disabled the enemy through a storm (4-5, 20-21)** There must have been a tremendous, violent thunderstorm which poured down rain. The river swelled and flooded its banks and Sisera's 900 chariots were left bogged down in mud. They couldn't move and were easily over-run. That's why Sisera himself literally abandoned his chariot and fled on foot! He made it 40 miles north to the tent of the only ally he thought he had, a man by the name of Heber the Kenite and his wife Jael. And you know the story of how:

(3) **Jael bravely killed Sisera, the enemy general (24-27)** She drove a tent peg through his temple into the ground while he slept!

That's the story. Three cycles, three judges, round and round and round. But it will all just be so much information to us unless we stop to glean:

II. **The Lessons From The Story** Each cycle has a less for us. The cycle of:

1. **Othniel** is uncluttered with details; in fact, I think God left them out on purpose and made it short to show us graphically the cycle Israel went through. We often call it the cycle of sin and repentance. But I'd rather call it the cycle of

MERCY because it simply reminds us of **God's continual mercy on His people** Listen to the words of **Ps.78:34-39** (TLB), *Then at last, when he had ruined them, they walked awhile behind him; how earnestly they turned around and followed him! Then they remembered that God was their Rock--that their Savior was the God above all gods. But it was only with their words they followed him, not with their hearts; 37 their hearts were far away. They did not keep their promises. Yet he was merciful and forgave their sins and didn't destroy them all. Many and many a time he held back his anger. For he remembered that they were merely mortal men, gone in a moment like a breath of wind. Oh, how merciful God is!*

Now the list of our national sins is pretty long too. To their credit, in 1963 Abington School District appealed all the way to the Supreme Court a case brought against it by a unitarian from this community whose name was Schempp stating that mandatory devotional Bible reading and prayer in a public school violates the First Amendment. They lost and the precedent was set; prayer and Bible reading were eliminated from our public schools. It was a major step in creating a whole culture without respect for or reference to God. Today you can't even use the word "Christmas" to describe the vacation students get around Dec. 25! In 1973 the Supreme Court heard a case by a pregnant single woman and declared our laws against abortion unconstitutional. In the years since then we have averaged 1.4 million unborn children aborted each year. And while I have a great deal of sympathy for the women who have also suffered as victims of this process, this decision set the tone for a whole culture without respect for life! The great challenge of our day is now whether to legalize unions between persons of the same sex. We have already developed a culture without respect for marriage! Immorality is everywhere and our media can be credited with fueling much of that. And just last Wednesday our Supreme Court ruled that 2 displays of the Ten Commandments inside Kentucky Courtrooms were unconstitutional, while a monument of them in Texas could stand outside. Their opinion is that each case must be treated individually. That reminded me of a story I read where *Chuck Colson was invited to a luncheon by the publisher of a major American newspaper chain. It was a meeting of the editorial board, and the topic for discussion was criminal justice. Before the actual program began, the publisher turned to Colson and asked, "You're one of those guys who go around talking about the Bible, aren't you?" When Colson admitted that was true, the publisher went on, "I suppose you think it's a good idea to post the Ten Commandments in school classrooms." "Yes, I do," said Colson. "Well, we sponsored a campaign in this city to take the Ten Commandments off the walls of every classroom." Colson asked him why they did that when Jews believe the Ten Commandments, Muslims believe in the Ten Commandments, and Christians believe in the Ten Commandments.... The publisher responded with a lame statement about needing to be enlightened. "Enlightened?" replied Colson. "How about teaching them history? Teach them that the Ten Commandments are the basis for our laws. That's why there's a portrait of Moses just above the Speaker of the House in U.S. Congress." "We can't do that in this country," said the publisher, "if we want to be enlightened." Then, just a few minutes later, in the middle of the program, the same man cited statistics showing that 50% of public school students steal from each other. He lamented this as a terrible situation and asked the group, "What can we do about this?" Colson spoke up: "Maybe we should post a sign on the wall that says, 'You shall not steal.'" [Citizen, Jul 22, 1996. Pages 6-7.] We don't get it, do we? Friends, if God allows us to continue in this direction, He'll owe Israel an apology! But the lesson of the Judges is that with God there is always mercy! No matter how far we plunge, how deep into our own idolatry we go, or how often we turn from Him we can still turn our hearts toward Him and find mercy. And that's true in our own personal lives as well! No matter what you have done or how often you have done it, there is mercy at the cross of Jesus Christ for you! That's lesson one; now in the cycle involving:*

2. Ehud we find another lesson: **God's principle of using champions** Let's go back to the story in chapter 3. Did you notice:

a. Ehud's courage? He was involved in a **solo assassination** behind enemy lines! He brought tribute money from Israel to Eglon, King of Moab in his palace. But on the way home he sent the rest of his companions on and returned personally to see Eglon and asked for a personal audience. Look at his daring deed (**3:20-23**). And he escaped and got away clean. Do you realize what a risk that was, to single-handedly attempt to kill a king in his own palace with soldiers everywhere? I'm betting that he wasn't counting on making it out alive, that he was willing to sacrifice his own life, if need be, to bring liberty to his people. But God honored that and let him escape undetected; that's a miracle! But notice what happened afterward:

b. Israel's willingness to follow him to victory (3:27-28) For 18 years Israel had not been willing to stand up against the Moabites, to fight them. But when they had a leader who was unafraid and committed in front of them leading the way, they followed willingly! And the end result was that the situation was reversed and Moab became subject to Israel (verse 30). Now there's a principle in here somewhere:

In the days of Ezekiel God said this, **Ez.22:30** *"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.* God was looking for a champion, for a leader, for someone who would stand up and risk all to be committed to do what He wanted done. That's what He is always looking for! Someone who is so committed to His will and His cause that they are willing to stand up alone, if needed, and do it at all costs. That's when others follow! Tomorrow we celebrate the signing of our Declaration of Independence. That was a radical step! *Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed it? Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes*

ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War. They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. What kind of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags. Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward. Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton. At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr, noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt. Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months. John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates. Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. They were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. Standing tall, straight, and unwavering, they pledged: "For the support of this declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of the divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." They stepped up to the plate, willing to pay the price, and the nation saw their courage and followed them. And the result is the United States of America and the freedom in which you and I live! God has always used champions to move His people forward. He is always looking for men and women of courage who will do His will, who will start a new ministry, who will go into a new area, who will defy their fears and doubts and hesitations, who will risk everything they have to be obedient to Him! And when there is a champion, His people willingly follow! The question is, are you one of them? Is He calling you to something? Will you step up to the plate? Now quickly before we close, there is one final lesson here from the cycle involving:

3. Deborah: and that is **God's blessing of female leadership** Because we have reacted against the radical feminist element in our society, I think we evangelicals have often gone too far the other way and minimized female leadership. But if you look at Scripture, God uses women in leadership. Miriam led the women of Israel; Rahab's courage led to the fall of Jericho; you know the stories of Ruth and of Esther, both of whom impacted their people greatly. In the early church there were key women like Lydia and Priscilla whom God used greatly. Paul wrote in **Phil. 4:3**, *Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.* Women have always been greatly used of God in His program for His people. Notice a couple of things in the story of Deborah. Evidently:

a. women can have a ministry role AND a family (4:4-5) Deborah was a prophetess and a wife and a judge who held court for Israel all at the same time. Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, Isaiah's wife, and Anna are all mentioned as being used of God as prophetesses, the female equivalent of male prophets and had some sort of public ministry. In China today there are many, many "Bible women" who have started churches, who teach small groups, who are advancing the church alongside men. I'm not saying that's easy and doesn't require some real balancing; what I AM saying is that women can be involved in real and important leadership in God's work. Second, notice that:

b. women are often more willing to believe God than men (4:6-7) Whatever God told her she was ready to believe and act on. On the mission field and even here at home, they are always the first to believe in Christ while husbands refuse. In the church it is so often ladies who are the first to jump up and volunteer in a cause. Their hearts seem to be more tender and open to God; how precious that must be to Him! And because of this:

c. women are often used of God to greatly encourage men (4:8-10, 14) If not for Deborah's encouragement, Barak would never have gone, would never have led Israel to victory. Women, the very openness of your hearts can be used by God to greatly encourage your husbands and the men of the church to obey and follow God. We need it. Don't sit back and be quiet; push us toward Him, encourage us. And finally:

d. women are often willing to risk their lives for God's cause Jael killed Sisera, the enemy general, single-handedly. She didn't go call her husband. **(4:21)** Do you realize what a risk that was? If a noise had woken him, if her first hammer stroke was not true and strong, she would likely have been overpowered and killed with no one to rescue her. Many women, like Jael and like Esther have obeyed God and said in their hearts, "And if I perish, I perish!"

You see, not all of those champions God is looking for are men. He wants and needs women too! Women who will stand up and make a difference in our country and for the gospel. Women like Shirley Dobson who organizes the National Day of Prayer every year. Women like Phyllis Kilbourne who saw the suffering of children around the world and founded the arm of WEC known as Rainbows of Hope that now spans the globe and like our friend Thirza Schoots who went alone to Kyrgyzstan to found the ministry to street children there. Women like Tara Siegle who will take a year of their lives to go to

West Philadelphia and live among the poor to touch their lives. Friends, we do live in a declining age, yet there is mercy! God will hear us when our hearts are turned to Him. But he needs those champions, Ehuds and Deborahs, men and women who will stand up for Him so that others will follow them to His feet and into His will!

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges

An Age Of Fear - Chs. 6-8

Chapters 6-8 take us deeper into the life of one single person who lived during the time of the Judges than have any of the previous chapters. They give us more of a glimpse of what life was like during these days when Israel would step out of the will of God.

I. Gideon's Situation was basically the same as that of the Judges who had preceded him: It was **Another Cycle Of Sin And Mercy (6:1-10)** In verse 1 you can see:

1. Israel's sin: which, of course, was **idolatry (1a)** Again they worshipped Baal and Asherah, as we'll see in the story. And naturally, that led to:

2. Israel's suffering (1b-6) Two words stand out to me. The power of Midian was SO **oppressive (2)**; the Midianites were nomads and they would wait until harvest time and come across the Jordan and camp all over the land and take all the harvest for themselves, ruining whatever was left. There were so many of them that Israel couldn't stop them. And they became (verse 6) so **impoverished** and starving after seven years of this that they finally cried out to Jehovah for help! But this time, before He sent help, he sent one of those unnamed servants of his, a prophet, to give them:

3. God's rebuke and an explanation of what was happening **(7-10)** "You are impressed and impoverished and living this way because of your own sin. You're worshipping false gods, idols, and you're paying for your unwillingness to listen to Me!"

Now just how were they living during these days? The one word that jumps out at me from the story of the man named Gideon is fear. As we read on, it becomes really clear that:

II. Gideon And His People Lived In Fear (6:11-7:15a) The time of the Judges was truly an age of fear, a time when all of the people of Israel lived in constant state of dread. God had warned back in Deut. 28 that one day he would scatter them among all the nations because of their sin; listen to what He said, *Deut. 28:65, Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!"--because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see.* Truly, the Jews have lived that way down through all the centuries since they were driven from their land in AD 70. But those same words characterize the way they were already living IN their land in the days the Judges. Terrified, fearing for their lives and their futures, hiding in mountain clefts and caves and strongholds. And Gideon was nobody special; he was just another citizen of his age, living in fear and trying to get by somehow. But God took him from fear to faith and raised him up to lead Israel to freedom. From the moment we meet him, it's clear to see that:

1. he feared the power of his enemies (6:11-13) Jesus comes to visit Gideon. He appears in the form of a man, a stranger walking up, and he sits down under a tree. Gideon is busy threshing wheat --in a winepress! Now normally you thresh wheat on a big flat open area, a threshing floor where teams of oxen are driven round and round to trample it and separate the heads of grain from the stalks. Gideon's doing it in a little winepress where you're supposed to walk around and squish grapes with your feet. It says two things to me: 1) he's hiding wheat where his enemies aren't going to look and 2) he doesn't have much wheat to thresh! He is so afraid of them that it governs how he acts. And because this stranger greets him using the name of God, (*the LORD, Jehovah, is with you*) Gideon quickly spills his thoughts:

a. he ignorantly blamed God for Israel's troubles "If Jehovah is with us, why am I threshing wheat in a winepress?! I know about Jehovah; my grandparents told me about all His signs and wonders, but where are they now?! He's abandoned us and left us! He doesn't care about us!" Is that not how people react, even today? "If God is real then why has he let more than half of the children in the world be devastated by poverty, war and AIDS? He isn't real or He doesn't care!" Even believers start to think like this: "Why did God let me get cancer or take my child from me? He doesn't care; He has left me!" Nobody ever stops to think just who abandoned WHOM! As America declines rapidly, it's easy to worry about the circumstances around us and what's going to happen to us and our children. Terrorists fly planes into buildings and explode bombs in pizza shops. Life is not secure and safe and it would be easy to live in fear! But notice Jesus doesn't even bother to answer the question; in his very greeting he has already given:

b. God's assurance: *I am with you!* And in Gideon's case that was "visibly" true; Jehovah was sitting under the tree talking to him! And Jesus made that same promise to us: *Lo I am with you ALWAYS! Even to the end of the age!* The Psalmist knew that assurance: *Psalm 27:1, The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear?*

The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid? If you know He is with you, you need not live in fear! But that's not the only fear Gideon had:

2. he feared his own weakness (6:14-16) Jesus had an assignment for Gideon, to go and lead Israel against the Midianites. He knew about Deborah and Barak and Ehud and Othniel before him and how they had saved Israel. But all he could see was his own weakness, his own inability. He was a nobody with no influence whom no one would follow! Maybe you can relate to that fear! You know what God wants you to do, but all you can see is how you can't do it! You're too weak, too young, too old! You don't have the money; you don't possess the gifts for it. You're afraid, not so much of the task, but of your own weakness and inability. But again, Gideon had already been given:

♦ **God's assurance: *I am sending you!*** "The success of your leading Israel does not depend on your ability, but on MY sending! If I SEND you, I will SUPPLY all you need. I will do it, not you!" Paul learned that secret: *Phil 4:11-13, ...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.* If you know that God has sent you and you're doing what He wants, then you can rest assured that He will supply all you need and you need not fear your own inadequacy! But Gideon was not done being afraid yet:

3. he feared that God wasn't really speaking to him (6:17-22) "How do I know this is really of God, that this is really YOU telling me to do this and not just some crazy idea I'm having?! Give me a sign!" You've been there, haven't you? "God, is this really You telling me to do this thing? If it is, can you just show me, make it plain in a way I can't miss?" We're not used to walking so close to God that we know His voice instantly, that He can guide us with His eye. So, Jesus does give him a sign. Gideon brings an offering and He touches it with the end of His staff and it goes up in flames and suddenly it really dawns on Gideon, "O my gosh, I've been talking with God! That man was really Him! I've seen Him face to face; nobody can do that and live! And look how irreverently I spoke of Him!" But out of thin air comes the voice of:

♦ **God's assurance (23-24):** God's assurance for us is His peace. Gideon's name for that altar says it all: ***The LORD is peace!*** When it is really God speaking to me, I have His peace, this unexplainable peace that passes all understanding that He's in control and I'm in His will and I am not afraid. *Col. 3:15* says, *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts....* Let that be the thing that rules your life and tells you when you are where God wants you, not your logical calculations. *During World War II while the Germans occupied his country, Bishop Berggrav of Norway was at his home with a friend when he heard a knock at the door. He opened it, and there was a German officer with a guard. They told him he was under arrest. Putting on his overcoat, he followed the soldiers to the waiting car. Just before it sped away, his friend called to him, "Remember 1 Peter 3:13." The bishop said he immediately reached in to his pocket, pulled out a small Bible, and read the passage. "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" As he read those words, he experienced an indescribable peace. He testified later that the reality of Christ's nearness came to him through this verse, that reality of Christ's nearness, that inner peace that the world can't give and can't take away, that sense that HE is here and everything is OK. When you have that peace, rest in it and all fear will be gone! So off went Gideon determined to obey God, however, it was not long before he got specific instructions and fear surfaced again. This time:*

4. he feared the reaction of his family and peers (6:25-32) [read 25-27] Gideon lived in an idolatrous family. His father had his own personal altar to Baal and his own Asherah pole, and I'm not talking little miniatures on a shelf somewhere. It took 10 men to tear this stuff down! Not everybody could afford that; his father must have been some kind of village leader. So, the Lord tells him to tear it all down and build an altar to Jehovah! Of course, he's afraid of how his father and his family and everybody else around will react, and with good reason; check out **verse 30!** That's why he did it at night, hoping no one would know who did it! He knew the threat that was coming; no wonder he was afraid. In Kyrgyzstan when you come to Christ, your family may kick you out and disown you; it takes new believers a long while sometimes to get over this fear of what will happen if their families find out! And what about us? Do you live in fear that if you obey God and do what He wants that your family or your friends or your coworkers will reject you somehow? That's a fear that many of us have. But in this case:

♦ **God's assurance** came in a strange way: ***his own idolatrous father stood up for him!*** (31) He said, "If Baal is really a god, then he ought to be able to kill somebody who tears down his altar!" You could probably have knocked Gideon over with a feather! Who would have dreamed this? But God has a way of changing hearts, of doing the unexpected and winning the respect, even of those who dislike what we're doing when we're willing to trust him and do it anyway. It reminds me of *Prov 16:7, When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him!* Trust Him, do what He says, and commit the reactions of others into His care.

So now it's harvest time and here comes the huge swarm of Midianites into the land like a locust plague. But God moves in Gideon and he begins to gather an army together. And while his messengers are out gathering the other tribes for battle, he has yet another fear left before the battle:

5. he feared that God might not keep His promise (6:33-40) Look at the expression in 36a, *IF you will do as you've promised*, I really need to know it, to be sure of it. So, he proposed a test to God. Please note that this is not some-

thing you should try at home because I guarantee that if you set out to make God prove Himself to you, you'll end up in trouble, but God is merciful and, in this case, gave His:

♦ **God's assurance: God stooped to his self-proposed fleece - twice!** When Gideon asked for dew to be on the sheepskin and not on the ground around it, God did that. But then he wondered whether somehow that could happen naturally so he asked for the reverse, dew on the ground and not on the sheepskin. Do you see that it was not an act of faith; it was an act of doubt! It was asking God to reconfirm over and over what He had already said and it was setting up a test for God. So don't put out fleeces for God, asking Him to have this boy ask you out if you're supposed to marry him or something! What God has promised, God will do. Just count on it! There is no promise of God that has ever failed nor will. Just trust Him! And Gideon does.

However, turnabout is fair play so now that God has confirmed Himself over and over and Gideon is sure what he's to do, He puts Gideon to the test. You see, God knew that down deep Gideon still:

6. he feared to do what God had commanded (7:1-15a) so:

a. God drew out his fear by reducing his army (1-8) He has 22,000 men. 12,000 of them are afraid of battle so God says "Send them home". The remaining 10,000 He sifts out by the way they drink, whether they get down and stick their face in the water like a horse or bring water up to their mouths in the palm of their hand a little at a time so they can watch carefully around themselves. You'd know that only 300 do it the hard way and God says, "Those are the ones I want, they're enough; send the rest home. Now do you trust Me?" It's easy to trust God when the odds look more reasonable. When there's almost enough money, it's easy to trust Him for the rest. When you have almost enough strength or time, it's easy to trust Him for a little bit. But when He sends you with 300 against more than 100,000, when the odds are impossible, do you still trust Him or are you afraid? *James M. Gray wrote about a traveler in Portugal who saw a fisherman's wife at the water's edge holding a small child by the hand. Just beyond where they were walking was a sharp drop-off. Still the mother kept leading the boy toward the brink. The frightened youngster clung to her, but with affectionate words she led him to the same spot again and again. Finally, encouraged by her reassurances, he toddled along the edge by himself. Gray said, "The traveler trembled at the risk, . . . a few feet farther the water deepened dangerously. But there was no real cause for alarm. The mother's eye was on the boy, and her hand was ready to catch him before he went too far. 'What are you doing?' the traveler asked. 'Drawing out his fear,' the woman answered.* Beloved, God has a way of drawing out our fears, of putting us in places where we have to face what we're afraid of so that our fears truly come to light and He can remove them by His love. So again God stoops to Gideon's weakness and gives His:

b. God's assurance (9-14) Gideon creeps down there in the middle of the night and what does he find? That **God put fear into the enemies' hearts!** They're all quaking in their boots at his own name and scared to death! And the punchline is in **(15a)**. You know what that was? That was:

c. the final removal of all fear From that moment on, it seems that Gideon never hesitated, never doubted, not once in the rest of the story. He runs back to camp, gets his men ready and says, "Let's go!" He is finally convinced that God said it and it WILL be so, no matter what the odds are, no matter what the consequences may seem to be! God and I are a majority anywhere, anytime! I say it again, *Psalm 27:1, The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?* That's the confidence Gideon finally came to and in that faith:

III. Gideon Led His People To Victory (7:15b-8:21) The story is familiar so we won't read it. You know about:

1. the miraculous battle (7:15b-25), how his 300 surrounded the enemy camp in the middle of the night with torches concealed under pitchers. And when suddenly 300 trumpets sounded all around camp and lights blazed and men shouted, "The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon", pandemonium broke loose. Enemy soldiers fought and killed each other in the dark and the whole bunch just started running and fled, overcome with fear! In chapter 8 we have the story of:

2. the mop-up operation (8:1-21) We won't read that either, but Gideon and his 300 chased the Midianites across the Jordan 100 miles or more, all the way to Karkor, where the last 15,000 of them made a stand. But they were routed there and all the Midianite kings were captured and slain. **Verse 28** is the summary of the result. Midian is gone and there are 40 years of peace. You know, that would be a nice, story-book ending, but the sad fact is that in the end:

IV. Gideon Became A Snare To His People (8:22-32) You see, after he won the battle, they came to him and offered to make him king, but:

1. he recognized God's right to rule over his people (22-23) He had learned the principle at last. God is in charge. He is King. He is Lord. The way to live is simply to do what He says! That was a great lesson for Israel, just as it is for you and I. But unfortunately, we also read that:

2. he symbolically transferred his reverence into an object (24-27a) Well-meaningly, he got a little bit of gold from everybody and thought he would make a symbol to commemorate this lesson. So, he made an ephod. Remember

what an ephod is? It was a garment, like a vest, that the High Priest wore at the Tabernacle. And on its front was a pouch in which were the Urim and Thummim, the holy lots. That was how Israel would ask God what to do and how He would show His will. He showed his will through the casting of the lots and Israel did it. So, Gideon made a vest like this out of gold, not to wear but to put up on a stand. Why? I suppose, to remind people that we need to do the will of God and to trust Him, to remind them that what God says, He means and it's true and you should trust His Word and obey Him! But, as nearly always happens when you make an object to represent God:

3. he and his people ended up worshipping the object, not God (27b) The very object intended to produce trust became itself an idol and Israel worshipped it. They worshipped Jehovah as represented in a piece of gold. And it wasn't far to step from that back into idolatry again once Gideon was gone.

Sadly, the church has so often done that very thing. It has often taken objects that we originally meant to be symbols to remind us of the power and the grace of our God and ended up seeking them to give us life. That's how we ended up having holy places and venerating holy things. That's how so many have come to believe that in the water of baptism or in the taking of communion people receive life from God. We can venerate the physical Book more than the words it contains and think that it protects us or value the cross that we hold in hand more than the death of the Savior upon the real one. Idolatry is not just something that crept into Israel; it has crept into the church and gained a powerful hold. That's why the last words of the Apostle John's first letter are *1John 5:21, Dear children, keep yourselves from idols*. That's good advice. Let's beware of anything that creeps in to take HIS place in our lives.

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges

An Age Of Betrayal - Ch. 9

The apostle Paul wrote this to us: *You may as well know this too, Timothy, that in the last days it is going to be very difficult to be a Christian. For people will love only themselves and their money; they will be proud and boastful, sneering at God, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful to them, and thoroughly bad. They will be hardheaded and never give in to others; they will be constant liars and troublemakers and will think nothing of immorality. They will be rough and cruel, and sneer at those who try to be good. They will betray their friends; they will be hotheaded, puffed up with pride, and prefer good times to worshipping God.* (2Tim 3:1 TLB) Does that not sound like a vivid description of the days we're living in? All around us we find people who care only about themselves and do only what benefits them. Relationships don't mean anything to them; there is no loyalty. They stab their own friends in the back when it suits their purpose; they turn against their own parents, totally ungrateful for all the care they've given them. Well, that certainly is what it was like in the days of the Judges in Israel. It was an age of self-centeredness, an age of betrayal. And nowhere do you see that more clearly than in the life of the man named Abimelech whose story is given to us in chapter 9. Abimelech was not a judge raised up by God; in fact, he was probably an idolater. He was a man who lived by the sword, forced his way to power, and eventually died by the sword. He was a true product of his age and God has recorded his story here in Scripture as a strong warning to us. Let's begin by looking at:

I. The Circumstances That Framed Abimelech's Life (8:29-35) First of all:

1. he was shaped by a sordid family life (29-32) Abimelech's father was Gideon (nicknamed Jerub-Baal), the great judge who delivered Israel from the Midianites and led them back to God. He told Israel that he refused to be their king, though it's funny he gave his son a name that means "my father is king"! At any rate he sure acted like one in this respect: he built a harem for himself. He took many wives. And as a result, he had 70 sons and who knows how many daughters! Now do you think they all lived in one house? Not likely unless you're a rich king like Solomon. Ask our friend Yallah from Liberia how this works. Different ladies live in different houses with their children; the husband visits them in turn. The wives and children all vie for his time and attention. How much input do you think each of his 70 sons got from their father? Abimelech's mother wasn't even a wife; she was a concubine, actually a slave or servant he purchased. Gideon lived in the town of Ophrah. She and Abimelech lived 20 miles north in Shechem, probably in her parents' home. How do you think he grew up feeling about his father? You know, in our culture today we have a whole generation growing up with single mothers and absentee fathers. We have children growing up having to cope with two or sometimes three people in the role of moms or dad as their parents have been divorced and remarried, even multiple times. In 1996 Hillary Clinton wrote a best-selling book based on an African proverb called *"It Takes A Village"*, expressing her personal view that it takes a village to raise a child, that the community, by which she really means the government and all its programs, play a primary and vital role in raising a child. Just this July 4 Senator Rick Santorum put out his rebuttal in a new book entitled *"It Takes A Family"*. However, years ago Sen. Robert Dole was the first to rebut her publicly in a speech where he said, *"After decades of assault upon what made America great, upon supposedly obsolete values, what have we reaped, what have we created, what do we have? What we have, in the opinion of millions of Americans, is crime, drugs, illegitimacy, abortion, the abdication of duty, and the abandonment of children. And after the virtual devastation of the American family, the rock upon which this country was founded, we are told that it takes a village -- that is, the collective, and thus, the state -- to raise a child. The state is now more involved than it has ever been in the raising of children, and children are now more neglected, abused, and mistreated than they have been in our time. This is not a coincidence, and, with all due respect, I am here to tell you: it does not take a village to raise a child. It takes a family. If I could by magic restore to every child who lacks a father or a mother, that father or*

that mother, I would. And though I cannot, I would never turn my back on them, and I shall... promote measures that keep families whole." We are growing a whole generation of children, many of whom, like Abimelech, have no idea what a nuclear family is and to whom the bonds of family are no longer sacred. Secondly, Abimelech:

2. he was shaped by an idolatrous culture (33-34) Israel forgot their God again and picked a new one. So, Abimelech was raised in the midst of a community without respect for the true God who were following the practices that went with worshipping Baal. One ritual they practiced was the "sacred orgy". *The people would get together, get very drunk, and engage in promiscuous sex. The stated reason for this ceremony was to celebrate fertility: By acting out acts of reproduction, they thanked their gods, Baal and Asherah, for their success at bearing children, breeding animals, and growing crops, and prayed for more of the same. Another ritual was child sacrifice...* which I won't even describe, but how convenient with all the children their worship would produce! In that culture you would grow up worshipping sex and without respect for human life. Sound familiar? Glorify sex and abort the babies that result. That's what our kids are being raised in; no wonder that many turn out like Abimelech. And finally:

3. he was shaped by a thankless community (35) For Gideon's whole struggle and great deliverance they had no gratitude. In today's parlance we'd say, "They used him when they needed him and then forgot him". And that breeds people like Abimelech who think only of themselves. We are raising up a generation like that, in which many are "users", who have no gratitude for anything, no matter how much you do for them; rather they expect it and think they are entitled to it.

Frankly, if we don't turn this ship around in America, we really are going to find ourselves in our own "worst of times"! But with all that background, now let's look at:

II. The Saga Of Betrayal In Which Abimelech Was Involved First notice that:

1. there was betrayal within the family (9:1-21) After his father Gideon died:

a. Abimelech murdered his own brothers in order to rule (1-6) Abimelech used the influence of his mother's relatives to gain influence within Shechem and the Shechemites gave him their allegiance. He became a little warlord of sorts with his own personal band of mercenaries to protect his turf. And his first act was to go to Oprah and ritually murder all of his own half-brothers so that none of them could claim a right to his throne! Now it's not all that unusual in history for a king to do this; many others have. Queen Athaliah even murdered all of her own grandchildren so she could rule! But it sure is without natural affection, isn't it? Doesn't it scare you a bit when you see several cases of young people in recent years who have actually murdered their own parents - in their sleep?! But betrayal doesn't have to involve killing the body. How many wives in our generation have had their husband come home and out of the clear blue tell them, "I'm divorcing you. I have found someone else." Or maybe it's vice versa. It's like being stabbed in the heart; the person who vowed to always be true to you is now saying, "I don't want you; I never loved you in the first place." How many older people have children who have rejected them and want nothing to do with them or else who put them in a home and then never come to visit them. As the institution of the family breaks down, increasingly we're seeing less and less regard for family ties. Family members betray one another without any sense of how wrong it is. Fortunately, Abimelech couldn't find one half-brother and in 7-21 we have the story of how:

b. he was cursed by his brother Jotham (7-21) We won't read it but Jotham's heart was broken over the injustice of what Abimelech and Shechem had done. So, one day he climbed up on a rock and shouted a parable down to the people of Shechem. It was a story about how one day the trees were looking for a king, but all the tall and useful trees refused so in the end they chose the ugly and useless little thornbush as king. It pricked everyone who touched it. The only thing the thornbush was good for was that everybody burned it; they used it to kindle their fires. So Jotham says, "You've chosen a thornbush as king; may fire catch on him and spread to all of you until you burn up together; you deserve it!" Jotham spoke a curse on them and then ran away and hid the rest of his life! I continue to stand amazed at the thornbushes who manage to push their way to power in the countries of the world, the Idi Amins and the Pol Pots and the Saddam Husseins! They destroy their own people and end up destroyed themselves. And if we're not careful, one of these days, we're liable to choose a real thornbush to lead us! At any rate, in those days there was not only betrayal within the family:

2. there was betrayal within the city (9:22-49), the community, the culture. It was not long before:

a. the people tried to sabotage their own leader whom they had chosen **(22-23, 25)** During this time Abimelech was asserting his authority over other towns in the region and had already moved his headquarters 5 miles away to Arumah, leaving a deputy named Zebul in charge of Shechem. Shechem was on the intersection of three key trade routes and now to oppose Abimelech, the Shechemites set up a system of organized piracy to rob travelers, from whom, no doubt, Abimelech was collecting his own tolls or tribute in some way. No doubt this also had the intent of keeping Abimelech from coming back to town! So, the people of Shechem turned against the very leader they had chosen, hired and supported. Not to compare the two men at all, but that thought does make me wonder how President Bush feels some days, knowing that the same people who believed in him and elected him can so easily

stand against him and work to undermine him just when he needs their support most! You can't trust the people! And, of course, almost immediately:

b. another leader wooed them with false promises (26-29) Another would-be warlord named Gaal moved into Shechem with his band of thugs. They placed their trust in him and he became their drinking buddy. And, trying to get the job, He boasted of how if he were king, he would get rid of Abimelech once and for all, which he, of course, did not really have the military strength to do. Sounds like many a political speech, doesn't it? "If I am elected, I will do this and that and so on, ad infinitum," none of which could he or she possibly do! And yet we follow it, we believe it, we put our confidence in yet someone else instead of God alone. But as the saga continues:

c. a deputy of the first leader betrayed the second (30-41) [Read 30-35, 38-41] Zebul was Abimelech's deputy. He was part of that drinking party the night before and though he was angry inside, he didn't show it on the outside. Gaal probably thought he was turned against Abimelech like everyone else. But Zebul slyly sent word secretly to Abimelech to come and get rid of this Gaal and his band. And when they lost the battle and fled back into the city, all his boasting now obviously false, Zebul himself drove Gaal right out of the city and the citizens who followed him didn't stand up for him! Are you getting the picture that in this town nobody can really trust anybody? Well, if not yet, check out the end of the story:

d. the leader exterminated his own people (42-49) [Read 42-43, 45] You would have expected Abimelech to come back into town and assert his rule but instead he just wanted revenge and wiped them all out. In fact, as part of that battle, about a thousand men and women locked themselves inside a strong tower where their idol's temple was and Abimelech burned it to the ground and burned them all to death. The one who said, "I'm your own flesh and blood; I care about you!", killed them all when it suited him. Not unlike what warlord leaders do today in many nations. Two months or so ago more than 1000 people died in the city of Andijan, Uzbekistan near the Kyrgyz border when protesters marched in the streets against President Islam Karimov and he simply ordered his troops to open fire on the crowd. Thousands fled for their lives. I guess there won't be any more protests!

But what's the point? It was a day when leaders couldn't trust their people and people couldn't trust their leaders, when family members betray each other, an age where there was no loyalty, no commitment that means anything, no ties that were sacred. An age when there was nobody you could trust! It's like that in a lot of the countries of the world today. And as we continue down this path of allowing the family to erode, following after the idols of immorality and cheapening human life and breeding that self-centered ungrateful view of life, that's where we're headed. May God help us! Yet, lest we get too lost in the details, there is one more key thing we can see in this story:

III. The Cause Of Justice In Which God Is Involved (9:23-24, 50-57) Where was God while all of this was going on, while all of Gideon's sons were murdered and this saga was played out? Read verses **23-24**. God had not forgotten. God was at work. God actually used Satan to accomplish justice; He sent an evil spirit, a demon, to bring about that betrayal and unrest which would eventually bring just retribution to both wicked Abimelech and the wicked people of Shechem. You can read in the end of the story how:

1. God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech (50-56) Abimelech moved 10 miles north to attack the city of Thebez and thought he'd repeat his "burn 'em up" tactic when the citizens went into their tower. But this time he got too close to the wall and a woman threw down a stone that cracked his skull and he had his servant finish him off with a sword. The punchline is **verse 56**. Justice was done. The violence of the murderer came back on his own head. And in this story through Abimelech:

2. God repaid the wickedness of the people of Shechem (57) The fire that started in the thornbush did burn them all up in the end. God caused their own ungratefulness and seeking after false gods and lack of respect for life to come back on their own heads. And that brings us to the first of the three:

IV. The Lessons We Can Learn From This Story The first one is obvious:

1. we will always eventually reap what we sow God has a law, an abiding principle that He wrote out for us in **Gal. 6:7-8**; turn there and read it with me please. God cannot be mocked. He, literally, IS not mocked. You may deceive yourself into thinking that He doesn't know, doesn't care or doesn't see what you do, that you can do whatever you like and God will have nothing to do with the outcome. But God's law is that whatever you plant you WILL reap. Every choice you make will have consequences. If you live according to the desires of your flesh, if you live in a way that is self-centered and immoral and ungrateful, chasing after other things instead of God, it will eventually bring destruction in your life, one way or the other! But if you listen to the Spirit of God who dwells in you and live out what pleases Him in caring about others and valuing them and doing good to them in righteousness and morality, then you will live a life that is truly living and that stretches on into eternity. The life you live here will be like the life you'll live there forever, one continuous age-enduring life! God will see to it! Don't think you can thumb your nose at His principle and get away with it! Learn from Abimelech that you WILL reap what you sow. Secondly, if we're going to make any difference in this kind of an age in which we live:

2. we must mature to become genuinely trustworthy Listen to what Paul wrote about Timothy in **Phil. 2:19-21**, *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon.... I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* Paul needed a Timothy, someone who was trustworthy, someone who genuinely cared about the church, someone who was only concerned to do what pleased Christ instead of himself, to send to the Philippians. And in this age in this country where everyone is looking out for his own interests, God needs Timothies that He can use, people that are dependable and trustworthy and filled with genuine love. He can send us into the lives of others and it will make a difference. It will draw them to faith! Integrity may get laughed at sometimes but in the end, it draws people! In an age of betrayal people hunger to know integrity. Let them find it in you! And finally, how are we going to survive in an age when it seems that you can't trust anybody?

3. we must continue to trust God when we can't trust others Listen to **1 Pet. 4:19**, *So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.* What do you do when people betray you right and left? When family members turn on you or maybe even desert you, when the people that work on your car rip you off, when your company renigs on all the promises they've made to you or terminates you, when your best friend lets you down, when it seems like everywhere you turn, there's nobody you can trust? You rest in this: **GOD IS STILL FAITHFUL!** He will NEVER let you down. Commit yourself and your path to Him. Trust Him and keep on doing good anyway! Keep living His way. Keep on being trustworthy and righteous; don't give in and become like all the people around you. The very next verse in Galatians right after God says you WILL reap what you sow says **Gal. 6:9**, *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* Billy Graham's daughter Anne tells the life story of a man she met in a country that is hostile to the gospel. She calls him "Professor Hill" but that's not his real name: "[Many years ago] he was serving on the staff of a church when he was turned in to the authorities by another staff member for preaching the gospel. He was imprisoned for 25 years, much of it in solitary confinement. During his imprisonment, the manuscript of the New Testament commentary that had been his life's work was seized and destroyed. When he was finally released from prison, the authorities declared him a 'nonperson,' which meant it was impossible for him to find a job. He was effectively stripped of everything and lived in poverty. His testimony, as well as his life, seemed insignificant. Then the same church where Professor Hill had previously served and been betrayed reluctantly invited him to come back on staff because he was the only one the church could find who knew Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and English as well as his native language. The professor agreed, and when I had the privilege of meeting him 15 years later, he was still serving in that church alongside the same staff member who had turned him in to the authorities 40 years earlier! I looked at Professor Hill and knew I was seeing someone who had been afflicted, who was poor, who had been slandered by the religious community--yet he was rich! The smile on his face went from ear to ear! His eyes sparkled with the joy of the Lord! He told me of the peace in his heart, of his renewed sense of purpose in ministry, of the fresh vision he had for reaching his people for Christ! He was committed to being faithful to Christ, even unto death!" [Vision of His Glory by Anne Graham Lotz. Word, 1996. Page 80.] Betrayed, yet faithful to death. That's the kind of person this age needs and that's the kind of person God wants to grow you into.

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges

An Age Of Conflict - Chs. 10-12

One of the most obvious factors about this age of the Judges in Israel's history is that it was an age of continual conflict. An age of battles, of one war after another, rather than an era of peace like Solomon knew later on. When asked about His return, Jesus told His disciples: *You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom....* - Mat. 24:6-7. And that is pretty much how the last 2000 years have gone. While everyone's desire and longing is for peace, that is just not realistic. One internet site listed some 95 wars in the century between the US Civil War and 2003 in which 160 million people died. And while during that period the world has made the greatest advances in technology and communication and everything else that should lead to peace, it has essentially been the bloodiest century in history! But, Jesus said, don't be alarmed. That is the way the world is going to be until He comes to straighten it out! We live in an age of conflicts, one after the other, just like Israel did. But right in the middle of their "worst of times" there rose a shining star, a judge by the name of Jephthah. About a number of the Judges we have very little information recorded, and several of the ones that we do see in detail have feet of clay. Samson is hardly a flawless hero and even Gideon doesn't finish well. But Jephthah seems to have been a man with a clear and unwavering devotion to God. The story of his life covers three chapters and we begin in chapter 10 by getting a sort of aerial view of:

I. The Situation Into Which Jephthah Came (Ch. 10) After the madness of Abimelech's crazy rise to power and subsequent fall, there were:

1. 45 years of relative stability following the Lord under the judges Tola and Jair (1-5) We know virtually nothing about them but it seems clear that they led Israel in the right direction of trusting in the true and living God because it is only after they are gone that we read about yet:

2. another cycle of idolatry and 18 years of oppression by the Ammonites (6-9) For some crazy reason, Israel always seemed to want to adopt the gods of the very nations that she had defeated! And then God would allow her in

turn to be defeated by one of the surrounding nations. The Philistines down on the southwest coast began war with them, as we'll see later about Samson. But the major oppressor at first was the Ammonites on the far side of Jordan. Just think of today's Amman, the capital of modern Jordan, Israel's neighbor to the east. Now in those days, Israel not only occupied all the land in Palestine, west of the river, but, if you remember, 2 ½ tribes settled on the east side of Jordan also. They occupied the land known as Gilead, a strip stretching pretty much from the mouth of the Dead Sea north to the Sea of Galilee. The Ammonites invaded Gilead and ruled it for some 18 years. Then they turned their sights westward across the Jordan to invade Judah and Ephraim. The Israelites were in big trouble and they knew it. And as usual, they turned back from all those other gods to the Lord yet again. So, in the next verses we have:

3. God's reaction to His people's genuine repentance (10-16) [Read 10-14] This time God doesn't jump up and say, "Sure, glad to have you back!" Look at:

a. His feigned refusal: He says: **"I will no longer deliver you!"** I say "feigned" because if He really meant it, he would not have delivered them, period! He was trying to make a point, "Hey, where are all these other gods you've been worshipping. They've had your time and attention for years. Go call them! See if they can help you!" What's He saying? "There's a pattern here! You keep running to them when things are good and to ME when things are bad. If those things were helping you, you'd run to THEM! I'm not here just so you can do whatever you want and then pull ME off the shelf to bail you out of trouble!" You know, an awful lot of people do see God that way. As long as things are good, they live life their own way and do what they want, but when they get in real trouble, they want to come to Him with crocodile tears and make promises to do better, which they turn around and forget the minute the pressure is off. And God says, "I ain't buyin' it! You can't manipulate ME with cheap repentance, with sorrow over getting caught. It's got to be real." But you know what? [Read 15-16a] Their hearts were so broken they changed their lives. They started serving Him. They began worshipping Him, even though they had no promise of help or forgiveness, without any sense that they would get anything in return. True repentance means life-change; it is not just saying "I'm sorry" to God but changing your life to live His way! And tucked away in here is a wonderful:

b. the truth: His heart cannot bear the misery of His people (16b) When they are really sincere, when they are really genuine, when they really turn back to Him and mean it, God's heart can't stand to see them continue to suffer alone. He can't bear it! He comes to them, He helps them, He answers their prayers - no matter how many times it's been, even 70 times 7! Never let Satan convince you that you are beyond the mercy of God, that you have sinned once too many times! But He will not turn to you and hear you and help you unless you are for real, unless you've had a true change of heart that shows in your life.

In Israel's case God had ALREADY done something. He had in place and on the scene His answer to their cry in the person of Jephthah. Now in chapter 11 we have:

II. The Areas Of Conflict Which Jephthah Experienced First we read that:

1. he was forged in a time of intra-family conflict, conflict within the family (11:1-3) You see:

a. he lived in a confusion of family origins His father had him as the result of a visit with a prostitute. But to his father's credit, he did not walk away from him but took Jephthah as a son in his home. He grew up with the other boys, but he was different from them. Their mother was not his mother. You see, Jephthah was a constant reminder to his brothers that their father had violated his commitment to their mother and hurt her, a constant evidence that their father was not the man he should have been and they loathed him. You can imagine the types of things that were said to him and how he was treated behind his dad's back. I don't think we have any idea how much impact the profusion of stepmoms and stepdads and stepbrothers and stepsisters has on children today. "You're not my dad!" is what comes out of their mouths when they're upset. Blended families do not often really work out as well as "The Brady Bunch" made it look on TV when I was a kid! There can be deep alienation in the midst of family and in our day there often is. So as the children grew older:

b. he experienced jealousy over family possessions It began to dawn on the half-brothers that he would get an equal share of their father's land and possessions one day. In the end it came down to money, as it so often does. How many times do children end up at odds with each other over their inheritance when their parents die? How many times have I heard that they are jealous over this one or that one who didn't deserve what they got? So finally, as the brothers grew strong enough and their father too old and too weak to prevent it, Jephthah:

c. he was driven from his family in weakness They literally ran him out of town. They forcibly expelled him with violence and he was not strong enough to resist them so he fled from them in fear and went and lived out in Tob, a town way out east on the edge of the desert. Now you would think that all of that would result in some real psychological damage. You would think that Jephthah would become another self-centered Abimelech who was abandoned by his father and hated his brothers and became consumed with gaining power and getting revenge! But he didn't! Instead:

d. he became a spiritual "warrior" who learned to use power for good Instead of paying thugs to become his bodyguards, he naturally attracted men to him because he was a leader. Like Abimelech he became the leader of a

band of men, but instead of using them to go and wreak personal vengeance, he welded them into an army to protect their town against the Ammonite invaders. He developed a reputation and became known throughout the entire region as a valiant “warrior”. And as we’ll see soon, the thing that really made him different from Abimelech was that despite all the wrong done to him, somehow, he had developed a love for the true God that ruled his life! Maybe that was the true legacy he got from his father! Listen, there may have been much wrong done to you within your family context. You may have been rejected terribly by your siblings or even your parents. But you are not doomed to let that pain control your life and determine who you become, living a self-centered, self-protective life. You can receive healing for that and you can rise above it. You can choose to walk with Jesus and become a true force for the kingdom of God and a leader in His campaign against the enemy! Now not only was there conflict within Jephthah’s family, but:

2. he served in a time of inter-national conflict (11:4-40) As we’ve already mentioned, the Ammonites were beginning to invade the main region of Israel across the Jordan and they called every man they could find into service and gathered an army. But we read in the end of chapter 10 that they had no commander, no one to lead this army into battle. So, they turned to Jephthah:

a. Israel’s need for a leader vs. the Ammonites (10:17-18, 11:4-8) [read 4-8] They were gathered at Mizpah which is not too far from Jerusalem and they went 70 miles across the Jordan northeast to Tob to get Jephthah. They knew they needed somebody with courage and they knew Jephthah’s reputation, so they went to get him and offered to make him their leader, their head man, the chieftain of the region of Gilead. He says, in essence, “You didn’t want me before! You helped my brothers drive me away. How do I know I can trust you now? How do I know you’re not lying?” So, they settled it by an oath and what I want you to notice is:

b. Jephthah’s reverence for the Lord (9-11) When they are willing to swear before the Lord, the true and living God as witness, he’s willing to go back with them. And when he gets back across Jordan to Mizpah where the army is gathered, he makes them repeat the oath all over again. Now we don’t think much of oaths today but the ancients took oaths very seriously. To swear before God was to make Him the keeper of the oath and if you violated your promise, it would be His obligation to punish you for it! To say something like, “May the Lord do so to me, if I do not do as I promised!” was like signing your own death warrant if you didn’t mean it. The oath settled things. And that’s how much reverence and respect Jephthah had for God. He expected and trusted Him to enforce this promise on their part. That’s the ONLY thing that would induce Him to accept! So, Jephthah becomes commander in chief and takes charge to begin to deal with the Ammonites. But notice that he doesn’t attack right away. Instead, what we read next is:

c. Jephthah’s attempt to avoid conflict through truth (12-28) [read 12] We won’t read the rest but the Ammonites answer back, “Israel is occupying our land on the other side of Jordan; give it back and we won’t attack you!” So, Jephthah sends back a long and detailed answer about the history of the Exodus and how the Israelites back in that day the Moabites and Ammonites did not let them pass and they had indeed gone “out around” their territory, leaving them alone! Then when they were attacked by the Amorites and Bashanites to the north, they defeated them and took *their* land and they had been living in it for 300 years! The Ammonites had no claim to that land! What impresses me about this is not only his desire to avoid unnecessary bloodshed by diplomacy if possible, but:

(1) his knowledge of the scriptures Where in the world did he learn all that? He didn’t have a Bible laying around to read. That information was found in the scrolls of Numbers and Deuteronomy. It was passed on by the teaching of Levites and priests. Somebody had taken time to teach Jephthah the things of God, perhaps his own father! But he had not forgotten them. He treasured them and learned them and stored them up and they were on his tongue in an instant. He knew the Word of God. And what also impresses me is:

(2) his witness to the enemy (23, 27) Several times he talks clearly about Jehovah, the LORD, the God of Israel. He defeated their enemies; He gave them their land; and He is the true Judge to decide whose land it is! Jephthah puts it all on the line: “I have absolute confidence in the LORD that He will see that our cause is upheld!” He didn’t say, “We have more men than you’ve got. We’re more experienced than you are. We have this or that.” He was saying, “It doesn’t matter what we have or what you have; we have God and HE is all that matters!” And that wasn’t just some nice-sounding words. You can see:

d. Jephthah’s obvious dependence on the Lord (30-31) Before he went out to battle, he made a vow to God. “Lord, if YOU will give them to me...YOU are the one in control. YOU are the One I’m counting and depending on. This battle is not mine, but YOURS! And I will praise you afterwards by offering to you the first thing that comes out of my house to meet me!” My friends, I am afraid that we in America place way too much confidence in our military superiority and feel like we have all the resources. Jesus said, that in this age there are going to be continual wars. International conflict is never going to cease; just or unjust it will go on and on. We will always live in the midst of it in some form or fashion. Peace on earth is just a pipe-dream until Jesus returns. So how can we live in such an age? Jephthah is here to show us that “the battle is the Lord’s!” Any confidence we place in ourselves is misplaced. We need to get back to where we fight battles on our knees before we ever set foot on the field and place all of our

hope and all of our confidence in Him as a nation! And that's true in our personal lives as well. That's what Jephthah did and look at his:

e. Jephthah's God-given success in battle (29,32-33) God did what Jephthah asked. He gave his enemies into his hands, and they were completely defeated, something Israel had been unable to do for 18 years! When you trust God, even the impossible is possible. But in the end as Jephthah comes home, we see:

f. Jephthah's ultimate devotion to the Lord (34-40) Now the meaning of this passage has been debated for centuries; did he literally offer his daughter as a human sacrifice or did he dedicate her to the service of God to remain unmarried as a perpetual virgin? But before I give you my opinion on that, don't miss the point:

(1) he could not break a vow he had made to the Lord (35) He loved his daughter. She was his only child. There would be no more and he cherished her with all his heart. But he loved God more. He would not, he could not, break a promise he had made to God, no matter how much it broke his own heart. And what's even neater is that he had raised his daughter to love God the same way and agree with him, even though it was her life on the line! Jephthah was another Abraham laying his son, his only son whom he loved, on the altar and lifting the knife because God said so! He was so devoted to God that he spared not his own daughter but offered her up on behalf of the land! Of course, since you asked for my opinion, I believe (along with many others) that:

(2) he did not sacrifice his daughter; rather she was devoted to the Lord Besides the fact that human sacrifice is utterly abhorrent to God, all the language in the passage indicates that she is mourning the fact that she will have no children, and the punchline is that she was a virgin. She spent the rest of her life devoted to the service of God, probably at the Tabernacle, and never married or had children. It meant the end of Jephthah's family line and in that culture, that in itself was a tremendous sacrifice.

3. he faced a time of inter-ethnic conflict (12:1-7)

a. the continual tribal jealousy and threat of Ephraim (1) compare 8:1

b. Jephthah's consistent attempt to make peace through truth (2-3)

c. Jephthah's self-defense and unnecessary death of Ephraimites (4-7)

You can read for yourself that in 12:1-7 that Jephthah faced yet another type of conflict: inter-ethnic conflict, jealousy between the tribe of Ephraim and the tribes over which he was now the head. You know how much of that we see in our own time. Just get the movie "Hotel Rwanda". Civil conflicts and ethnic strife have killed millions. But even in this Jephthah tried to make peace through laying out the truth, only defending himself as a last resort. Alas it didn't work as it often doesn't. In this world you will have tribulation. There will be conflict. But the point of Jephthah's life is that in a time of tremendous conflict, he was utterly devoted to the Lord and that's why God listed his name in that special roll call in **Heb. 11:32-34**. Turn there and look at it with me. There he is right alongside Abraham and Noah and Samuel and David and all the great prophets. By faith Jephthah conquered a kingdom and administered justice to his own people for six more years before he died. By faith he escaped the edge of the sword in fight after fight until all 20 towns of the Ammonites had been subdued. By faith his weakness was turned to strength, he became powerful in battle and routed a foreign army. And that, dear friends, is how you and I must also live in our own time of conflict, whether it involves our family members, our nation or our race. It is the only way to face conflict in any area of life. *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the Name of the LORD our God [Ps. 20:7], like Jephthah did.*

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges

An Age Of Self-Love - Chs. 13-16

We've been studying straight through the Book of Judges but there is an important thing you need to know:

I. The Book of Judges is not chronological after Jephthah in chapter 11. From there on the events that are recorded do not simply occur one after the other. During these days the nation of Israel had no unified king or leader over the whole and functioned more in a fractured and fragmented fashion.

1. many of the events and Judges are regional in nature and simultaneous We already saw that Jephthah was head over the tribes in Gilead across the Jordan. In 12:8-15 we read about three more judges. Ibzan lived in Bethlehem and probably primarily led the tribe of Judah in the south. Elon probably led the tribe of Zebulun way north up in Galilee. Abdon lived in Pirathon in the middle and seems to have led the tribe of Ephraim. They may not have come strictly one after the other as the text appears to read, but have served in their own regions more or less at the same time. When we come to the life of the last judge, Samson, in chapter 13, it's important to know that:

2. Samson's 20 year judgeship is parallel with Eli and Samuel's lives Samson lived in Zorah, a mountain village about 14 miles west of Jerusalem at one end of the Sorek valley and overlooking the coastal plain where the Philistines had settled in a confederation of five cities. We read back in 10:7 that at the same time the Ammonites were op-

pressing Gilead across Jordan, the Philistines came against Israel from the west side. It could be that while Jephthah was delivering Israel across the Jordan, Samson was already forming a barrier to the Philistines on the other side. In any event we do know that during Samson's days Eli was serving as the High Priest for 40 years at the Tabernacle up in Shiloh in the middle of the land and even Samuel had begun his ministry as a prophet at Ramah further south. During Eli's days we read in 1 Samuel that the Philistines had actually captured the Ark of God in battle and kept it for a time. So as Samson came on the scene there was this kind of uneasy peace where the Philistines were acknowledged rulers over the southern tribes but let them continue some semblance of normal life. Samson never led an army like many of the other judges. In fact, he never delivered Israel at all; they remained an oppressed people. Instead, Samson formed an effective one-man barrier that God used to keep the Philistines in check for 20 years until the time of Saul and then David who finally defeated them for good. The other thing I'd like you to think about is the fact that:

3. Samson's life forms a picture of Israel's life (and by extension ours!) Samson was born a man who was dedicated and set apart to God but chose to live for himself, pursue things God had forbidden and ended up destroying himself. Just so, Israel was born as a nation dedicated and set apart to God in the earth to declare His glory. But she too lived for self; she pursued her own ways and fell into terrible idolatry. And she ended up destroying herself. Samson was a product of that age; he lived the way his people lived. And the same path lies before us. WE are people set apart and dedicated to God through the new birth to declare His glory. But we face the same choice. Like Samson, we live in an age where everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Paul said: *Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves...* - 2 Tim 3:1-2. That is, they will choose themselves and what they want over God and every other thing. People all around us are living exactly that way. But I can't think of anyone who pictures it better for us than Samson. As you know:

II. Samson Was Born A Nazirite: Set Apart To God's Service - Ch. 13 In the story of his birth we have:

1. his prohibitions explained (2-5a) The Nazirite vow is detailed back in **Num. 6:1-8**. An Israelite could make a special vow to serve the Lord for a specified period and during that time he was not allowed to do three basic things. The most obvious one is that he was not allowed to cut his hair like other men so the long hair became his obvious trademark; it was the visible sign to show that he was set apart to God. *(And you know it does make me wonder what Samson must have looked like if he had never cut his hair from the time he was born until he was 35 or 40 years old. Guinness says the world's longest documented hair belongs to Xie Qiuping of China at 18 ft., 5.54 in. when measured on May 8, 2004. She has been growing her hair since 1973 from the age of 13 [31 years]. Can you imagine Samson with 18 or 20 feet of hair curled up on his head? Kind of changes your mental picture of him, doesn't it!)* Secondly, during the time of his vow he could not drink wine or eat anything associated with grapes or grapevines. And he could not become unclean by touching a dead body. Now Samson did not choose to do this; God chose it FOR him. He was set apart and dedicated to the service of God from the time of his conception. His mother even had to follow the rules while he was growing in her womb! And it was to continue, not for a period but for his entire life. Now why would God do that? Well, at the end of verse 5 we have:

2. his purpose declared: to begin delivering Israel from the Philistines (5) God had one purpose for his life. He was the beginning of a great task, a great deliverance that God was working for His people. God planned to use him to begin to protect them against and set them free from their enemies, the Philistines. Others would later complete the task, but the plan was that he was to maintain his dedication to the Lord so that God would get the glory and God in turn would empower him for the chosen task. In the next verses we see:

3. his parents reassured (6-23) The angel of the Lord who is speaking with them is actually Jesus and basically, He does a miracle in their presence to reassure them that they really have been speaking with God and they realize it. But the footnote at the end of the chapter is interesting because here we read of:

4. his power experienced (24-25) This reads almost like what Luke says about Jesus' own growing up years! As Samson grew up, he was blessed of God and he began to experience a miraculous gift of strength that God had given him. He would find himself "stirred", literally moved, impelled, driven. He would find that at times the Spirit of God would take control of him and when that happened, he would have the strength of ten men, or perhaps of fifty or more! He could do things he never dreamed of by God's power, things no man could do! What a gift! And God intended it for His glory, for Samson to use it against the Philistines to protect his people and to display the power of the God of Israel, in the same way that a little shepherd boy with a sling named David displayed it to them years later! But sadly, as we read the record of Samson's life, we find that's not what he did. Instead:

III. Samson Lived A Dual Life: He lived life **Serving Self But Used Of The Spirit** anyway. Instead of acting like a man set apart to the service of God:

1. he regularly did what he wanted to do, despite God's command We read the first example of this right away in **(14:1-3)**. Now, of course God had made it really clear in His law that His people Israel were not to marry non-Israelites. They were not to take wives for themselves from any of the other nations in the land of Canaan because, as we've seen, they would be led into idolatry through it. Just like we're warned in the New Testament that believers should not

marry unbelievers, but only other believers. Samson's parents even tried to remind him and set him straight. But Samson was enamored with this girl and he did what he felt like doing, despite what God had said. He served himself rather than God. Of course, a lot of Christians do the same thing, and I'm not just talking about the fact that they will often choose to marry someone who's not a genuine believer, despite what the Word says. Our society has told us pretty clearly that the chief question to ask in life is "What do YOU want?" It starts with, "What do YOU want to be when you grow up?" and moves on to "What do you think is best for YOU?" in all areas of life. Yet we're Christians. We call Jesus Lord, our Master. But nobody ever teaches us to ask, "What does Jesus want? What does God want?" So, we end up with this disconnect and so many believers go through life making their own choices, doing what they want and by it serving themselves, all the while believing that Jesus is their Savior! Just like Samson! Now the amazing thing about Samson is that:

2. while he served himself, God used it for His purpose anyway (4) That doesn't mean that God WANTED Samson to disobey Him, but simply that in God's plan He was already counting on using Samson's very act of disobedience as an occasion to accomplish His will, which in that day was to punish the Philistines and set his people free. So, as we'll see, this whole occasion of Samson's self-centered, disobedient marriage to a Philistine girl became God's opportunity to begin to move against them. You see, God doesn't waste anything! He wants you to obey Him, but He will use even your self-centered disobedience to get done what He wants to do if He has to! Of course, He'd rather have your cooperation and your submission! He will work through you or even in spite of you if He has to. Yet still in the process, you can see that:

3. whenever he served God's purpose, the Spirit empowered him (5-6) At that moment a young lion jumped out of the bushes and his life was in danger, but God still needed him so the Spirit of God took control of him and filled him with supernatural divine power so that he literally grabbed that lion by the legs and tore its body in half! We read that phrase about the Spirit of God coming upon him five times in all. Whenever he was doing something in line with God's declared purpose of opposing the Philistines, that would happen. The Spirit would take over and he would have supernatural strength. Likewise, didn't Jesus tell us in Acts 1:8 that we would receive POWER when the Holy Spirit came upon us to indwell us? The same Holy Spirit who came UPON Samson has come to live permanently in each one of us! And in Him is all the power of ten men, of a thousand men, indeed in Him is the very power of Almighty God! That's why Paul could write literally in *Phil. 4:13*, *For all things I have strength, in Christ's strengthening me*. All the power you need to accomplish God's purpose and will is already there in Him inside you and as you need it, it will be there for you, just as it was for Samson! What a priceless gift, but Samson didn't see the value of it and:

4. he often paid a sad price for his self-centered choices As we follow his story, you'll see that the very things he strove for in order to please himself ended up being taken from him. In the end he lost everything of value to him and eventually his very life. Indeed, you CAN choose to live a self-centered life like Samson, but every self-centered choice you make to disobey God will cost you, sooner or later. Now as we skim through the record of Samson's life, you can easily see that:

5. this process happened repeatedly for 20 years (according to **15:20**) while he was a Judge. He would disobey God, choose self, God would use him in spite of it, but he would pay a price. You can see it:

a. at his wedding (14:7-20) Later on his way down to the wedding, he stopped to check out the carcass of the lion and found a swarm of bees had made a nest in the skeleton and there was honey which he took out and munched on (and I would imagine that violated God's prohibition about touching a dead body!) Well, that was kind of a unique thing and Samson saw an opportunity to profit by it so he made a *selfish bet* with his wedding attendants to solve a riddle about it. They pestered his bride to get the answer out of him which she did and told them and he had to pay off. **Verse 19**. He was so angry that he *killed 30 Philistines* and never did marry his wife. And it cost him: his *wife was given to another!* But he didn't know that right away and the cycle occurred again:

b. when he tried to visit his wife (15:1-8) Evidently this could have been one of those kind of marriages like Abimelech's mother had where the woman continues to live with her family and the husband "comes for a conjugal visit" regularly! Of course, he brings a present; wouldn't you ladies love a young goat? Well, when he finds out that the girl is now married to someone else, he says **verse 3**. He's mad again so he comes up with a plan. He goes out (and no doubt spends a long time) catching 300 "foxes" (probably jackals, wild dogs), ties them tail to tail in pairs with lit torches and turns them loose in field after field. So, he *burns up the grain* of the Philistine harvest to get revenge. But now they're angry and when they find out why he did it, they come and burn his "wife" and her father to death. He loses her for good now! And that makes him really mad, **verses 7-8**. Well, that was more or less a declaration of open war and:

c. when the Philistines invaded Israel to capture him (**15:9-17**), His own countrymen, instead of standing behind him, come with their own army to take him and hand him over to the enemy! He lets them tie him up but once he's near the Philistines the Spirit of God comes on Him and he breaks the cords, grabs the nearest handy object which happens to be the jawbone of a donkey lying on the ground and kills 1,000 Philistines with it! Look at his self-

centered take on it: **verse 16**. He's only serving self, getting personal revenge, using God's gift for his own desire, but God is putting fear into the Philistines and they begin to stay away from Israel. In fact, now Samson can go anywhere he wants in Philistine territory and even though they're always plotting to kill him, nobody will openly try to stop him. You can see that:

d. when he goes to Gath (16:1-3) He *visits a prostitute*, again following self and forgetting God's command. His *enemies lie in wait* outside the gates to attack him and, in the middle of the night, he gets up and literally *tears off the city gates* with his bare hands and carries them up to the top of the nearby hill. Can you imagine? This kind of thing went on, I'm sure, for all of his 20 years but the last cycle occurs:

e. when he falls in love with Delilah (16:4-21) And you know the story of how he *loves this wicked woman* and she finally gets him to *betray the secret of his strength*, which is that it comes from God because he is set apart as a Nazirite and the sign of that separation is his long hair. She shaves it off while he sleeps on her lap and the Philistines finally have him. They put out his eyes and blind him. They put him to work grinding grain with a millstone like a slave. They bring him out during a festival to their god Dagon to make a buffoon out of their enemy and his god and he ultimately dies there. Gary Inrig writes: "*Some time ago there was a news story about 300 whales that were found marooned on a beach. Scientists could only explain the mystery by speculating that the whales had been chasing sardines and became trapped in shallow water when the tide went out. For most of his life, Samson was like a whale chasing sardines--a great power pursuing small goals. He was finally beached by his pursuit of the sardine of sexual pleasure.*" [*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay* by Gary Inrig. Moody Press, 1979. Page 231.] The price for his life of self-serving was really high. But despite all of that self-centeredness, there were times when:

6. in dire straits he would recognize his dependence on God It happened:

a. when his resources were exhausted After he killed those thousand Philistines with the jawbone **(15:18-19)**. When he had used up all of his strength, in the end he knew where it came from and he cried out to God to meet his need. He prayed for water and God opened up a spring in the ground for him. And it happened again at the very end of his life:

b. when he was too weak for the task (16:22-31) He was standing in that pagan temple with thousands of Philistines jeering at him. His hair was growing back, but he knew it wasn't the hair he needed. **Verses 28-30**. He lived for self to the end, but every time he reached the end of his rope, he cried out to God expectantly for help. It is amazing to me that his name is included in that blessed roll call in **Heb. 11:32-34**. What is he being commended for? Which part of his life are we to imitate? Which one of these feats points to Samson? I believe it's the last one: *out of weakness were made strong*. That's the only thing about his life worth imitating. When you are weak, when you are not strong enough for the task, cry out to God in faith, cast yourself on Him and trust Him for strength. That is actually the model of our daily Christian life! You see:

IV. We Face The Same Issue As Samson (Turn to **Galatians**) You see:

1. our "self" (flesh) is always warring against the Spirit in us - 5:17 There is a continual war going on in our minds. Our self-centered, self-serving flesh is always pushing us to displease and disobey the Spirit of God, to do what "we" want, instead of what HE wants. Whether those desires are in the sexual area like Samson's were, or the area of greed for money, lust for power and control or whatever. There's always a pull to ignore what God says and do what we feel like. And:

2. the lesson from Samson's life is: we must choose to live in obedience to the Spirit - 5:16 Instead of waiting until your choices get you in trouble and then crying out to God for rescue, call on Him right away every day for the power to choose what the Spirit wants, to moment by moment opt to please God, to obey God, to be pure, to be holy, to live a life that represents well the fact that you belong to God. His power for us to live out HIS life is there in us and available to us every single day. But as Samson's life shows us:

3. every time we choose self, we reap destruction - 6:8 When we choose to act selfishly and do what "WE" want instead of what we know God wants, we think we get what we want, but we actually pay a heavy price, sometimes right away, sometimes later, but we ALWAYS destroy the value of our own lives to one degree or another.

In 1779 the famous preacher John Newton composed this poetic fable which I think conveys the lesson we should take away from Samson's life well:

*"Once upon a time a paper kite
Mounted to a wondrous height,
Where giddy with its elevation,
It thus expressed self-admiration:
'See how the crowds of gazing people
Admire my flight above the steeple.
How they would wonder if they knew*

All that a kite like me can do!

*Were I but free, I'd take a flight
And pierce the clouds beyond their sight;
But ah! like a poor prisoner bound,
My string confines me to the ground!
I'd brave the eagle's towering wing,
Might I but fly without the string.'
It tugged and pulled while thus it spoke--
To snap the string--at last it broke.*

*Deprived at once of all its stay,
In vain it tried to soar away;
Unable its own weight to bear,
It fluttered downward through the air.
Unable its own course to guide,
The winds soon plunged it in the tide.
Ah! foolish kite, thou hast no wing,
How couldst thou fly without a string?*

*My heart cried out, 'O Lord, I see
How much this kite resembles me!
Forgetful that by Thee I stand,
Impatient of thy ruling hand;
How oft I've wished to break the lines
Thy wisdom for my lot assigns!
How oft indulge the vain desire
For something more, or something higher!
But for Thy grace and love divine,
A fall this dreadful had been mine!"*

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges

An Age Of Idolatry - Chs. 17-18

If you remember, last time I told you that the Book of Judges is not written in purely chronological order from chapter 11 on, that the stories overlap and occur simultaneously. Well, here's another:

I. Important Note: In a sense the Book of Judges ends with the death of Samson, the last judge; Samuel was already on the scene and the story line moves ahead to him. Therefore, **Chapters 17-20 are** actually **an epilogue** placed at the end of the book by the author who was led to append two stories that demonstrate what life in that era was like. Chronologically both stories occur **early in the period of the judges**; in fact, it is quite probable that the story of the man named Micah we'll study today happened way back in the time of Othniel, the very first judge. But this story is appended here, I think, to give us a vivid picture of how Israel so rapidly fell into the practice of idolatry. At the end of Joshua's life, she was serving the Lord only. But within one generation she was worshipping Baal and Asherah. And you have to ask, "How is that possible?" Of course, one factor, as we saw early in our study was mixed marriages, marrying a person from the other idol-worshipping peoples and "converting" directly to that idolatry through them. But there were also other factors that paved the way for it. And, not surprisingly, those same factors are rearing their ugly heads in our own culture here in America also. So, let's look at:

II. Three Factors Involved In Israel's Idolatry in The Story Of Micah - Chapter 17 The first factor is:

1. religious syncretism (1-5) Doesn't that leave you scratching your head? Micah's mom dedicates a 5 lb. hunk of her silver to the Lord for what? To make a carved idol (out of wood plated with silver) and a pure silver idol cast in a mold. Micah had in his house literally "a house of gods", a "god-room" or shrine and besides these two items he had teraphim, literally "household idols or gods" and an ephod, a vest like the Israelite High Priest wore at the tabernacle. What's going on? Micah isn't a worshipper of Baal; his family worships Jehovah. But the way they choose to worship God is the way the other peoples around them worship their gods! They make images and idols to represent Him. Syncretism is **the fusion of differing beliefs**; it means I take what you believe and add it to what I believe and mix the two together. **2 Kin. 17:33** has a great description of what happened when Assyria brought colonists to live in Israel many years later but it pretty well defines syncretism: *They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.* They fused belief in the Lord with the beliefs and practices of their own culture. Now Micah was violating a direct command of God and perhaps we ought to review:

a. the purpose of the second commandment - Ex. 20:4-5 The first commandment implies clearly that there is no other god; the Lord is the only true, real, actual God! The second commandment says that we are not to represent him or worship Him by making an image or an idol to which we bow down and worship. Moses explains why in **Deut. 4:15-19**. God is not like anything else in His creation and as soon as we try to make an image of Him, the temptation is immediately there to worship the image itself as though it were Him! Micah was taking the way that other cultures worshipped their gods through images and idols and trying to worship the Lord in that same way in his own little “house of gods”, instead of following the pattern God had laid out of going up to the Tabernacle with sacrifices and offerings. In a sense it is doing what many people say they do, “worshipping God in my own way”. Unfortunately, you can’t do that; God will not be worshipped in “your way”; He must be worshipped HIS way, in spirit and truth! If you look around the world, you’ll soon find that:

b. similar syncretism persists in many cultures today I’m going to read you a letter written directly to us back in April by a national missionary that we support. Urias is the first missionary sent out by the Sougb people of West Papua to live among and reach the Irarutu people. He writes: *We entered a new village by the name of Yaru. In 2004 I led a man, named Topilus, to the Lord. He speaks Irarutu, the same as Aroba, but he is from Kaimana, which is a different language group. This man took himself away from bowing down to idols. He is alone in this. All the others in Yaru village bow down to idols like those in Aroba. Pray for Topilus. Also pray for those in Aroba. I have preached to them for 8 years already. Pray for fruit from these 8 years. The village is planning to build their jungle huts and have feasts for their idols in September and October this year. I have preached and shown them God's voice about their worshipping idols many times. And I have brought many to Jesus from Aroba. But their flesh still remains inside their own fences (the pastures of their idol worship places). My heart is greatly saddened at this. They have not given this up totally yet.* Syncretism, the fusion of beliefs. All over Latin America there are faithful Catholics who literally worship the statues of Jesus and Mary that stand in their cathedrals and then sacrifice chickens out in the hills as an offering to the spirits and see no contradiction at all. Sounds terrible and primitive, doesn’t it? Well, let me give you:

c. examples of syncretism as it appears in our own culture One of the most obvious is:

(1) the popularity of New Age thought and practice The New Age Movement of the last 30 years or so is really nothing new at all; it’s just a re-make of ancient Hinduism and Buddhism with a 20th century face and espoused by a hodge-podge of differing organizations, cults and popular figures like Edgar Cayce or Shirley MacLaine and her books or movie star Tom Cruise and his devotion to L. Ron Hubbard and his Scientology writings. “God is not a being; god is IN everything. God is in YOU; in fact, you ARE god; you just have to become conscious of it!” It incorporates beliefs and practices like reincarnation, angels, channeling the spirits of the dead, out-of-body experiences, the use of the power of crystals, astrology, transcendental meditation, chanting and dozens of others. But, of course, there is room for Jesus too! Say, did you know that Jesus was a man who was a great teacher. Why, during his first 30 years he traveled to India and learned divine “God-consciousness” and total control of His mind and body from Indian guru masters. That’s what made him the Christ! And you can be just like him! That’s what they’ll tell you! And in case you don’t think this is having an effect, what’s scary is that according to the polls 25% of Americans now say they believe in reincarnation and 36% believe astrology is scientific! Today you can pray to Jesus, talk to your personal angel while you meditate holding your crystal and read your future in the stars! Just fuse it all together! Then there is:

(2) the common pursuit of occultic practices How many, even those from Christian background will go visit a fortune teller’s booth on vacation or check their horoscope regularly? We play with Ouija boards to get answers to the haunting questions of life and get psychics to read tarot cards to divine our future. Folks, this stuff isn’t just gimmicks and nonsense; it’s serious! It’s occult; it’s demonically energized. It is opening the door to demonic infestation and control in our lives just as surely as worshipping an idol in the forest would. Yet many see no harm in it and see no conflict with attending a church and hearing the teachings of Jesus on Sunday. Syncretism is all around us and coming from another angle you can see it in:

(3) the humanistic restructuring of Christian theology The whole movement of liberal theology which has taken over so many of our mainline denominations is simply the fusing of Christianity with humanism. Man is basically good; he doesn’t need a savior; he needs a great example of how to live which is what Jesus was. While the Bible is important as the record of what the ancients believed, it is a human book and contains lots of factual errors and outdated notions. We must use our reason to sort out the timeless truths like love and tolerance from the antiquated concepts like eternal punishment. It’s all syncretism, fusing the worship of other things to the worship of the true God and thereby losing it, just like Micah and so many other Israelites did 3000 years ago in the time of the Judges! Syncretism always ends up in idolatry and along with it is another factor:

2. moral relativism (6) There was no authority to set standards so everybody did what they wanted. Micah wanted to have a “god house” and make his own priest; well, why not? Without a clear defining authority, **there is no absolute right and wrong**; you can do whatever you want! What’s right is what’s right for you! Without the clear defining author-

ity of God through the Bible, if you're a man and want to marry another man the church should do the ceremony for you! It's archaic for the church to tell you that its wrong for you to live together outside of marriage or to tell young people that sexual activity before marriage is sinful and wrong. It leads to idolatry and the true idol here is self! But there's a third factor that enters in:

3. overt materialism: the desire for financial gain (7-13) Now what's that about? The young Levite's true job should be to serve at the Tabernacle of the Lord in Shiloh, to teach the Law and help in the arrangements for sacrifices, but never to offer them. No Levite could ever be a priest unless he was a descendant of Aaron. I'm sure this young man knew that. Then why did he agree to Micah's offer to be a priest in a personal shrine and offer sacrifices to idols? The answer is pretty obvious: money! It was a decent job and this young man was out of work. Materialism led him to idolatry, as it always has and still does. One obvious way you can see this is in:

a. charlatanism: the practice of religion to make money Paul said in **2 Cor. 2:17** *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.* There always have been and still are people out there using religion as a means of making money. Frauds. Con-men who promise the favor of God in response for financial gifts. Not every person on your television or radio who shouts the name of Jesus is a sincere person sent from God. I won't name names, but simply beware of people who promise things God doesn't promise (like miracles and healings and getting material things) and strongly ask you to send them money! But you see, the reason people actually send it is because the materialism in our culture has infected us too. We want to GET something, just like Micah did! That's what accounts for:

b. the popularity of the "prosperity Gospel" "God wants His children to have the best! He doesn't want you to be poor; you are to be the head and not the tail! He will give you a nice house and a new car. Just claim it by faith. If you don't get it, you must not believe enough! And He doesn't want you to be sick either; He WILL always heal your body. And He doesn't want you to have any other problems either! He'll take them all away if you believe!" That's what you hear on TV and radio, but that doesn't sound anything like the New Testament! Yet that message is sweeping the world and it's natural for people, especially poor ones who are suffering to flock to it! In **1 Tim. 6:5** Paul mentions people...*who think that godliness is a means to financial gain*, people like Micah who say, *Now I know that the Lord will be good to me since I have...done this or that!* No, He IS good to you, ALL THE TIME! And Paul goes on to say: *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil....* (6-10) The desire for material things leads to idolatry; it leads you to do the things that will get you what you want. It may begin with bending the Scripture but it will end in making an idol out of what you want and serving money rather than God. For thousands of people all around us, material well-being is the very thing that is making them feel self-sufficient and blinding them to their utter lostness and their need of Christ. And if you let it, it will grab your heart too and blind you to His purpose for your life.

Now let me quickly trace for you in chapter 18:

III. The Growth Of Israel's Idolatry: The Story Of The Tribe Of Dan - Chapter 18

When God divided up the land of Canaan through Joshua, Dan was given a portion west of Jerusalem in the area where Samson later lived. But we read back in 1:34-35, *The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the house of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor.* They were not able to kick the Amorites out of their inheritance but instead of trusting God and persisting in His will, they took a step of:

1. compromise (1-2a) They decided to go find themselves an easier place on their own! Idolatry always begins with compromise, with **seeking to meet needs your own way** instead of God's way, with taking a step out of His will because it looks easier or better. But then, if it works, we often make an:

2. assumption (2b-10) Their scouting party ran into Micah's Levite priest and asked him to check in with God. I don't know how he did it, but his answer was "Sure, God is with you." and when they get all the way north beyond the boundaries of Israel, they find this city of Laish which looks like a guaranteed easy target. And they report, "Look what God has given us!" The assumption is that **success is a sign of Divine approval**; if it works for me, then God must be in it. I try things my way and if I get some benefit, it must be that God is OK with it. *"I'm sleeping with my girlfriend but we're committed to each other; we'll get married someday and look how great I feel!"* So, I keep on and prosper in my disobedience and that leads to:

3. influence (11-21) Now a whole bunch from the tribe of Dan, 600 armed warriors and their families set out to go conquer Laish and, of course, on the way they stop by Micah's house. They steal his idols, invite his priest to be priest to their whole tribe and take him along with them. Why? Because **the experience of a few infects the majority**. The 5 told the 600 how the Lord had blessed them this way and now the 600 fall into the same idolatry because it worked for them! That's how religious syncretism spreads! That's how moral relativism spreads. And that's how materialism

spreads. That's just how idolatry spreads, from the few to the majority and that's how it has been spreading in America too. Well, once it is embraced by the majority, they have:

4. power and the majority begin to impose their will on everyone else (22-29) As you can read:

a. they intimidate any who oppose (22-26) Micah gathers some men and goes after them and says, "This isn't right; you've stolen my idols and my priest!" And they reply, "If you want to live, go home!" Once idolatry is the religion of the majority, they put pressure on anyone that stands in their way and that's what we are beginning to feel here today. Today it is the evangelical Christians who have begun to be labeled right wing fundamentalists, bigots, extremists, hate-mongers and things like that! And the stronger idolatry becomes, the more we'll be seen as enemies! And at the same time, that majority will:

b. they eliminate the innocent for their advantage (27-29) This was a quiet and unsuspecting people far to the north. They hadn't fought with Israel at all but were just minding their own business when the Danites fell upon them and wiped them out to take their land and city. What's happening here? We already eliminate millions of innocent unborn because it's to our advantage. On the table today is the whole "right to die" and "assisted suicide" thing. I believe the elderly and the infirm are next. You see, afterwhile the end result is:

5. institutionalization where idolatry becomes a way of life

a. Dan became a national center of idolatry (30-31) The renamed city of Dan in the north became a rival center of worship for Israel and it stayed so for centuries. Years later when Jeroboam went to set up a golden calf to keep people from going to Jerusalem to worship, where did he put it? Here in Dan! The whole nation was influenced and eventually judged by being conquered by Assyria. And here's the kicker: did you notice who that young materialistic Levite was? His name was Jonathan and he was Moses' own grandson (or possibly great-grandson)!

b. Moses' own descendants became idolatrous priests for centuries and it only took one generation, maybe two, to move from serving the Lord to leading the nation in idolatry! That's why we've got to teach our children to love Jesus, why we've got to model before them a living faith that's real and draws them in. Otherwise in just a generation they will be swept up in the idolatry that's all around them!

Tourists throughout the centuries have visited the famous Acropolis, the ancient hilltop religious citadel in Athens. Thousands of sightseers from all over the world have picked up marble chunks as souvenirs. Why hasn't the supply of pieces been exhausted long ago? The answer is very simple. Every few months a truckload of marble fragments from a quarry miles away is scattered around the whole Acropolis area. So, tourists go home happy with what they think are authentic pieces of ancient history. That's what Micah did in his faith; he went home happy with a fake substitute for God, thinking it was the real thing. In a society awash with idolatry, we'd better be sure we're taking home the real thing. Religious language and music, religious objects and services may fool us into imagining that we are experiencing a firsthand relationship with God when in reality many people are simply going through empty routines that amount to idolatry. And we must guard ourselves carefully or before we know it, we'll join them. The apostle John concluded his first letter with these words: 1 John 5:20-21 ...we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

"The Worst Of Times" - The Age Of The Judges

An Age Of Immorality - Chs. 19-21

In 1991 America was shocked when the story broke of a serial killer named Jeffrey Dahmer who over a decade had deliberately tortured and killed 17 men to perform sexual acts with their dead bodies, kept their bodies in his apartment in vats and a refrigerator and actually ate parts of them. I mention that only for the feeling of horror and disgust it creates. The last three chapters of Judges are that same kind of story, the story of a horrible and revolting atrocity that occurred in one of the towns near Jerusalem, an atrocity that was defended by its own immediate society and ultimately resulted in a civil war that killed thousands. It is perhaps the most repulsive story in the whole Bible, yet I believe it is recorded here in brutal honesty to reveal the low moral state into which a significant portion of Israel had fallen. And sad to say, many of the same factors we see in it, we see all around us in our American society right now. Timewise, strangely enough, it occurs not at the end, but very early in the period of the Judges because Phinehas, Aaron's grandson is still alive and serving as High Priest at the tabernacle. And that in itself stands as a warning to us: when a culture departs from God's standard, it does not take long for people to plummet to the very depths of depravity. Those depths will be very clear as we examine:

I. The Atrocity Committed At Gibeah which is recorded for us in **Chapter 19**. In all of Israel throughout this period:

1. sexual morality had severely degenerated just as it has here. Many of the same things we see in this story are common today. God's ordained plan of one man and one woman for a lifetime and sex belonging only in the boundaries of such a marriage is being ignored and defied in many ways. One is:

a. the legitimization of multiple partners (1) Concubine, now there's a word you see throughout the Old Testament, but maybe you never thought about what one is. A concubine is sometimes described as a "secondary wife", but if you boil it down, a concubine is a female servant legally "purchased" or "contracted" for sexual purposes. She

is not a “mistress” nor a prostitute. She is legally bound to the husband but never given the status and voice of a wife, yet is provided for by the man and in return is expected to be exclusively his sexual partner alone. Now God never invented or sanctioned this practice but it evolved early on in this region of the world; even Abraham had one as did this religious Levite. It was a way to legitimize a man having multiple women. Of course, we don’t have concubines today; but we have come to view marriage in much the same manner, as a contract made that can and will be broken legally when and if I want a different partner. Divorce has become for many a legal way to have two, three or more partners. As I say this, some of us here have been through the pain of a horrible and messy divorce and God has given you new loving spouses and godly homes and I hope that you know I love you and am not talking about you personally, but about our culture. 1997 statistics say that 50% of all new marriages end in divorce. 43% of all weddings are a second marriage for at least one partner. And 60% of all remarriages end in divorce again! And these marriages, first or second, last an average of seven years. Our culture’s view of marriage has definitely been lowered to that of a contract. We have found our own way to legitimize multiple partners. On top of that, God’s design is being violated by:

b. the prevalence of marital unfaithfulness (2-3) This girl became tired of her arrangement and had a fling with another man. Then she fled from the Levite’s home in the hills of Ephraim in the middle of the land back south to her father’s house in Bethlehem, I assume to avoid the wrath of her husband. A 1994 study says 28% of American men age 50 have had extramarital affairs as have 17% of women. But honestly, if you had, would you tell the truth to a pollster? The real number is likely somewhat higher, but still, more than a quarter of American men admit to cheating on their wives despite their promise before God to “keep myself only unto you”! That’s shocking! Our standards of sexual morality are degenerating. This tells me that we are no longer seeing unfaithfulness as being so wrong, so awful. It’s being accepted, even expected. I guess it wasn’t so bad to the Levite either, because he wanted her back. He traveled down to her father’s house four months later to literally *speak to her heart*. It must have worked. He was greeted warmly and her father wined him and dined him for three days, then drug it out through a fourth day and into the morning of a fifth day. And finally in the afternoon, the two of them left to go home but the trip was too long and now they would have to stay overnight somewhere in the middle. They didn’t want to stay in Jerusalem because it was still inhabited by Jebusites and they didn’t feel safe, so they pushed on four miles further to the village of Gibeah so they’d at least be among Israelites from whom they might expect better treatment. But they didn’t get it. In the end an old man coming in from working in his field invited them to stay in his house and that’s when the atrocity happened. In this town morality had fallen to a new low and there was:

c. the presence of flagrant homosexuality (22) The men of the town had seen this stranger in the square and they gathered as a mob to demand that, of all things, not his concubine, but he be surrendered to them so they could sodomize him! Now homosexuality has always existed in every culture, but it’s usually been quiet and secretive and viewed by the majority as repugnant and unnatural. However, in this town, it is not simply out of the closet and in the open; it is a way of life parading in the streets, militant and demanding fresh victims to use for its lust! Somehow Gibeah had slid all the way down the moral slope to exactly where Sodom was centuries before! And though we are a bit more civilized, we’re pretty far down that same slope ourselves to where homosexuality has not only come out of the closet but is loudly demanding equal status and recognition. The debate is on among the states as to whether a homosexual partnership can be recognized as a legal marriage. And sad to say, it is on even in the churches. ALL of the mainline denominations that I know of are engaged in hot and heavy debate about not only ordaining practicing homosexuals to the ministry, but also whether they can be married in the church. Evangelicals in those denominations are losing the battle and this issue will likely divide some of them. I am certainly not accusing every homosexual of being the type of violent person these were; many of them are nice and decent people and I care about their souls. But the fact is that this practice is morally wrong according to the Scripture and its acceptance as a valid lifestyle is a huge step down the slope to no sexual morality at all! Now before we move on, let me back up a second to point out that it was not just sexual morality but:

2. public morality had totally disintegrated, period! The first thing you notice from the moment they arrive in town is:

a. the evaporation of common hospitality (15) There were no motels in those days! And most towns had no “inn”. So, the duty of hospitality was one recognized by the whole population. A traveler would wait in the square and some passing resident would take them in for the night. It was a cultural system, but not here. Not a single person approached them with an offer of help; rather, it seems that everyone who passed by noted them with the intent of victimizing them later on! At last, one old man who still held to the ancient code of hospitality took them in quickly because he knew the danger they were in. Jesus warned that in this age as His coming approaches, *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold - Mat. 24:12*. When people stop caring about others and think only about themselves, when they will turn their back on someone in trouble and say, “it’s not my problem”, society is in deep trouble. That’s how life in much of the former Soviet Union under communism had become. No one trusted anyone; everyone took advantage of others. That’s the first step toward:

b. the devaluation of human life Whether people live or die doesn’t matter. What matters is who has power. People you don’t know are to be used. The mob around that house in verse (22) was demanding the surrender of a life

to them basically. The old farmer made at least a show of protest but see (25-27). Some husband. He shoved his concubine out the door to the crowd to save his own neck, rather than dying to protect her. The frenzied crowd gang-raped her all night until she fell down dead on the doorstep. She wasn't a person; she was an object to be used; what became of her was of no consequence. It never fails to amaze me how cruel and inhumane human beings can be to one another. The thing that has always set America apart from so many societies is that human life is sacred. We don't torture and kill our prisoners of war and shoot the wounded; we don't kill women and children and innocent bystanders to accomplish our ends. Even in war we treat human beings like human beings. Massacres have always horrified us. But once you stop believing that every human life has value it's really easy to get to the place of dealing pretty cruelly with people whom you see as valueless! Some of the incidents that occurred in the south during the civil rights movement are proof of that. The other thing you can see in this story is:

c. the degradation of women First the thinking was: "Send out the woman; she's worth less!" But then look at (28). Can you believe that? She's raped outside all night while he rests inside; he finds her fallen on the doorstep and he says, "Get up, let's go!"? No tears. No remorse. No tearing his garments in agony over her. No wonder she left him in the first place! He loads her body up and goes home but then look at (29). He doesn't even give her a decent burial. He literally cuts her body into 12 pieces and sends each with a message to each of the tribes of Israel for the shock value of it. Folks, the message that our society sends over and over again in these last years is that women are not people; they are objects to be desired and used. There are no longer thousands; there are literally millions of pornographic websites that can be viewed from the comfort of your home portraying women doing every conceivable kind of sexual act. You can't watch the cleanest TV show without being interrupted by a commercial portraying a woman for her sexual value or watch the Superbowl without fear of being exposed to direct nudity at half-time! A woman is the most beautiful and precious thing God ever made to give to man as a sacred partner in life. Yet more than 25% of women in America have been sexually abused by men. We're sending the wrong message in every direction.

My friends, our morals aren't all that different from Gibeah; we're just a little further up the slope still but in a heartbeat we could be down where they were. Well, the Levite's heinous act worked (30) and now we see:

II. The Response Of The Nation To The Atrocity - Chapter 20 The Levite was making a call to the entire nation, to all the tribes, for justice and it worked. They came together to deal with this atrocity as he explained it to them. They did something about it. They responded, but their response was both a good thing and a bad thing. As it starts out, I want you to notice:

1. the commendable aspects of their response First of all:

a. they had a united desire and commitment to administer justice (8-11) They had a resolve to see that justice was done and that this evil was removed. Oh, we need that! I wish we had it! We need to unitedly rise up and stand against the disintegration of morality that is all around us. Secondly:

b. they attempted to hold only the guilty parties accountable (12-13a) The ones who committed the atrocity were the ones who should be punished. That's always just, always fair, always right. The one who commits the act is the one who must be punished, not his family, not his friends, not his town. But their attempt to punish only the guilty didn't work so:

c. they also held accountable those who protected them (13b-17) The tribe of Benjamin rallied to protect its own, the men of Gibeah. But Israel believed in what is today called "The Bush Doctrine", that is, "we will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them!" If you shelter and protect the guilty, you aid them in their evil and are just as guilty. That's why we invaded Afghanistan and why the Taliban are no longer in power today. Israel applied that same principle and it's a good one, a valid one. Benjamin massed an army to protect the evil in their midst and the other tribes massed an army to fight them if necessary! And the other good thing is that:

d. they sought the Lord for direction in the process (18-19) They still had a sense of the need to seek God at this point in their history. It hadn't been lost yet. Oh, if only we would seek God's wisdom in administering justice! In this they did well, but on the other hand are:

2. the tragic aspects of their response First of all:

a. it escalated into a civil war in which thousands died The first day, verse 21 says, 22,000 Israelites died in battle. The second day, verse 25 says another 18,000 died. But on the third day, Benjamin was finally defeated and verse 35 says 25,000 Benjamites died. How sad that what started out as a decision to leave too late in the day killed 60,000 men! Evil can become really entrenched in a society if it is left to take root and grow and the cost to finally root it out can become tragically huge. But what's worse is that for Israel:

b. justice degenerated into vengeance and over-reaction (41-48) They didn't just win the battle and quit. Their grief over their own huge losses was so great that they wiped out the enemy nearly to the last man and then they

killed all the innocent women and children left behind and burned the cities to the ground. A 'scorched earth' policy, we call it. Justice had turned into vengeance, into getting even, into doing them one worse than they did to me. That is always the danger with justice; it's only one small step to vengeance, to over-reaction; we must be so careful to know the difference. When it was all over, the Israelites woke up and realized what they'd done. They had almost literally wiped out one whole tribe. Only 600 men of Benjamin were left with no women or children. And they went back and cried before God! But in chapter 21 we read that:

c. salving their guilt led to two further atrocities (Chapter 21) Because they had taken an oath before God that anyone who didn't show up to fight would be put to death, they ended up:

(1) wiping out an innocent town (10-11) They committed their own atrocity to get terrorized wives for 400 of the Benjamite survivors. And because they had sworn another oath that none of them would ever give their daughters to anyone from the tribe of Benjamin, they ended up:

(2) kidnapping unsuspecting women at a harvest festival **(20-22)** And that's how the other 200 kidnapped their wives. In the end the Israelites didn't act much better than the men of Gibeah, did they?

So, what can we learn from this shocking story?

III. Lessons From This Immoral Age First, you might notice that the story ends with the same words it begins with in 19:1 **(21:25)**. It's here to make a point. You see:

1. God puts government in place to restrain evil - Rom. 13:1-4 You may complain about the government and not one of them is perfect, but without it the world degenerates into the age of the Judges. Everyone does what they want and might makes right, survival of the fittest. Government serves God as an agent to punish evil and keep it under control, making life in the world tolerable. Secondly from this story we can learn that:

2. God will act to punish national evil Centuries later Hosea the prophet said to Israel in **Hos. 9:9**, *They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.* **10:9**, *"Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel, and there you have remained. Did not war overtake the evildoers in Gibeah?"* Gibeah became a perpetual example for Israel that God will not let evil go forever; He will punish it. And that doesn't apply just to Israel. Listen to the words of **Jer. 18:7-10**. God is constantly at work among all the nations of the earth, restraining evil and administering justice. If we slide down the slope to where Gibeah was, there is a day of reckoning coming for us too. And that's why from this story we should learn that:

3. God needs His people to pray and act or we will indeed end up there. Paul said this: **1 Tim. 2:1-3**. First priority, number one is pray! But what do we do most often? We complain a lot, but seldom do we pray for those in authority or about issues that are on our legislative table. In America, since government is by the people, God needs Christians to get involved and be part of the government, to run for public office and get on school boards and into township positions! He needs Christians to make godly views and opinions known. Yet many of us don't even bother, as simple as it is, to vote. Edmund Burke once said, *"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."*

On the wall of the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC is a shortened engraving of these words by Martin Niemöller, a Christian pastor in Nazi Germany: *When the Nazis came for the communists, I did not speak out because I was not a communist. When they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. When they came for the Catholics, I did not speak out because I was not a Catholic. When they came for the Jews, I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.* God has put us here to speak, to pray and to act. The only thing that stands between us and scenes like this one occurring right here is you and I.

OUTLINE

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

1. Tragedy: "Without Her Two Sons And Her Husband" - 1:1-5, 19-21
2. Security: "Go Back... Find Rest" - 1:6-13
3. Love: "Where You Go, I Will Go" - 1:14-22
4. Toil: "Let Me Go To The Fields" - 2:1-8, 14-18
5. Trust: "Under Whose Wings You Have Come To Take Refuge" - 2:10-13
6. Providence: "His Kindness Has Not Forsaken" - 2:19-23
7. Selflessness: "A Woman Of Noble Character" - 3:1-11
8. Integrity: "The Man Will Not Rest" - 3:12-18
9. Redemption: "You Are Witnesses" - 4:1-10
10. Legacy: "Better Than Seven Sons" - 4:11-22

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Tragedy: "Without Her Two Sons And Her Husband" - 1:1-5, 19-21

The little book of Ruth is a mere 85 verses long, yet it is absolutely revolutionary if you stop to think about it. First of all, this book is the record of the lives of two women, a mother-in-law named Naomi and a daughter-in-law named Ruth. While the landscape of the Old Testament is populated with the stories of men, one after the other, the lives of women normally come into view as they are related to the men. Yet here the men involved pass quickly off the scene in the beginning and are only secondary in the end; the heroine of this book is a woman who stands and acts on her own faith in God and, as a result, is used by Him to impact, not only the history of the nation of Israel, but to become part of the preparation for Christ's coming into the world. Then secondly, against the Old Testament backdrop of God's dealing with Israel, we find that Ruth is not even an Israelite! She is a Gentile, a Moabite who comes to faith in the True God, and in her we see early on God's heart for the nations, His desire that all the peoples of the earth should come to worship Him, that Jesus expressed so clearly as He commissioned His disciples. The story of Ruth is familiar to most of us, but we're going to look at it piece by piece in small sections and attempt to mine out the hidden treasures that God has buried in each one. I found that each section of the book contains a key phrase that sums up its point and I've tried to give each a one-word title to express that point succinctly for us. For instance, you can't read the first five verses without seeing that you are looking at a tragedy, which the dictionary defines as *an event causing great suffering, destruction, and distress, such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe*. Tragedies are one thing when you read about them, but they are something else again when they occur in YOUR life. So, as much as possible, I'd like us to try to put ourselves into the story and live through its Naomi and Ruth, so that we can more fully understand what God needs us to when tragedy invades our own lives or the lives of our loved ones or of those we minister to. Let's begin the process by thinking about:

I. The Tumultuous Time In Which Naomi Lived (1a) That tiny phrase says a mouthful. The period of the Judges is the segment of the history of Israel that lasted about 350 years. From the death of Joshua to the time of Saul becoming its first King, Israel was led by a series of men and women called Judges, temporary leaders that God raised up to deliver His people at various times. But the reason they were needed in the first place is that Israel perpetually went after other gods and between each deliverer the Lord made them live as a helpless conquered people impoverished by the surrounding nations, 8 years under the Syrians, 18 years under the Moabites, 20 years under the Canaanites, 7 years under the Midianites and 18 years under the Ammonites, and then came 40 years of oppression by the Philistines. Their conquerors demanded heavy tribute, impoverished them, and even destroyed and stole their livestock and crops wholesale in Gideon's days. Though scholars are divided, my best guess (based on the genealogy in chapter 4) is that Naomi lived around 1100 BC, which would place the beginning of her suffering during the 18 years of Ammonite rule before Jephthah was

raised up to free Israel. The record says, *they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.* [Jud. 10:8-9] We have no concept of what it is like to live in a land that is continually subject to war and conquest, of the fear and uncertainty that creates. There was no central government to organize anything, no standing army to protect anyone, no recourse to turn to when suffering came and no way to predict what would happen next. That's why we have this sad summary in **Jud. 21:25**. For these centuries everyone was on their own and they did whatever they thought would help them the most. That is the environment in which Naomi lived and is really what begins:

II. The Tragic Litany Of Naomi's Sufferings (1b-5) For longer than ten years Naomi was struck with one sorrow after another. One author has called her a "female Job" and comments that she "out-Jobed Job". Her sufferings were every bit as deep, but instead of coming all in one day were stretched out over a decade. Of her early life and marriage to Elimelech we are told nothing, but likely she was thirty-ish and the mother of two teen boys when:

1. she was driven from her home by a famine On top of the poor economic conditions created by Israel's enemies, either a major drought occurred or God intervened through some other factor to create at least one and probably multiple years of crop failure in the region of Judah. The town of Bethlehem where she lived has a name that means "House of Bread", and is a strong agricultural region, what we might call a "breadbasket" area, known for producing food, and Elimelech and Naomi:

a. they were an agricultural family, dependent on their field's produce They lived in a house in the village and Elimelech and the boys went out to their family property in the surrounding countryside to work the crops and tend livestock every day. Their lives depended in a very real sense on the crops growing well every year. They ate what they grew and sold the rest to live on the remainder of the year. A season, and especially more than one, with little or no crop meant not simply financial ruin, but hunger and, potentially, starvation, since everyone in the whole region would be in the same straits. Let me illustrate with a more familiar picture from Aug. 2012: *For the third time in ten years, drought is raging in the Sahel region of West Africa. The resulting famine could be the worst humanitarian crisis in history. Those living in the Sahel region of West Africa, which covers parts of [8 nations], have always had it tough... however, the current famine, which is expected to get much worse before it gets better, is even more serious than those in the past and aid organizations are struggling to cope. More than 18 million people are facing a food crisis and more than 1 million children under five risk severe acute malnutrition. To complicate things, this is an area where hundreds of thousands of people have already been displaced due to internal conflicts.* [<http://metro.co.uk/2012/08/03/sahel-drought-in-west-africa-leading-to-crisis-as-millions-of-lives-at-risk-521534/>] You've seen pictures. The situation has not improved much in 2013. We hardly know what it's like to be in a situation where you're afraid you'll not have food for yourself and especially for your family, though for some of us it begins to hit home when you're out of work and can't get a job and unemployment runs out, or when you're a single mom with no one to turn to and you can't make enough to support the kids. In times like that people get desperate and tend to take whatever option they can find. This family sure did:

b. they "pawned" their property to finance their survival and moved out of Israel altogether. That's the best word I can think of to describe the fact that they sold their property (and probably their house in town) to someone else but retained the continuing right to redeem or buy it back at a future time under Israelite law. Then they took what money they scraped together from this and headed east down the mountains, across the Jordan River and around the far side of the Dead Sea about 60 miles, and then climbed again to the 3,000 ft. plateau of the country of Moab (in modern Jordan) to try to start a new life for themselves. It was not a good thing for people of faith to do, to forsake the land God had given them, their God-given inheritance, the place that He had assigned to them and in which their needs had always been supplied. But fear does powerful things to people, even Christians, driving them to do things they know are not in God's will, things they would never otherwise consider. Verse 2 makes it sound like it was mostly Elimelech's doing; maybe Naomi never did like the idea. We don't know, but at any rate it didn't pan out well.

2. she experienced life as a foreigner in Moab Now you need to understand that:

a. the Moabites were long-time enemies of Israel This was not like one of us moving to Canada or to England. It was more like moving to Russia during the cold war of the 60's! Even though they were cousins to the Israelites, the Moabites:

(1) they had opposed Israel in Moses' time before Israel entered the land. They had hired Balaam to curse Israel and because of their scheming, some 24,000 Israelites had defected to false gods and died. And to make matters worse:

(2) they had oppressed Israel in Ehud's time, some 250 years earlier according to **Jud. 3:12-13**. For 18 long years Moab had levied a heavy tribute upon Israel and oppressed them. They were hated enemies so Moab was not a place where they would expect a warm welcome or an easy adjustment. And, even if there was no famine and there were opportunities for employment:

b. the Moabites worshipped false gods, primarily their national god **Chemosh**, a god to whom his worshippers would actually offer their children as sacrifices in times of great distress, the ultimate abomination to the Israelites. Plus, like the worship of most Semitic gods, his worship involved ritual prostitution and sexual immorality. To a godly Israelite Moabites were immoral pagan idolaters.

Just imagine trying to start life over in a strange place where you are an outsider, where everyone is suspicious of you and talks about you behind your back, where they won't let their kids play with yours, where you don't dress or talk quite like they do, where you'll never fit in and "be one of them". And you don't want to, because you are repulsed by the very things they practice as necessary and normal to please their gods! Peter says that when Lot moved into the city of Sodom, *that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard* (2 Pet. 2:8). I'm certain that Naomi felt the same way living in pagan Moab daily, but then, suddenly it seems, Elimelech died and:

3. she became a middle-aged widow with no husband Somehow, we always portray Naomi as an old woman, but if her sons were teens and married soon after the move, she was probably widowed at about 30-ish. Not only was that shocking and unexpected, it was totally devastating. It left her without a means of income and without a man's protection. And in Moab what man would ever marry a widowed Israelite with two extra mouths to feed, not that Naomi would ever want to marry such a pagan idolater anyway! In her eyes she had no future. Some of you know the devastation of losing a spouse. You prayed for our neighbor, who just this summer lost her husband at 52 with 2 older teens at home. Finances don't seem to be an issue with her, but you can see how much she realizes that the other half of her life is suddenly missing. Losing a spouse is hard, but at least Naomi had her two boys and they were nearly men. This was her saving grace, but very soon:

4. she watched both her sons marry Moabite women Now how this happened, I have no idea. You didn't just "fall in love" and marry in those days. Parents arranged marriages for their children, but:

a. there was no father and no wealth to arrange their marriages in Naomi's case. Usually, the boy's family would pay a significant dowry for the girl. How it was arranged we don't know, but as one writer put it, you can rest assured that Orpah and Ruth were not the "cream of the crop" in Moabite terms. And as a genuine believer, it must have broken Naomi's heart. If you remember:

b. Moabite women had led Israelite men into idolatry back in **Num. 25:1-2** by inviting them to the sacrifices of their pagan gods and having sex with them. This is the reputation that Moabite women had to Israelites. And this is the cultural and religious climate that Ruth herself was born into; it was her norm, just the immoral way things were in her world! Oh, how many of us know the heartache of watching our children make poor choices, marrying unbelievers, being drawn away from the faith by it. But at least Naomi had a means of support and care in Mahlon and Chilion as ten more years went by, but then:

5. she watched both her sons die early and without children First one, then the other either became ill or were victims of tragic accidents or perished somehow. If the pain of losing a spouse is awful, the pain of losing a child may be even worse. And in Naomi's case, this seemed the very end of her world. In ten years neither marriage had produced grandchildren. Elimelech's line was at an end. The young widows were still bound to her as family but eventually they would remarry and there was nothing left for her, nothing. It is hard to convey the degree of sadness contained in the last words of verse 5, *and the woman was left without her two sons and her husband*.

Truly Naomi did suffer deeply, just as Job suffered. Yet while much of the entire long book is devoted to the expression of his feelings, here only a few verses reveal:

III. The Profound Reaction Which Naomi Experienced It is not until she returns to Bethlehem and speaks with her former neighbors that her true feelings fully come out, so let's skip ahead to verses **(19-21)**. Now notice first of all that:

1. she openly expressed the painful thoughts her suffering produced She did not hide her pain from others or bury it, as we so often do. Somehow, we think that's the right thing, even the godly thing, to paste on a smile, get on with life and cry in private. But it's not. When suffering comes into your life, tell somebody how you feel. Yes, tell God! Tell Him all; He knows what you're thinking anyway! Come boldly to His throne and yell at Him if you need to! But certainly tell those you're close to or tell a counselor. Let people into your suffering; let them share in your suffering. They will help carry you and bear your burden! Look at the feelings Naomi was having:

a. she felt her life was now empty She was not rich materially when she left but in another way she was "full". In her world a woman's value lay almost solely in having a husband, supporting him and giving him sons that would carry on his name, so Naomi felt she had lost her whole meaning and purpose in life. It was all over. There was nothing left for her but to wait to die at 40 plus. She could not see how greatly God had already used her and the wonderful gift already standing by her side in Ruth, nor conceive that He had a further plan for her life. Suffering blinds us to so many things God wants to show us. Then notice that:

b. she felt God was against her and punishing her Because He had brought these things into her life, He must have found some evil in her; He must be punishing her for her sins. At every step He opposed her and didn't help her and made suffering worse. He didn't love her! Oh, how often has Satan sold us on that lie! Nonbelievers say, "If your God is real, why are you suffering so much? He's supposed to protect you from stuff like that!" And down deep, we tend to believe that very thing! Suffering blinds us to His great love and keeps us from coming to Him. On the other hand:

c. she felt God had ruined and shattered her life That word *calamity* or *misfortune* is literally "bad" and its root means to shatter. The phrase contains the sense of unfairness, "God is treating me as I don't deserve; He's punishing me without a cause; He's ruined my life without reason. He is wrong, unfair, unjust." Oh, dare we even say that as Job and Naomi did? Yet we experience that feeling. And to sum it all up:

d. she acknowledged the bitterness this had produced in her She said, "My name Naomi means *the pleasant one*. Don't call me that anymore; call me *Mara, the bitter one*, because God has acted extremely bitterly toward me and it has caused me to be bitter! It has changed me. I know that I'm resentful and angry because of all He's done!" Oh, that's where these feelings go if they're left to fester and grow. We become bitter people, hardened by suffering.

In his book *Night*, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel wrote, "*Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.*" [*Night*, p. 32]. Tragedy will change us profoundly, and it can be for the worse, but if we will allow Him to walk with us through it, God will change us profoundly in the better direction of His own image. Lastly, I want you to notice that, even having confessed all these feelings, Naomi:

2. she confidently retained her faith in God in spite of suffering We see glimpses of it as she is talking to her daughters-in-law in (8-9). The name of the Lord is still boldly on her tongue as it always was and she still has hope that He will bless them, even though she sees nothing for herself. We see it in the clear difference she makes in verse (15). "Orpah has gone back to her gods. I still worship Jehovah, the only true God, and I'm going back where He is worshipped by all!" Like Job, her faith is shaken, but not destroyed. It is wounded, but it is not dead. She is angry with God and the way He has chosen to do things, but she will not turn to any other. That's a good place to be. God can work with that, as we'll see.

Some of you will recognize the name of Anita Bryant. She's 73 now, but at the age of 18 she was Miss Oklahoma and second runner up for Miss America. She was an outspoken believer, a career singer who entertained our troops overseas with Bob Hope, who sang for millions her rendition of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and who did Florida Citrus commercials for 12 years. But in 1977 she along with others took a public stand against an ordinance that would allow homosexuals to teach in private and religious schools. The full venom of the Gay Rights movement was unleashed against her personally as a scapegoat. Personal threats, public humiliation in the media, and ultimately the loss of all her contracts brought so much pressure into her life that it broke her marriage in 1980. Her world caved in... She was caught between those who opposed her stand and the church which condemned her divorce. 11 years later she wrote a book called "A New Day" and here's what she said: "When disaster strikes your life or mine – or that of your pastor, neighbor, parent, son or daughter – God stands fast. The world may seem to sway and shift beneath your feet. Friends may desert you. Strangers may judge, curse or abuse you. Even Christians may at best misunderstand, or judge you, and at worst actually become malicious. Nevertheless, I'm here to tell you from firsthand experience: you are not alone. Despite the most horrifying, poor, hopeless circumstances, you need not be washed-up, finished or beyond hope. God is there, even when you cannot pray and desire not to pray. He knew your name before the foundation of the world. He holds your life in His eternal hands, and He will not let you fall, I know. Eleven years ago, amid the spectacular wreckage of my life, viewed before the whole world, my mind knew these things. At the same time, however for the first time in my experience, my mind also knew deep depression, fear, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, and grief. I had said I'd never divorce and when it occurred, I felt self-hatred in all its force, and with it the negative conviction that never, never, never could God ever restore the mess my life had become.... In desperate times, you either give in and give up or you get up and get out... Men's evil intentions could succeed in temporarily destroying my career, but what people mean for evil, God has used for good. I was to learn the unspeakable depths of God's richest love toward Anita Bryant - and you – not because of successful careers, fame, or fortune or any other such temporal thing, but that His love for His child surpasses all else in life and stands throughout eternity. [<http://anitabmi.org/3.html>]

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Security: "Go Back... Find Rest" - 1:6-13

Last time we looked at the decade-long tragedy that had come into Naomi's life, living in a war-torn land, driven from her home by famine, struggling as a stranger in the pagan land of Moab, the untimely death of her husband and finally the death of both her sons. One after the other these things slowly stripped Naomi of absolutely everything in life. She had no means of supporting herself, no male to protect her and no heir to continue her family line. She felt like she was left with nothing, that she no longer had any value and her life was essentially over. She decided to do the only thing she could

think of to do, even though she felt God was against her. She would go home to Bethlehem and take her chances at finding charity among her own people. Now let's pick up the story in verses (6-9). I want you to notice that word *rest* in verse 9. Rest is really what Naomi is seeking for herself; it's what she desires for her daughters-in-law and it is what we all want.

I. We Are On A Continual Search For Security It is one of our two most basic human needs, to know that we are safe. The other basic need is significance, to know that we matter and that we have value, something Naomi had obviously already lost and saw no opportunity of getting back. But the drive to find security, at least for others, was still on her mind. Let's think for a moment about

1. the concept of rest, a concept we find in a number of places in the Bible. The Hebrew word is *menuchah*, a resting place, a refuge where a person is safe and secure and can cease from anxious activity and be restored. We find the term used again in the same sense in **3:1**. For a woman in Hebrew culture, the only true place of rest was in the house of a husband. Lange comments: *The possession of a menuchah, an asylum of honor and freedom, is the highest happiness; the want of it, a terrible misfortune. Israel is told that that if she proved disobedient to God, she would have no menuchah, no place of rest, in Deut. 28:65. The holy land, was, as it were, the earthly house to which Israel had come, like a wife comes into the house of her husband. "Hitherto," says Moses in Deut. 12:9, "you have not yet come unto the menuchah, the resting place, which Jehovah your God gives you." The desert had no place of rest, properly speaking: it was only the way, not the goal. At the end of his life, David said, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has given rest to his people, and he dwells in Jerusalem forever - 1 Chr. 23:25, and Solomon echoed his sentiments in praising God for the complete gift of menuchah, of rest, to his people: Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised - 1 Kings 8:56. In English the word security conveys the concept better. We all seek it; we all need it and people who lived 3,000 years ago seemed to seek it in the same ways we do today. Notice here several of:*

2. the places where people have always sought security First of all:

a. we seek security in better economic situations In verse (6) it specifically mentions that Naomi was *in the fields of Moab*. Perhaps she was trying to glean grain for herself or maybe working as a day laborer for some Moabite landowner cultivating or harvesting, barely able to survive. But in the midst of her struggle, she heard news that came from home. After what must have been some 10 years of poor crops, the famine in Judah had ended and this season and maybe the previous one, the region of Bethlehem had been blessed with an abundance of crops. The harvest looked good. And, of course, the reason given by the writer is that it was the Lord's doing; it was Him looking on His people and caring about them and giving them bread once again. But to Naomi struggling in the field, this news was a dim ray of hope. She thought, "If I just go back home, at least maybe I can find a way to eat." Now let's pause a moment to highlight **the plight of the poor**. We come from a heritage of plenty and never think about what it's like for almost half the world, nearly 3 billion people, who live on less than \$2.50 a day. 22,000 children die every day due to poverty. Three quarters of the people who live on less than a dollar a day live in rural areas in country villages struggling to survive any way they can like Naomi or like the Yenadi people we saw in India living under sheets of plastic draped over a framework made from tree branches. And worldwide the poor are doing what Naomi did, fleeing to the cities where rumor has it that they will find bread, a job. Yet there are none and so the slums in the large cities of the world are also growing at an alarming rate. We who have much tend to blame the poor for being poor because of our experience in the US, but in much of the world they work extremely hard, have nowhere else to go and no means of getting there if they did. They simply have no opportunity to improve their situation. Yet God cares about the poor and He hears their cry, especially the millions who are believers and somehow sustains them. We should hear it too and respond; *Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed. - Prov. 19:17.* God delights in using the poor, like Naomi, to serve His Kingdom purposes! But the point I would really like to make is that, poor or not, human beings always think security can be found simply by improving our economic situation and it can't. Secondly:

b. we seek security in marriage That's what Naomi is expressing in verse 9. "To have security, Ruth and Orpah, you young widows need to remarry. You need a husband. It's too late for me, but you're young. Go home and let your parents find you another. Then you'll find *menuchah*, rest." Let's consider for a moment **the plight of widows**. By the way, I would highly recommend a book by Carolyn Custis James called *The Gospel of Ruth* which you can get on Amazon. It has been very helpful in these studies. She writes, *Without a father, husband, son, or other male relative to speak and act in her defense, a woman had no voice, no legal rights, and no recourse against injustice. Widowhood threw Naomi in with the weakest members of society — the widows, orphans, and foreigners. These at-risk individuals were defenseless because they lacked the necessary male connections to ensure their safety. In a world where the strong have historically (viciously at times) preyed on the weak, the dangers Naomi faced were not imaginary, but a brutal reality that Jesus exposed when he denounced the religious leaders of his day for "devouring widow's houses" [James, Carolyn Custis (2009-08-30). The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules (p. 62).] That is still true in much of the world today. A widow is a non-person, she basically ceases to exist when her husband dies. In India the government in recent times has outlawed the ancient practice of sati in which a widow would throw herself onto her husband's funeral pyre and burn to death with him! We don't think about the plight of widows much, but we ought to since the statistics are that 9 out of 10 women will spend some*

portion of their lives in widowhood! Jesus ministered to widows often during His time on earth and the early church took up the responsibility of caring for them almost immediately in Acts 6. James called attention to their need and Paul even wrote to Timothy extensive instructions for their care as part of church life. God loves widows. God values widows and He uses widows like Naomi and Ruth to advance His Kingdom on earth! But again, there is a caution. Human beings tend to believe that security can be found by getting married, by finding somebody else who will commit themselves to take care of me. But it can't. Then thirdly:

c. we seek security in children In biblical culture, Ruth and Orpah were in an even more desperate situation. Both had been married for roughly 10 years and never produced a child. Their prospects for remarriage were zilch. Let's take another moment to consider **the plight of barren women**, which is much the same today in many places in the world as it was then. *Carolyn James asked a Tanzanian friend what happens in his country when a woman fails to conceive. He answered gravely, "She's in trouble. Her husband has grounds for divorce." He went on to explain that the problem extends beyond my question, for a woman is not simply under pressure to bear children, she must give birth to sons. In patriarchal cultures, sons are prized. Daughters are not. A daughter leaves to build another man's house. But a son will carry on his father's name, build his father's house, and inherit his father's wealth. A man must have a son. If his wife lets him down in this, his family will press him to discard her — either by divorce or polygamy — and find another wife who can produce a son. [James, Carolyn Custis (2009-08-30). The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules (p. 77)]* No one even considers that the problem might lie with the husband. This practice is normal all through the Middle East. It happens routinely in Kyrgyzstan and many, many other places. A woman who cannot bear a child is of no value to much of the world, and even here, so many women feel that having a child is what will fulfill them, complete them. Or else it will give them someone from whom they will get the unconditional love they seek. How many go to intensely desperate measures to try to conceive, yet even having a child will not provide the security they seek. The bottom line everywhere in Scripture is that God opens the womb and God closes it; He is the giver of life who chooses to send each child into the world. And God uses and values childless women like Ruth! Despite the heartaches they endure, they play a major part in His story. Think of women like Sarah and Rebecca and Hannah and Elizabeth who faithfully loved and served Him for long years and only by a miracle conceived at last which declared His glory. God's word to the childless woman is Is. 54:1, *"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD.* You are tremendously valued and God will bring forth more spiritual fruit from your life for His Kingdom than from many who have lots of physical children! Your *menuchah* is not in having children!

You see, there is always a:

II. The Choice That Always Lies Before Us Concerning Security and to understand it, let's go back to the story and examine:

1. the difficult choice that Ruth and Orpah faced (10-13) Keep in mind that society was different then than it is now. Orpah and Ruth were widows, but:

a. they were bound to their husband's house When they married, they left their family and became part of their husband's family and his line. The only survivor of that line was their mother-in-law **Naomi** and they were bound to her as family. They had the obligation to stay with her and care for her as their own mother. And on the other hand:

b. they were all the earthly security Naomi had She had nothing left but them, nothing, no money, no men, no children, just these two daughters-in-law, but at least she would not be alone to face the world. They would face it together. And so, the three started out on this journey to Bethlehem together, but even if that was her thinking as she started, she just could not press forward with it. Somewhere along the way she stopped and tried to send them home. Why? Because:

c. Naomi loved them enough to release them to give them a future In so many cultures the daughter-in-law is the slave of the mother-in-law. In Kyrgyzstan when a man marries, the wife moves into his parents' home and she becomes the family slave doing all the household work. She is often treated harshly and nobody thinks about her well-being. It seems this attitude has prevailed in many times and places. *One ancient Roman writer says "that all mothers-in-law have ever hated their daughters-in-law". Another says that matrimonial peace is inconceivable so long as the mother-in-law lives. Germans have ancient maxims like "the mother-in-law has forgotten that she was ever a daughter-in-law" and "the best mother-in-law is one on whose gown the geese feed", i.e., who is dead. [Lange on Ruth 1:11].* But there is none of that among God's people, and certainly not in Naomi's heart. She cannot bring herself to think of binding Ruth and Orpah to meet her needs the rest of their lives. She loves them too much and they love her too much to be glad to go back. They weep over the thought of parting with her. Her love has touched their lives for a decade. They are drawn to her. They *want* to go with her. They love her. But let's understand the choice before them:

2. to go with Naomi to Bethlehem meant a loss of all security First of all:

a. it would probably mean a life of poverty Naomi, of course, could not provide for them financially and as widows bound to her, they would be forced to accept her lot in life, maybe even reduced to begging to survive, and that in a strange place where they would meet with the same negative reaction that Naomi had gotten when she came to Moab years earlier. And second:

b. it would probably mean foregoing marriage and children That's what Naomi is trying so pointedly to tell them. If they go home to their mothers, their families could potentially arrange another marriage in Moab for them. In Israel, first of all it is unlikely that anyone would want to marry a Moabite widow, much less one who had failed to produce children in 10 years! Naomi could provide no sure means of their ever being married. The only thing she could even imagine is the law of the Levirate marriage which says that in the event that a man dies childless, his brother (or nearest kin) must marry the widow and have a child to carry on his name. (By the way, keep this law in mind because the end of the story hinges on it.) But Naomi by this point was right at menopause and could not guarantee that she would ever have another son to marry them and even if she got married that very night, they would never be able to wait another 15 years for her son to be old enough to marry. They would be old themselves! In the natural their case was hopeless; in Israel they would have no future:

3. to go with Naomi was to cast their entire future upon Naomi's people and their God Their very lives would depend solely upon the mercy of the people of Israel toward them and upon the favor of Israel's God, Jehovah. And that wasn't a sure thing. In those days people conceived of their gods as being tied geographically to their lands. To the Moabite mind Chemosh was the god of Moab but he wasn't god in Israel, Jehovah was. Chemosh would be no help there. To survive there they would have to worship the God of the land, become worshippers of Jehovah like Naomi and hope that Naomi's god would accept them and help them! And out of love Naomi put that choice squarely in their laps, rather than forcibly dragging them with her.

That was a pretty sizeable wager to make! Do I choose to run to the security that I can see with my eyes, that lies, I believe, within my grasp? Or do I cast myself upon the love and grace of a God I can't see but whom I am told loves me? Every one of us must make that choice! We must either spend our lives running after things we believe will give us the rest we so desperately want as Orpah did or:

III. We Must Choose To Rest In God For Our Security as Ruth did. Look at the end of verse (16).

1. Ruth chose to trust in the God of Israel Over her ten years in Naomi's family watching and listening to her tell about her faith, even though she was in a bitter state at the moment, Ruth knew that Chemosh and the life he imposed upon his people was not worth it. It held no security. She chose Jehovah, the God of Naomi and Israel, the people of Naomi. When we meet him in the next chapter, Boaz understood that clearly (2:12). Ruth chose to seek her refuge, her rest, her security in God Himself and so must we. David testified in Psalm 62: *My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.... Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.* Then listen to the words of Jesus Himself, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* - Mt. 11:28-29.

2. Jesus invites us to come to Him to find true rest, rest from all our anguished striving and struggling and trying to find our own ways to make ourselves secure in this world. Everything in our world and in our lives depends on Him and when we recognize how much He loves us, we can truly rest in Him. St. Augustine put it like this: *Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.*

Kay Arthur writes: *"The muffled, distant sound had broken the quiet reverie of his walk across the meadow. The sharp barking of a dog almost irritated him. It was abrasive in that tranquil setting. As the barking grew louder, his eyes scanned the meadow, looking for the culprit. Suddenly a small doe broke through the edge of the woods. Now he understood. Leaning against the fence post, the man watched with compassion as the doe cut across the broad expanse of meadow. She was running straight toward him. He stood motionless, not wanting to add the fear of man to the animal's frustration. As the frightened deer leaped the fence, she staggered. The chase had taken its toll. Her wet coat gleaming in the sun, the doe stopped, took a few steps in one direction, then, ears held high, looked back toward the sound of the barking. The dog had broken through the woods. Eyes wide with fright, seemingly confused and worn out, the doe surveyed her surroundings until she discovered the man standing beside the fence. Looking back again at the dog in hot pursuit, then at the expanse of open field before her, she turned weakly and walked straight toward the man and buried her head in his jacket. Compassion filled his eyes. She had found a protector."* Where do you run in time of need? When the hounds of trouble, worry, and fear pursue you; when the dogs of temptation, corruption, and evil seek to overtake you; when your energy is spent; when weakness saps you and you feel you cannot run away any longer, where do you turn? *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Pro.18:10).* [Lord I Want to Know You by Kay Arthur. Fleming H. Revell, 1984. Page 15.]

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Love: "Where You Go, I Will Go" - 1:14-22

At its core, the Book of Ruth is a love story. Only it is not the common type of love story about the romantic love of a man for a woman or vice versa, rather, it is the story of the extraordinary supernatural love of a daughter-in-law for her mother-in-law. Ruth loved Naomi in a way that astonished and amazed all who heard it and when we understand the depth of it, it will touch our hearts as well. Somewhere on the road leading out of Moab toward Jericho, there is a very special spot, the place where Naomi stopped to rest with her two daughters in law, Ruth and Orpah, and where she, out of great love for them, released them from their obligation to care for her so that they could to return home to their parents and have a chance to make a new life for themselves in Moab. And on that spot in that moment both Ruth and Orpah made a choice, a life-altering choice that would set the direction of the rest of their days. That choice is recorded powerfully for us in verse (14). Orpah *kissed* Naomi, but Ruth *clung* to her. Both of them loved Naomi, but Ruth loved Naomi in a much deeper way; she loved her with the sort of love that Jesus and Paul talked about in the New Testament, *agape* love, the kind of love that willingly sacrifices itself for the other's well-being whether or not the other deserves it or returns it. John Piper commented in one of his blog posts that while we often say, "Love is a choice", love is *more* than a choice and he points out: [\[www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/love-is-more-than-a-choice\]](http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/love-is-more-than-a-choice)

I. Three Important Facts About Real Love Yes, love:

1. it is a deliberate choice made with our will It is more than a warm emotional feeling toward someone. Piper comments that we say, "I fell in love" like love is some kind of ditch you stumble into, like love is something that just happens to you, that you have no control over. The truth is that love begins with a choice. You love people that you choose to love. It is an act of your will. You can choose NOT to love certain people even if your feelings want to and you can choose to love certain people that you don't really feel like loving. While we were still sinners, Jesus chose to love us and to die for us. Ruth made a choice to love Naomi enough to cling to her, to go back with her to Judah, to do what was best for her rather than for herself. But love is more than simply a choice:

2. it is based on a genuine desire of our heart Paul pointed out that you can give away everything you have and even deliver your body to be burned but without love it's of no value. There has to be true caring in the heart behind the decision. Jesus did not die for us simply because that was the right thing to do in God's eyes. His heart loved us and wanted to save us! Ruth did not simply stick with Naomi because that was the right thing to do, so she could say "I've done my duty". Her heart was in it. She truly wanted to protect and care for Naomi. She loved Naomi deeply, from the heart, just as **1 Pet. 1:22** admonishes us to do toward one another. And thirdly, this kind of love we're talking about:

3. it is produced by God Himself, not merely our own efforts In New Testament terms love is a fruit of the Spirit; it is something that the Spirit of God Himself produces in us, not something we generate. **Rom. 5:5** says, *...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*. That kind of love is a God thing, something He creates in us, not something we simply work up ourselves. And as we'll see, it was something that He created in Ruth.

Now let's go back to our text and look at:

II. The Natural Choice That Orpah Made (14-15) Orpah is often caricatured as being shallow and self-centered, but I don't think that's true at all. It seems obvious that:

1. she had great human affection for Naomi After all, she was packed up and already on the road with her to Bethlehem. She had every intention of going with her, just as Ruth did. And when Naomi first released them and told them to go back in verses 9-10, she wept and wailed just like Ruth did and both of them said to her, "No, we're going back with you to your people!" Orpah had come to love Naomi and have great affection for her. She didn't want to be separated from her and was surely concerned about what might happen to her. But:

2. when pressed, she ultimately chose a more certain future for herself Naomi argued harder in verse 13 and declared pretty clearly that they would have no future in Israel, no husband and no marriage and urged them more strongly to go back. So Orpah wept again, together with Ruth and Naomi; she was deeply grieved, thinking that she would probably never see Naomi again, yet in the end she embraced her mother-in-law, kissed her goodbye and started back down the road to Moab where she had parents waiting for her and maybe someday another husband and another life. And I wonder whether that last thing Naomi said is what tipped the scale for her, *...the hand of the Lord is gone out against me*. I wonder whether Orpah believed her enough to think, "Her own god is against her and if I go with her, I might share with her in his displeasure. Is his displeasure with her what took away my husband from me already? Do I want to go to Israel and bet my future upon the favor of a god who has treated one of his own people like this, taking away everything from her?" We can only speculate about her thoughts, however Naomi does make it clear in verse 15 that in returning to her people Orpah was returning to her gods! With Naomi's urging and full approval she naturally chose a future that felt more secure to her, a future among her own people worshipping gods she knew and understood. But her choice stands in blazing contrast to:

III. The Amazing Choice That Ruth Made (16-17) Ruth's answer is one of the finest expressions of love that you'll find anywhere in Scripture. It rivals what the Scripture tells us about the love of Jonathan for David when it says *...the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.* - 1 Sam. 18:1. These verses are often used in weddings to express the depth of the love that should exist between husband and wife. In fact, I would bet, although I haven't been able to confirm it, that the promises Ruth made to Naomi probably helped the church form at least portions of the traditional wedding vows that it developed in the Middle Ages, especially the "until death do us part" line.

Ruth:

1. she had a true selfless love for Naomi and in this vow, she makes to her, she expresses it point by point. *"Stop telling me to leave you and to quit following you. No matter how many times you say it, I won't do it. Where you go, I will go...* She's saying, first of all, that:

a. she would never abandon Naomi She would never desert her or leave her to pursue her own interests. And think about what that meant for her. For Ruth to go where Naomi is going **meant leaving her family** behind permanently. It meant probably never seeing her father and mother or any siblings again. But no matter what the cost to her personally, she vows that she would not abandon Naomi. Real love does not abandon the one who is loved; it does not leave them when the going gets tough or forsake them when the strong pull of opportunity arises. And just think, is that not the love that God Himself has declared to you? *...for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* - Heb. 13:5. You have a promise from Almighty God that He will never abandon you, not for any reason, not under any circumstance, never, never, never. And that is the love that we are to have for one another! Then Ruth added, *...and where you lodge, I will lodge.* By that she was promising that:

b. she would live in Naomi's circumstances That Hebrew word usually means "to stay the night". She means, "whatever place you find to stay, I'll stay in it with you; whether it is a tent or a palace doesn't matter. I will share whatever circumstance you encounter." Thus, in our vows we say, "for richer, for poorer". And for Ruth, joining in Naomi's circumstances probably **meant poverty**. In fact, we're not sure where Naomi and Ruth lodged when they arrived in Bethlehem. It is highly improbable that Naomi and Elimelech's house just sat there empty for a decade awaiting their return. It is more likely that it was sold, just like their land, before they left. When Francine Rivers tells the story of Ruth in her book, *Lineage of Grace*, (which I highly recommend, by the way), she pictures Naomi and Ruth finding shelter in one of the caves that the shepherds used near Bethlehem, and that could well have been the case. Real love for someone does not waver with circumstances, but rather endures in spite of them, just the way God's love for us endures no matter what befalls us. Then Ruth shares her deeper intent, *...your people will be my people.*

c. she would leave her people to join Naomi's people, Israel In going with Naomi, she was not merely fulfilling the obligations of her marriage vows, nor simply acting out of personal love for her mother-in-law. She is vowing that she will become what Naomi is, a Jewess, with all that that entails. She will dress as the Jews dress; she will live as they live, practicing their culture and their customs. She will observe their holy days and feasts and obey their laws, and of course, there is the most important thing of all, *...and your God, my God.*

d. she would leave her gods to worship only Naomi's God, Jehovah For her the choice she made that day was about far more than the choice to love Naomi; it was choosing Naomi's God to be her own, forsaking Chemosh and Baal and all the other pagan gods she had known growing up in Moab. She was forsaking them all to follow Him. Ruth is almost a female version of Abraham, who lived in pagan Ur and whose family worshipped other gods. But in that pagan place God revealed Himself to Abraham and the writer of Hebrews says, *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob...* - Heb. 11:8-9. Like Abraham, Ruth left behind her pagan culture, placed her trust in Jehovah, the true God, and set out to pursue Him in a land she didn't know at all and in circumstances that would probably prove to be poor and temporary. Only, unlike Abraham, she did it without any promise to claim! This moment on the road to Bethlehem is the moment of her true conversion, of her placing complete trust in Jehovah God. And look what she vows next, *...where you die, I will die and there will I be buried!* Think about that for a moment. Obviously, Naomi is older and they both know that Naomi would normally die before Ruth. She's saying:

e. she would never go back even after Naomi died "And when you die, I'm staying. I'm never going back home to Moab and back to my pagan gods. I'm becoming a Jewess and a worshipper of Jehovah forever. I will be buried there in Israel, just like you! No matter what happens to you, my commitment is permanent and will not change!" And by the end:

f. she sealed her vow with an oath to Naomi's God She called on Jehovah Himself to be the witness to her promise and to punish her to the severest extent possible if she violated it. The writer of Hebrews explains, *Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument [6:16].* When the ancients swore an oath before God they fully expected Him to enforce it; nobody would dare to lie

under oath for fear of God's retribution. For Ruth to seal her vow with an oath to Jehovah settled the matter permanently as far as both earthly parties were concerned; to renig on such a vow was tantamount to forfeiting life itself in their eyes. Thus verse **(18)**. It was settled. Ruth was going, end of story.

What an amazing choice Ruth made, not only to selflessly love Naomi, but to love Naomi's God and to do it forever! And here's:

2. what makes this choice truly amazing (19-22) We've already looked more closely at verses 20-21 when we talked about Naomi's attitude. The amazing thing about Ruth's choice is that:

a. she made it in spite of Naomi's own bitterness toward God Naomi wasn't in the best frame of mind to represent God well. She was angry at Him. She blamed Him. But Ruth chose to worship Him anyway! And:

b. she followed through without further encouragement from Naomi Verse 18 literally says that when Ruth swore her oath, Naomi ceased speaking to her.

(1) Naomi expressed no joy or gratitude over her choice If that was me, I'd have been jumping up and down thanking God for Ruth sticking by me, thanking God for Ruth's conversion, thanking Ruth for loving me, saying something! Naomi just turned in silence and walked on toward Bethlehem while Ruth fell in step! And then you'll notice that when they finally arrive after their long journey:

(2) Naomi did not acknowledge her to the women of Bethlehem All the women gather round her and she boldly declares how empty her life is and how bitter she is and how she has nothing left, and there stands Ruth off to the side, ignored, probably snubbed by the women. I'd be thinking, "But what about me? Am I not SOMETHING? Am I not the one positive thing you have left?" Naomi doesn't even mention her presence and yet Ruth proves true to her choice in spite of it all, true both to Naomi and to God!

Nobody but God can produce a love like that for someone else or for Himself. That kind of love is truly a work that only His Spirit can do. *Father Maximilian Kolbe, was a Catholic priest who was a prisoner at Auschwitz in August 1941. One day a prisoner escaped from the camp, and in reprisal, the Nazis ordered that ten prisoners would be chosen to die by starvation. At the risk of being shot, Maximilian Kolbe spoke up and requested that he be allowed to take the place of one of the condemned men who was weeping over his family. Strangely, his request was granted. The Nazis kept Kolbe in the starvation bunker for two weeks and then put him to death by lethal injection on August 14, 1941. Thirty years later a survivor of Auschwitz described the effect of Kolbe's action: "It was an enormous shock to the whole camp. We became aware that someone among us in this spiritual dark night of the soul was raising the standard of love on high. Someone unknown, like everyone else, tortured and bereft of name and social standing, went to a horrible death for the sake of someone not even related to him. Therefore, it is not true, we cried, that humanity is cast down and trampled in the mud, overcome by oppressors, and overwhelmed by hopelessness. Thousands of prisoners were convinced the true world continued to exist and that our torturers would not be able to destroy it. We were stunned by his act, which became for us a mighty explosion of light in the dark camp."* [A Book of Saints, Anne Gordon - BILL Norman Markham, Ontario]. Ruth's act of self-sacrifice for Naomi is likewise stunning and is an explosion of light in the midst of the tragedy and suffering in her and Naomi's lives, light that was likewise born out of the faith in God she had come to embrace. Carolyn James writes: *Ruth is a powerful reminder that the most important thing in all of life — the purpose for which we were all created — is to know the God who made us and to walk through life as his child, no matter what it costs us. Even when we are standing at ground zero — when we are hurting, God is silent, and our suffering makes no sense — we have no other place to go. And so, Ruth clings to Naomi and turns her face toward Bethlehem.* [James, Carolyn Custis (2009-08-30). *The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules* (p. 52)]

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Toil: "Let Me Go To The Fields" - 2:1-9, 14-18

Let's rejoin the story of the book at **1:22**. That sounds simple enough, but the journey that Naomi and Ruth made in returning from Moab to Bethlehem was not an easy one. The distance was more than 60 miles and they made it on foot while carrying whatever possessions they could. I'm guessing it took them nearly a week, camping by the road or in small villages each night. Their path included the infamous 5-mile steep uphill climb up the mountains from Jericho to Jerusalem where Jesus talked about a man attacked by robbers and being helped by a Samaritan. Indeed, the entire journey was dangerous for two women to attempt alone and unprotected and I'm sure that their arrival was due in large measure to Ruth's strength and courage, as well as God's watchcare over them. But at last, they arrived to find:

I. The Improved Situation In Bethlehem Naomi had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited His people with food, with abundant crops once again and they found it true. They arrived in Bethlehem just after the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in April. The Feast of First fruits, seven days after Passover, was the official beginning of the barley harvest when the first sheaves harvested were offered to the Lord. Barley is a grain crop like wheat, but ripens earlier. Fields of barley surrounded Bethlehem with their amber waves of grain blowing in the wind as Naomi and Ruth walked by, ready to be harvested. Actually:

1. Israel had several seasons of harvest As an agricultural society, her year revolved around them. The barley harvest came first, beginning in mid-April on our calendar. It was followed by the wheat harvest in June, which was celebrated by the Feast of Pentecost seven weeks after First fruits. Finally in late September came the harvest of fruits, especially the grapes in the vineyards which was celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles in October. From the beginning of the year to its end Israel celebrated God's goodness in providing for them; in fact, the traditional Jewish blessing at table that has been used from antiquity is, *Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth.* It is a reminder that food does not magically appear in plastic bags and containers in a store. It comes to us through the hard work and labor of many, but ultimately God is the one who feeds us; it is He who makes grain to grow so we can have bread and vegetables and fruits and all the good things we enjoy eating. They come from His hand. But even as God gave good harvests to His people:

2. Israel had a mechanism to care for the poor: the process of gleaning which Ruth seizes upon in verses (2-3). When a field of grain was harvested, a line of men with sickles would go first. They would cut the stalks of standing grain and lay them in piles. Then would come a group of women who would tie the bundles together into sheaves and stand them upright to dry. Later they would be collected and taken to a threshing floor where the sheaves were beaten or trampled to separate the grain from the straw and the chaff. But in the process of harvesting God built into His law a way for poor people who did not own land or those had fallen on hard times, like widows, to share in the bounty. *And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. - Lev. 23:22. When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. - Deut. 24:19-21.* The poor were allowed to go into the fields during all the harvests and gather for themselves whatever was left. Now this was a creative system:

a. it gave those with much the obligation to be generous. They were to deliberately leave the grain at the edges and corners standing and not to be thorough in picking up every last stalk or sheaf on purpose. It was a means of being generous and helping the poor. And at the same time:

b. it gave those with little the opportunity to earn their way They were not handed a welfare check; they had to go out and pick it up and thresh it themselves. They had to go out and invest their own sweat and toil to feed themselves; it gave them the opportunity to work like everyone else, an opportunity they would not otherwise have had. And so, Ruth saw the bounty in the fields around them and immediately seized upon this custom of gleaning as the means for her and Naomi to survive. Now this morning I want us to focus on:

II. The Industrious Character Of Ruth Naomi is not old, but she is older and perhaps weakened by the long journey or even still too depressed by her circumstances to do much about her situation. But Ruth is a go-getter. She is a woman determined to survive and to care for the mother-in-law she loves. She is an example to be emulated. First of all:

1. she displayed initiative in verses (2-3). That phrase, *Let me go to the fields*, pretty much characterizes Ruth's attitude. It was her idea to go into the fields to glean. She came up with it, not Naomi; she was ready to go and work and do something about her situation. And it was not without its risks. Not all landowners followed the law or were generous. She could be driven away, or worse, she was a foreign woman alone in the fields and she could be harassed or even molested by the men. It was not as easy as it sounds for Naomi to say, *Go, my daughter*. But Ruth had the courage to brave the hazards and take the step to go anyway. Are you willing to step out of your comfort zone and seize the opportunities that God puts before you? Yet in the process:

2. she interacted with humility Listen to how the overseer in Boaz' field describes Ruth's approach in (5-7a). She did not just assume her right to glean but approached the man in charge and humbly asked to be allowed into the field to glean. Indeed, we'll see later in all her interactions in this chapter she always speaks with humility, never assumes anything for herself, and everyone is greatly impressed by it. I'm sure there were other poor people out in the fields gleaning and I can just picture it, rushing to garner the largest uncut spot or to grab up the biggest pile of missed stalks for themselves, maybe even shoving others out of the way in their desperation. Have you ever seen video of food trucks delivering supplies in a refugee camp and how they're often swamped by hungry people all shoving to be first? Initiative is good, but it must be combined with humility in our interactions with others. Then notice how Ruth:

3. she labored with vigor (7b) She had worked hard all morning. The Hebrew here is difficult to translate; some versions say *with not even a brief rest*, while others take it as *with only a brief rest*. Either way, she had worked for six solid hours bent over in the hot sun, pretty much without stopping. She had a strong work ethic; she didn't just do enough to get by for the day but she gleaned all she could while there was opportunity. I'm reminded of Paul's words: *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness... For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not*

be a burden to any of you. It was ...to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. - 2 Thes. 3:6-10. Ruth embraced the principle of working hard and:

4. God blessed her labor (17) She worked until it was growing dark, then found a rock and beat the huge pile of stalks she'd gathered against it and gathered the barley into her shawl and it amounted to a whole *ephah*, about 3/5 of a bushel basket or perhaps about 30 pounds. Picture a 30 pound sack of rice or bag of dog food as she carries it back home! Now she had a little help as we'll see, but one source says that *old Babylonian records from that era indicate that a male worker's take-home pay for a day's labor was rarely more than one or two pounds. So, in one day Ruth gleaned the rough equivalent of a half-month's wages or more, a minimum of fifteen times what Boaz's harvesters were [probably] pocketing as a fair day's wage. James, Carolyn Custis (2009-08-30). The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules (p. 112).* God tends to bless hard labor. *Solomon said, Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. - Prov. 10:4.* And I think God blessed Ruth especially because:

5. she had an unselfish purpose (18) She did it all for Naomi, not herself primarily! She did it to care and provide for her. She even saved her a portion of her own lunch that she'd been given! She didn't just work in order to *get*; she worked in order to *give*! And finally note that:

6. she persevered in her labor (23) She kept this up every day from the middle of April until the end of June when the wheat harvest finished and there would be no more gleaning to do! For more than two whole months she didn't stop; she gathered all she could to store it up because she knew leaner times would be coming!

What a woman! She was a true Proverbs 31 woman of great virtue and well worth imitating. But meanwhile another character has entered the story line. The field she ends up gleaning in happens to belong to a man by the name of Boaz, who happens to be a relative of Naomi and Elimelech, and we can learn as much from:

III. The Generous Nature Of Boaz as we can from the industrious nature of Ruth. Now verse 1 literally says that:

1. he was a "great" man (1) That specific phrase is translated a *mighty man of valor* some 40 times in the Old Testament and almost always refers to a person distinguished in battle. So maybe in his younger days, Boaz had actually served admirably in the military actions of Israel against her oppressors. At any rate he had become a man of standing in Bethlehem, a man respected and well known, and certainly a prosperous and well-to-do man in these last years with the reversal of the devastating famine. But more importantly:

2. he had a genuine love for God that permeated his work life Look how he greeted his workers as he arrived at his field that day (4). All his workers knew he was a man who loved God and operated according to His laws. He was not ashamed of his faith and as you read the book, the name of the Lord is often on his lips when he speaks. It was just a natural thing to him. Now I realize that many of us work in environments where we need to exercise some caution in sharing our faith, but for the most part we're free to mention the Lord as a natural part of our daily personal conversations and really, our love for God *should* permeate our work life. It should govern our principles; we should pray for our coworkers and realize that God has put us into their lives to bless them, just as Boaz was a blessing to those who worked for him. But what really shines here is that even though Boaz was wealthy, he did not get that way by being stingy.

3. he displayed true generosity to the poor When he noticed a strange woman in the field and learned that she was the daughter in law of his relative Naomi, there was no romantic interest, as we often try to read into the story. The whole town knew that these two poor widows had come back from Moab and were struggling to survive. He knew Ruth was a poor woman struggling against huge odds to care for her mother-in-law so:

a. he made sure that Ruth was protected (8-9) He realized the dangers she might face in the fields of others so he encouraged her to stay in his field and he strictly warned his reapers to let her alone because he knew what could otherwise happen. He even invited her to share the water that had been carried to the field for the workers. When the midday break came:

b. he made sure that Ruth had food and rest as she labored (14) Boaz had put up a simple shelter to provide shade for his workers and he invited her to come eat with them and share their bread and roasted grain. He actually served her personally, as though she was his guest, and gave her more than she could eat. And because he knew how desperate her situation was:

c. he made sure Ruth would glean more than normal (15-16) He instructed his workers to let her come right in among them and glean, not to keep her away and even to intentionally drop stalks for her to pick up. That's how she accumulated so much by the end of the day! He was making sure she would begin to lay up a store for her and Naomi.

What a generous man! He was not thinking of himself and greedily hanging on to his property to accumulate more. And he gave not only that day but all the way through the seasons of the harvest. In God's economy hard work and generosity

go hand in hand. Paul used the analogy of sowing and reaping to encourage US to be generous with what He provides to us: *...whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.... He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.*

There is a legend that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from the famed Greek conqueror Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. One of his attendants was astonished at Alexander's generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving." How you give to others, how generous you are with what God has given you, is a reflection of your own character and heart. In whatever situation God has placed us, let us determine to be industrious like Ruth and at the same time generous like Boaz. God wants both.

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Trust: "Under Whose Wings You Have Come To Take Refuge" - 2:10-13

In our study of chapter 2 last time, we looked at Ruth's industrious character, going out to glean in the fields and working hard and also at Boaz' generous character, caring for a poor widow struggling to support her mother-in-law. But, if you noticed, I deliberately omitted the best part, the beautiful dialogue between Ruth and Boaz which occurred that morning as Boaz began speaking with her to encourage her to stay in his field and not go elsewhere in verses 10-13, and I did that so that we could give it our full attention today. It is here that we learn the full truth about what has really happened in Ruth's life in her choice to come to Israel with Naomi. Now even in the first words she speaks to Boaz we are reminded that:

I. Ruth Was A Foreigner (10) In fact, five separate times in the book when her name is mentioned the author deliberately calls her *Ruth the Moabite* as in verse 2. There is a continual reminder that she does not belong, that she is not an Israelite, that she is different from the people of Jehovah and has no status in their eyes. Even as Boaz speaks kindly to her, she seems to be astonished that he is treating her that way and openly calls herself a foreigner.

1. she realized that she had no right to anything in Israel There was a long negative history between Moab and Israel and God Himself had decreed this in **Deut. 23:3-4**, *No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.* Now the Jewish commentators, wanting to explain the exception for Ruth, say that this applied only to men, not women, but I doubt Ruth understood it that way. She accepted her place and knew she had no right to any kind of mercy in Israel, and:

2. she was humble enough to be thankful for the grace she was shown She did not share the animosity of her people toward Israel. She did not rail against the animosity and coldness that she surely must have felt from others. She simply fell on her face before Boaz with an attitude of thankfulness for him taking notice of her and helping her in a way that she had not expected from anyone. And:

3. she was insightful enough to inquire the reason for it, to ask him why, *Why are you treating ME, a foreigner, with such undeserved kindness?* What a humble unassuming heart she had! Paul had that same attitude. Looking back at his past, he wrote the Corinthians, *For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am... - 1 Cor. 15:9-10.* And to the Ephesians he wrote, *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ - Eph. 3:8.* In spite of his many accomplishments and his hard labor and his enduring of great suffering, Paul never forgot that he didn't deserve anything that he had received; any standing or status that he was given was purely by God's grace, just as Ruth's was. And that helps us realize that Ruth:

4. she is a picture of all of us non-Jews We were all foreigners and strangers. Look with me at **Eph. 2:11-12**. Do you realize Paul is talking about us! We are Gentiles; we had no part in the privileges that God gave to His people Israel through His promises to Abraham. We were Moabites - and Philistines and Germans and Italians and Indians and Chinese; we were strangers, aliens to God's people. Truly:

a. we were without God and without hope in the world, to me the saddest words in the Bible. We were just like the Yenadi in the villages of India or the Yanomami in the jungles of Brazil before missionaries and evangelists came to tell them about Jesus or like thousands of other unreached peoples are still today, without knowledge of the true God and without any hope at all for eternity. That was our corporate history; it IS our corporate history! It is the state of our people among whom we live, even though they do know information about God. Apart from Christ,

they are without hope and without God in the world, just as we personally were at one time. But look at verses **13, 19**. Hallelujah!

b. we have been made members of God's own people We've been grafted into God's people, even though we didn't belong and had no right to it. We've been taken into His household and given full status as His very children, sons and daughters, made part of His family. What God did for Ruth in taking her into His people and receiving her as a worshipper of His, He did for us, even though we didn't deserve it, even though we all sinned and fell short of the glory of God, even though there was nothing in us or about us that would merit Him giving His Son to save us! Now in verse 11 we have Boaz' answer to Ruth's question (**11**). In a small town like Bethlehem, everybody knows everything about everybody and Ruth was evidently the talk of the town. Boaz had never met her, but he had already been told the whole story of how:

II. Ruth Forsook Everything Native To Her and how behind it all:

1. her driving motive was love for her mother-in-law Now ladies, if your husband died, what would your deepest concern be? Your kids, I know, but if you didn't have any, like Ruth, would caring for your mother-in-law be at the top of your list? And even if you did feel the weight of having to care for her because there was no one else to do it, wouldn't you be more likely to fit her into the plans that you knew you had to make for yourself to survive? An ordinary person in Ruth's situation would have stayed in Moab, depended on their parents and sought remarriage there and maybe found a way to help Naomi in the process. But nobody forsakes everything to go follow her mother-in-law on a wild goose chase to an unpromising future! Everybody who saw what Ruth had done, saw the same thing, how much she loved her mother-in-law, Moabite or not! It was striking to them. For the love of Naomi:

2. she left every relationship she had in life including her family Her own mother and father had always been right there, had always been part of her life, even during the 10 years of marriage to Mahlon. Her brothers and sisters had been nearby and all their children. Her childhood friends, the other young wives in her village whom she met at the well every day, the older couples who helped her and her husband get started in married life, every last person who meant anything to her, she left behind and never expected to see them again. All for the love of Naomi! In fact:

3. she left everything associated with her native land. Any missionary can tell you that leaving your people to live among another is a difficult thing. It means speaking the rest of your life in a new language (or in this case a different dialect). It means eating someone else's traditional foods instead of what you like and following another culture's rules and expected behaviors rather than the ones you're familiar with. And some of those may be radically different. Israelites lived by a stringent set of laws. One day each week they didn't even work! Everybody had to celebrate seven festivals each year and give away a tithe of their yields to others. Ruth even left behind the worship of the gods that had been familiar to her since childhood, and to a Moabite that would have been a scary thing. What if Chemosh or Baal became angry? What would they do to me if I stop offering sacrifices to them? Everybody could see plainly the great price that Ruth had paid because of her love for Naomi! And she left it all without any assurance of what she was going to; she left it to come to a people that she did not know before, that she had no experience with. Essentially:

4. she did it entirely on faith, just like Abraham did. In **Gen. 12:1**, *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."* And **Heb. 11:8** comments, *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* Like Abraham, Ruth took a great leap of faith; she left behind everything that held any certainty for her to go to a land she'd never seen, to a people she'd never known except as enemies and to a God she had never prayed to. On all counts she was hoping against hope that this land, this people and this God would accept her but even if they didn't, she was willing to die trying to care for her mother-in-law in the process! Now in that respect, God has given us a great illustration in Ruth of the fact that:

5. Jesus expects us to forsake all to follow Him He said it very clearly in **Mat. 10:37-38**, *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* Jesus may not call us to move to a strange place and to physically leave everyone and everything familiar to us, but He still demands of us that same love. We are called to love Him supremely, above all else, so much that it supersedes our love for anything else, even our own families and even our very life itself. In the words of **Ps. 45:10-11**, *Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord!* The example of Ruth's great love for Naomi, her willingness to give up everything for her, encourages us to do the same for Jesus. And the great leap of faith she took is also what we must do. You see:

III. Ruth Sought Refuge In Jehovah, The God Of Israel Boaz continues in verse (**12**). There is the key phrase in this whole section, *...the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.* The King James says, *under whose wings you have come to TRUST.* That's what Ruth had done; she, a foreigner, had taken a leap of faith into the arms of Jehovah, the God of Israel. And so do we who were without God and without hope in the world. We take a leap of faith

into the arms of Jesus; we cast ourselves completely upon His mercy and grace. There are two beautiful metaphors here in Boaz' words that describe it. First, he says that:

1. God is our refuge and the word *refuge* has two shades of meaning. First of all, it can mean a place where protection is to be found, only in this case the protection is not a physical place but a person, God Himself.

a. He is the One we flee to in danger I probably shouldn't tell you this but when LuAnn was in her lower school years, her younger brother was a lot smaller and weaker than she was but he tended to have a big mouth and get himself in situations where kids wanted to beat him up. So, when he was in danger, he would come running to LuAnn because she was bigger and stronger and the other kids were afraid of her. She was his refuge, the one he ran to for protection. You know **Ps. 46:1**, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*. When we recognize that we are in danger, we run to Him because He is mightier than we are and He is always close by. But secondly, the reason you run to a refuge is because you trust in its ability to protect you. So, God:

b. He is the One we trust in to save us from destruction - Ps. 57:1 *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by*. Ruth ran to the God of Israel and placed her trust in Him to protect her from destruction. She rested in that protection. And that is exactly what we did when we first recognized that we were lost and in eternal danger; we ran to Jesus and trusted in Him to save us from that everlasting destruction. By faith we rested in the truth that His death for us on the cross took away the guilt of all our sins and saved us from the hell that awaited us. We have taken refuge in HIM! Then, just like the Psalmist, Boaz says in the same phrase that:

2. we seek refuge "under His wings" Now the metaphor is about birds and how a mother bird will use her broad wings to enfold her vulnerable, defenseless young underneath herself and keep them shaded from the harsh sun, warm in the cold night, dry in the rain and safe from all attackers. The wings most often referred to throughout the Old Testament are the wings of the eagle, the most powerful bird of prey, the strongest of all. Picture a nest of young eaglets, high on a cliff, gathered safely under the mighty wings of their mother. In the same way:

a. we trust that we are sheltered "under His wings" - Ps. 36:7 says, *How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings*. And I'm sure you know **Ps. 91**, *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty....He will cover you with his pinions [that is, the outer edges of his wings with the flight feathers], and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.* - **1,4**. Think how safe those helpless baby eagles feel and are in the shelter of their mother's wings; in the same way, as God's children we abide continually under His mighty protection. In fact, Jesus used a similar metaphor to show us that:

b. He desires to gather us "under His wings" Speaking to Israel, He said in **Mat. 23:37**, *...How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!* A mother hen does the same thing as a mother eagle; she uses her outstretched wings to sweep her chicks to shelter, to gather them underneath herself. She wants to protect them; she wants to keep them safe, but they keep trying to run out and explore the dangerous world on their own and she has to keep sweeping them back to the safety of her wings. So even more than we may want to run underneath the refuge of His wings, HE wants us there! He is constantly trying to keep us there trusting Him while we so often try to push outside and go our own way! But not Ruth, she ran to Israel and hid under Jehovah's wings, trusting her very life to His protection. What a beautiful way to put it! And in verse 12 Boaz assures us that:

3. God will fully reward our trust both in this life and eternity He will repay us for what we have done here out of love for Him and give us a full reward of glory in eternity. Just as God rewarded Ruth's leap of faith as we'll soon see in this story, so Jesus will reward ours both in this life and eternally.

Now in vs. 13 we have Ruth's response to Boaz **(13)** You see:

IV. Boaz Genuinely Accepted Ruth You have to realize that:

1. His words are Ruth's first assurance of acceptance by Israel and her God He is the first person she meets in Israel to receive her warmly, to speak kindly to her, to treat her with the same care as one of his own. And he is the first to tell her that the God of Israel wants her too, that she is acceptable to Him, that her huge leap of faith has not failed, that both Israel and God WILL have her because of her sincere heart. She says his words:

2. they comforted her and [literally] spoke to her heart. Her use of the word *comfort* gives us a hint of the great anxiety she must have had all these days of her trip and even as she went out to glean. "Will I be accepted? Will anyone receive me or will they all hate and despise me? Will anyone help me? Will Jehovah God want me?" And as Boaz speaks to her and answers yes to all of the above, you can just see all the anxiety drain away. She knows she is safe, she is protected, she will have food and she has found favor with God, even though she is a foreigner. Peace has come, just as it does to us when we realize that:

3. Christ genuinely accepts all who come to Him Look with me at **Jn. 6:37-40**. What assurance! It is the will of God the Father that you, the one who has come to Jesus for refuge, the one who has looked on the Son and believed in Him, should never be lost. It is His will that YOU should have eternal life, that you should rest securely under the shadow of His wings.

Queen Victoria of England once heard a sermon in St. Paul's Cathedral that greatly impressed her. Later she asked her chaplain, "Is it possible to be absolutely sure in this life of eternal safety?" He replied, "I know of no way that one could be absolutely sure." This incident was later published in the "Court News", widely circulated, and came to the attention of a minister of the gospel by the name of John Townsend. After much thought and prayer, he sent the following letter to the Queen: "To her gracious Majesty, our beloved Queen Victoria, from one of her most humble subjects. With trembling hands but love-filled heart, and because I know that we can be absolutely sure even now of our eternal life in the home Jesus went to prepare, I would ask you, Most Gracious Majesty, to read the following passages of Scripture: John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10. These passages prove there is full assurance of salvation by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ for those who believe and accept His finished work." Several days later Townsend received this note: "Your letter of recent date received, and in reply would state that I have carefully and prayerfully read the portions of Scripture referred to. I believe in the finished work of Christ for me and trust by God's grace to meet you in that home of which He said, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' (Signed) Victoria Guelph." Queen Victoria died on January 22, 1901 after a reign that lasted nearly 64 years! She was laid to rest beside Prince Albert in the Frogmore Royal Mausoleum at Windsor. Above the Mausoleum door is inscribed the following words from Victoria, "Farewell best friend, here at last I shall rest with thee, With thee in Christ I shall rise again." Are you resting in the finished work of Christ for you? Have you fled to Him for refuge and trusted Him to save you once and for all? Are you resting, assured and safe beneath His sheltering wings?

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Providence: "His Kindness Has Not Forsaken" - 2:19-23

The story of Ruth is short, but it is important not to be in a hurry to move through it too quickly because we miss the beautiful treasures that God has embedded in the midst of it for us to find. Last week we looked at Ruth's conversation with Boaz out in the field that first day when she went out to glean and there discovered the deep meaning of the trust she had come to place in God. Today we're going to focus on the conversation that Ruth had with Naomi that evening when she got home from gleaning all day. And the reason we're going to focus on it is that something occurred in that moment that is little short of amazing:

I. Naomi's Bitter Attitude Was Transformed By Ruth's First Day Blessing (18-19) Ruth arrived home that evening at the door of their humble abode carrying 3/5 of a bushel of barley in her shawl, about 30 lbs. worth. That in itself would have been reason to rejoice. Yet supper was still a long way off after roasting or even grinding the grain and baking a loaf. But when Ruth reached into her garment and pulled out the already-roasted and ready-to-eat leftovers from her noon meal, Naomi could hardly have asked for anything better. Someone quipped that it was the first fast-food meal in the Bible. Truth be told:

1. she was utterly amazed at what Ruth brought home to her She might have expected a pound or two of grain, enough to get by for the next day or two, but this was like a month's worth of grain. And this complete with an MRE (meal-ready-to-eat in military parlance)! She was shocked at the success Ruth had found and she immediately knew that:

a. it could only have been possible through someone's special generosity No ordinary day of gleaning could have yielded all this, so immediately she sensed that some field owner had seen Ruth, taken special notice of her need and been extremely generous with her, which is, of course, exactly what Boaz had done. That's why she blurts out, *Where on earth did you glean today, where have you worked to get all this?* And:

b. she naturally prayed God's blessing on the one who would do this *May God bless the man who would take such special notice of you and our need and help us in this way!* She didn't even stop to think about it; it came as natural as breathing. She asked God to bless and reward the one who had blessed them. But then Ruth innocently lets the other shoe drop, *The man's name was Boaz*. It would have been neat to be a fly on the wall that day to watch Naomi's reaction:

2. she was completely shocked at the mention of Boaz' name I'm sure her eyes got wide and her mouth hung open. Ruth had no idea that he was anyone special other than a kind man she'd met, but at the mention of his name, Naomi suddenly remembered what more than a decade of suffering in Moab had caused her to forget. "Boaz! Why didn't I remember him? How could I forget? I thought we were all alone here with no family to help us!"

a. she had forgotten him even though he was a close relative She explains to Ruth in **(20b)**. Boaz was of the same clan as Elimelech her husband, part of his extended family, according to verse 1, certainly not a brother, but perhaps a cousin or even a second cousin. However, the point for Naomi was not the specific relationship but rather the responsibility this relationship gave him:

b. she immediately recognized him as a goel, a redeemer who would have responsibility to care for them

You see, in Israel family was everything. There was no social security or disability system provided by the government. The closest relative had the responsibility to take care of those in need. If a man became poor and was sold for his debt, his nearest relative had an obligation to buy him back out of it or to redeem his property if it was sold.

Lev. 25:35 says, *If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.* And the first one with the responsibility to rescue and support him is the nearest relative, the goel, the redeemer. Boaz must have recognized that immediately when he learned who Ruth was. Yes, he was truly generous, but he also realized it was his God-given duty to do something to provide for these two poor widows who were his relatives. By the way, we still have a similar responsibility. Paul put it succinctly: *...if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* - 1 Tim. 5:8. And a few verses later in verse 16 he added, *If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.* The primary responsibility to care for a widow or for anyone in need falls first and foremost on their own family. The church has enough to do to help those who have no one to take care of them.

But there is something much deeper than that going on here. Look what Naomi says first when she hears the name Boaz (20a). In that instant a deep transformation took hold of Naomi. The bitter attitude she so openly held toward God for so long suddenly evaporated and she practically shouts, "Hallelujah! God has not forsaken me!!" What produced that? In that moment:

II. Naomi Suddenly Saw Clear Evidence Of The Providence Of God That's a word we don't use much anymore, though in colonial days in America the word Providence was virtually a synonym for God and was often used instead of His Name. Our Declaration of Independence concludes, *...with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.* Ben Franklin defined it succinctly at our Constitutional Convention when he said, *I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth - that God governs in the affairs of men.*

1. providence means that God sovereignly arranges all things to accomplish His good purpose and that includes, not only the rise and fall of nations, but even the events of our personal lives. It is a doctrine perhaps best stated in **Rom. 8:28** which says, *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose [NASB].* Even when we can't see Him, God is at work behind the scenes, in control of the scenes, arranging all things by His powerful hand. Even when our lives are flooded with misery and suffering, like that of Job or Naomi, God is right there, in control of it all, carrying out what He knows to be good, advancing His Kingdom. When everything looks so awfully wrong to us, so devastatingly bleak, God has all things right on track. And that's what Naomi suddenly saw:

2. Naomi realized that God had led Ruth to Boaz' field Verse (3) says, *she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz*, as though it was chance or fortune or luck or fate. But it was none of the above; it was GOD! It was a Divine happenstance, a Divine appointment or as we put it today, a God-thing! Of all the hundreds of fields surrounding Bethlehem, she landed on that one. The odds are completely against it, but using her thoughts and her legs and her vision and the road and the location and time and a dozen other factors, God SENT Ruth to that very field on that day just as surely as if He had commanded it out loud! That's what Naomi saw and, in the abundance of grain that lay on the floor:

3. Naomi recognized that God already had in place a way for her and Ruth to survive and protection for them She didn't think, "Look what Ruth did!" She thought, "Look what GOD DID! He sent us enough grain for weeks in one day!" And then Ruth went on in verses (21-22). And the bounty of this one day would now stretch into 2 full months of bounty. They would not starve! They would eat! They would have grain to sell and buy other necessities! They would not die but live and God had seen to it already! In fact, God had already taken care of her worst fear, that after losing everyone else in her life, something awful would happen to Ruth! But here God had arranged for her protection by putting her in the field of a mighty man of valor who was her close relative. No one in Bethlehem would dare to touch her! God had arranged everything. He gave Ruth the love in her heart and brought her to faith. He brought both of them safely back to Bethlehem. He gave them a place to stay. And now He gave them a way to live and protected them! She saw it all in an instant! She saw the hand of God clearly at work directing the circumstances of her life, but more than that:

III. Naomi Saw Fresh Evidence Of The Love Of God Through His Providence She says, *His KINDNESS has not forsaken the living or the dead!* That word kindness in English does not do justice to the meaning:

1. In Hebrew it is the word hesed which means **the steadfast love of the Lord for His people** It is the word used in **Ps. 103:17**, *...the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children.* It is the word repeated in every one of the 26 verses of Psalm 136, *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.* We sing it in the praise song: *His love endures forever!* It is used 241 times in the Old Testament and in the great majority of those verses it is ascribed to God Himself. In fact,

God repeatedly proclaims it of Himself as one of His own character qualities and it seems to have three facets of meaning which are always intertwined. First of all, it means that:

a. God cares about the well-being of His own Sometimes *hesed* is translated as *mercy*. God sees when His people are in trouble and suffering and He has mercy on them, He is deeply moved with compassion for them. He cares deeply about them, but it is always more than just an emotion or an attitude. *Hesed* means that:

b. God acts with His powerful might on behalf of His own He does something about their plight. God saw the suffering of His people in Egypt. He heard their groanings. He told Moses, "I have seen their oppression, I have heard their cry and I am doing something about it - I'm sending YOU to deliver them!" God is never a passive observer; when He sees His people in trouble He cares and He ACTS on their behalf. Now His acting doesn't always look like what WE want it to look like. Joseph was sold into slavery at 17. Joseph loved God and God loved Joseph but He didn't bail him out of slavery for 13 long years. Instead, He engineered a chain of circumstances that seemed to be getting worse but which actually thrust him into a position to rule all of Egypt and save his own family! God acts, He engineers, He controls all that happens to us with His sovereign power out of His deep caring for us. And here's the third part of *hesed*:

c. God is constant in His caring and acting; He never changes That's why the ESV translates it *steadfast love*. Love never stops, it never ceases, it never fails, it never runs out. It is always there, even when we can't see it, even when it is hidden by the dark shadows of our difficult circumstances. His love endures forever! You see:

2. in her suffering Naomi felt God had withdrawn His love from her That's what we learned when we looked at her earlier words: **1:13, 20-21**. "God hasn't gone away somewhere, He's still there. God isn't too weak to do anything about it, He's still powerful and sovereign. I still believe in Him and worship Him, but He has stopped loving me! He has stopped caring about me and stopped helping me. He has stopped being my Redeemer, the one who takes care of me!" But in that moment when she saw how God had arranged Boaz to care for them:

3. she suddenly understood that God did NOT stop loving (20) She exclaims, *God's steadfast love has not forsaken the living or the dead!* She suddenly saw that:

a. He continued to love the living (and by that she meant herself and Ruth) **by providing for them**. His love had a plan for their care all along and He was working on their behalf. Suddenly she had hope that there could be a future for her and for Ruth. But in that moment, she saw something else, something profound:

b. He also continued to love the dead (and by that she meant her deceased husband Elimelech, and her two sons Mahlon and Chilion who had died in Moab). She saw that He hadn't stopped loving them because they died as she thought; He still loved them **by caring for their loved ones**, the beloved widows they left behind! I can't help but think of our two dear friends, long time members of this church whom many of you knew, Gus and Esther Rufino. Their picture hangs fondly in our office. All their lives they prayed for their son who was not walking with the Lord; it was a deep burden on their hearts. They died without seeing it realized, but here sits Frank today in church having given his heart and life to Jesus! Of course, they're enjoying being in heaven with Him, but God has not stopped showing His steadfast love to them here on earth by working in the life of the son they left behind! That's what Naomi is saying! Even when we're gone from this world, His love for us and acting on our behalf continues. It never stops! But the best thing is this, once Naomi realized once again that God loved her:

4. God opened her eyes to a door of hope for the future that she hadn't been able to see previously (23-3:1) For two months Ruth went back to Boaz' fields every day to glean barley and then wheat and stored up provisions for them. But Naomi began to see something much deeper. When she had tried to send Ruth back to Moab there on the road, she was utterly convinced that she could never find a husband for Ruth in Israel, that no one would ever accept her and she had no more sons to marry her. Now she begins to see that Boaz himself is the answer to her prayers. He has the right to be the *goel*, the redeemer who marries the widow of the deceased, provides a home for her and raises up a son to carry on his name. The threads of a plan begin to come together in her mind. There is a future! It was there all the time, but she couldn't see it, couldn't even imagine it, because she believed the lie that God didn't love her any more and had stopped working on her behalf.

Don't ever believe that lie! It will blind you to God's providence, it will keep you from seeing His working in your life. Believe that His love for you is constant, that it is deep and that it is always at work on your behalf! *Morgan Roberts was the pastor of a church in Pittsburgh for many years. As a surprise birthday gift, he was given a boxer dog, which he named Churchill. The dog was always at his side and could be counted on to meet him at the door whenever he returned home. Roberts said, "He existed to be in my presence." The dog, of course, could not understand what Roberts was thinking or why he would leave to go to church meetings, or why he would feed him a certain way, or why he would take him for a walk at certain times but not at others. "As with God and man, so it is with man and dog," observed Roberts. "My ways were higher than his ways, and my thoughts were beyond the reach of his thoughts. Still, he probably thought that I existed for the sole purpose of caring for him and spending time with him, just as I often think that God's principal business is that of listen to me and taking care of me." Churchill had no way of understanding why his master let certain things hap-*

pen to him. Certainly, he wouldn't have been able to comprehend why Roberts would let the veterinarian stick needles in him. All the same, the boxer would enthusiastically jump into the van whenever it was time to take him in for his annual injection. After a number of years, Roberts took him to the vet for the last time. He had found out that the poor dog had incurable cancer. Churchill didn't know what was happening or why. With great difficulty, he shuffled out to the van and climbed in. His weakly wagging tail said that he was glad simply to be going on an outing with his master. He didn't know it would be their last ride together. Said Roberts, "He lived without answers. He did not know what was next. All he knew was what he had always known: he knew whose he was (mine) and that he was traveling with the master he loved (me)." All we need to know is whose we are and that we are traveling with our Master who loves us. [Clergy Journal, Feb. 1997. Page 35.] Dear ones, God loves you with His steadfast love and is working absolutely everything in your life together for good through His Divine Providence. Rest in that.

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Selflessness: "A Woman Of Noble Character" - 3:1-11

2:23 tells us that two whole months have gone by since Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem from Moab. Every day Ruth has gone out and gleaned in the fields of Boaz, first through the barley harvest, then through the wheat harvest, and brought home to Naomi an armload of grain. They have enough to make it through the summer and to trade for other things they need for now, but it's coming to an end. In the fall there will be the harvest of the fruits which Ruth could glean, but after that comes the long winter season with no crops, so their long term outlook is still bleak unless circumstances change. Over these months Naomi has clearly been thinking and pondering and praying about the future, yet at this point no visible answer has come, so as we enter chapter 3, we see that Naomi has developed a bold and daring plan and has now decided the time has come to carry it out (1-4). The scene that plays out in this chapter has three actors, Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, and as they act and react, the common characteristic that you'll notice about all three of them is selflessness. None of the three act out of their own interests or desires; every one of them seeks the good of others first and is willing to sacrifice personally to see it happen. In these verses we see:

I. Naomi's Selfless Care For Ruth Look again at (1):

1. she desired to seek a secure future for Ruth There's that word *rest* again, *menuchah*, a safe place, a secure place, a refuge. Naomi realized that she was probably at least 20 years older than Ruth and would in all probability die long before her. The only claim Ruth had to being treated well in this community was her tie to Naomi. If Naomi should die, Ruth would have no future at all. And in the world in which they lived, the only tangible security that a woman could have was to be found in marriage. Apart from the protection and provision of a husband or a male relative a woman had precious little hope of any kind of decent life and of avoiding being victimized. That's just the way it was. And Naomi realized that it was her responsibility to seek that security, not for herself, but for Ruth; it is not her own future that matters to her, but that of this precious daughter in law who has become a true daughter to her and loves her so deeply. Ruth cannot do this for herself and she has no father here to arrange it for her, so it falls to Naomi and she suggests this to Ruth (2a). What it means is that:

2. she sought to arrange Ruth's marriage to Boaz as a redeemer You see, in the law God had told Israel that:
a. the nearest relative is to marry the widow of a deceased relative and raise up a son for him to receive his inheritance. This is referred to as the law of Levirate marriage which we find in **Lev. 25:5-9** if you'll turn there and read along. Now this may seem repulsive to our 20th century mindset, but in a society where property is inherited only by males and passed down within the family, this was a procedure that guaranteed a male heir as well as a means of caring for the widow. It kept the property within the family to whom God had originally assigned it. And you'll find that it was not only practiced in Israel, but it has been practiced in many tribal societies throughout the world, including the Kyrgyz and it was commonly practiced in India even down to the recent past, just to mention two places where we are engaged. Now this duty was assigned to the husband's brother, but it is obvious that by the time of Ruth, in the absence of an actual brother it had been extended further to the nearest male relative (in Hebrew, the *goel*, the redeemer). So in Naomi's eyes, this is a duty that would fall to Boaz. Since she herself was probably past childbearing, it would be his duty to marry Ruth, buy back Elimelech's family property and hopefully produce a son to inherit it. Now notice one more thing in the passage we read:

b. the woman has the legal right to demand this if the man hesitates If he won't marry her, she can go to the elders at the gate and get them to pressure him to do it and if he still won't, she can publicly shame him before the whole town. She has a right to this marriage, to this redemption, and she has the privilege to demand it. This is what Naomi is counting on. Boaz has been kind and generous and provided but he has not stepped up and offered to do what the Law commands, so in her thinking Ruth must demand it of him and:

3. she devised a bold plan to accomplish this Notice three things in verses (2b-4). First of all:
a. Ruth is to put off widow's garb indicating she is ready to marry Normally, we might think that Ruth is being told to dress attractively or even alluringly, but that's not really the case. In ancient cultures widows often dressed as widows for long periods after the death of their husbands, perhaps even the rest of their lives. Even in Victorian

England widows wore black for an entire year. Naomi was telling her to put aside the outward indications of her widowhood, to anoint herself and dress normally as an indication that her time of mourning was complete and that she was now ready to marry again. Secondly:

b. she is to approach Boaz in the absolute privacy of night Think about it. When is she supposed to talk to him? In front of all his workers in the field where she will seem to be trying to advance her own case. Boaz has a house in town. He's got servants. In fact, though we often assume that he is single, in Jewish culture it's very probable that Boaz already had a wife and even children. He would be an odd duck if he didn't. Old Testament culture never endorsed multiple wives and it shows the inherent dangers of it but it was neither forbidden nor uncommon. To Boaz this might have been a request to take a second wife so another woman can't simply go and knock on his door and propose marriage! Yet somehow through the town social networking opportunities Naomi learns that Boaz is winnowing grain today and knows he'll sleep on the threshing floor in the field tonight. After all are asleep, he can be approached privately without anybody being witness to the event and making assumptions and giving him opportunity to answer honestly without any pressures. Thirdly:

c. she is to approach him in the humble posture of a servant To wait until he's asleep, uncover his feet and lie down below them as a servant would. She is not to come demanding her rights, pressuring him to what he ought, but humbly letting him know that SHE is requesting him to do it.

Now you can't argue with the fact that Naomi's plan was bold! It was gutsy, risky, even dangerous. And like they say on all the reality shows, "DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME!" It is not something to be imitated; this is not God's intended method for procuring a husband, young ladies, but in that time under those circumstances, it just might work! What's even more incredible to me than the plan is the fact that Ruth agreed to do it! **(5-6)** She did what Naomi told her to do, do you believe it? To the letter! Now let's concentrate on looking at:

II. Ruth's Selfless Obedience To Naomi Think what this means from Ruth's standpoint. First it means that:

1. she relinquished all personal choice in the matter of marriage Granted in her culture parents arranged all marriages anyway, but usually the daughter at least got SOME say in it. Naomi told her to marry a man who is probably 20 years her senior, likely old enough to be her father and maybe one who already has another, older wife! Yes, he may have been kind and generous, but even he himself is greatly surprised in verse 10 that she did not go after a husband her own age. Second, following Naomi's instructions meant:

2. she was willing to risk her reputation if she was seen or misunderstood What if someone saw her sneaking in to lie down by Boaz at night? What would they think? Surely, they would say, "Ah, I knew that Moabite woman would act like all Moabite women act sooner or later! They all seduce their men!" Or for that matter, what would Boaz think? What if he wakes up to her lying there and thinks she is offering herself to him sexually? What if he, as a godly man, misunderstands her intentions, drives her away and castigates her as an immoral woman before everyone to show how pure and righteous he is? But then, what if he reacted just the opposite?

3. she was willing to trust Boaz to act honorably in a vulnerable situation Here they are alone in the dark of night, lying next to each other, and her proposing marriage. What if he is overcome with desire and reaches out for her and they violate God's command? Oh, he'd have to marry her then according to the law, but everyone would assume it was because she came to him to offer sexual favors! She had to bank on the fact that he would listen to her and understand her and believe that she was making an honorable request of him. That's a big gamble! And then what if she goes through all this and he does listen and understand but simply says "No!"

4. she was willing to risk Boaz being unwilling to marry her What if he won't marry her because he's already married and his wife will kill him or because she's a Moabite and he doesn't want to defile himself or because he thinks she's after his money or etc., etc., etc. If he says no, she'll be humiliated for having put herself out there in such a flagrant way and have to live with the rejection of knowing she just wasn't good enough for him to want her. What a pile of risks, what a huge stake is riding on this gutsy plan of Naomi's, but she simply says, "Yes" and does it all without question. Why?

5. she did it all out of love for Naomi She didn't do it for herself. She didn't risk all this to get herself a secure future. She did it to get NAOMI a secure future! When Boaz responds in verse 10, he says, *You have made this last kindness [this last hesed, this last act of steadfast love] greater than the first!* What does that mean? He's talking about her love for Naomi! Her first act of love was to come with her back to Bethlehem and gleaning to provide for her. Here second act of love was to choose to marry him for her sake, so that she would be taken care of in the process as a relative, rather than running off to marry some young handsome guy outside the family! She risks it all for Naomi. This is not some romantic meeting; Ruth is sacrificing herself and her future to care for Naomi! She's doing something she may not have wanted at all to do, may have been terrified to do, to secure a future for her mother-in-law! Now at verse 7 we read the details of:

III. Ruth's Courageous Approach To Boaz (7-9) All goes according to plan. She hides by the threshing floor. Nobody sees her. She creeps over to where Boaz is sacked out, lies down and uncovers his feet. And, sure enough, he wakes up and is startled by her presence, but once reassured in the darkness that it's her, he listens to what she says. There is a beautiful play on words in the Hebrew here:

1. she literally requested him to spread his "wing" over her. The term used for the outer edge of a wing is also used to mean the corner of a garment. She's asking him to spread his garment over her, to take her under his protective wing, just as he had earlier mentioned that she had come to take refuge under the wings of God! Listen to what God says about the nation Israel in Ez. 16:8, *When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment [my wing] over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine.* Boaz knew this was a clear request, not to sleep with him, but for him to marry her, but she added to that, *for you are a redeemer...* It was more than an offer of herself as a wife:

2. she requested him to fulfill his duty as a goel which also involved buying back Elimelech's property and trying to raise up a son to inherit it in his name. That was a heavy responsibility. It meant spending a potentially large sum of money for something that would never be his own, but would always belong to a son that he fathered and yet would be regarded as the son of another man. It was a challenge, a call to an act of sacrifice that was equal to her own. And Boaz rose to the challenge! Look at:

IV. Boaz' Wonderful Response To Ruth (10-11) He is not put off and repulsed. He does not misunderstand:

1. he sees her actions as righteous before the Lord He doesn't think she's trying to seduce him or take advantage of him. He prays a blessing on her because she's acting in a godly way in asking him to do this rather than going off trying to find a young handsome husband to please herself! And rather than being flattered by his own ego:

2. he recognizes the sacrifice she is making for her mother-in-law He knows she isn't asking this because she is smitten with love for him and can't help herself. He knows she's doing this because she loves her mother-in-law! He perceives the whole thing exactly right, and, just like Naomi and Ruth, he acts selflessly. He doesn't think about what it will cost him or how it might upset his life or what people will think. All he cares about is what's right before God and what will help others. Right away:

3. he calms her fears and promises to do his complete duty toward her "I'll do it!" You can just hear her sigh of relief. She now has a guarantee, a word of promise from a man she knows she can trust that her future will be secure. But that's not the point; look at that last line, *all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman*:

4. he declares her to be a woman of noble character [NIV], a *chayil*, a woman of valor, just as he himself is called a *worthy man*, a mighty man of valor, in 2:1. In God's eyes and in the whole town's eyes, she is what he is, a person of great virtue! Interestingly, the other place we find that word used of a woman is in **Prov. 31**, if you'll turn there with me. This is God's portrait of a virtuous woman, a wife of noble character. Look at verses **10, 29**. The woman Solomon describes is the greatest sort of woman, the most excellent kind, and if you read the text in between, what is the characteristic that makes her noble and virtuous? It is that she is selfless like Ruth. She does her husband good; she makes clothes and buys food for her family; she works hard and helps the poor and the needy. Her actions are always for others, not for herself! Selflessness: that's what makes a person noble and virtuous and excellent and honorable in God's eyes!

And that's the noble quality God wants to develop in you. Paul admonishes us: *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* - Phil. 2:3-4. And then he goes on to tell us that we should have the very mind of Christ, who did not hold onto privilege for Himself but made Himself nothing and went to the cross for us. THAT Christ-like selflessness is excellence in God's eyes! In Ernest Gordon's true account of life in a World War II Japanese prison camp, *Through the Valley of the Kwai*, there is a story about a man named Angus McGillivray. When he died, the news of Angus McGillivray's death spread throughout the camp. No one could believe big Angus had succumbed. He was strong, one of those whom they had expected to be the last to die. Actually, it wasn't the fact of his death that shocked the men, but the reason he died. Finally, they pieced together the true story. The Scottish soldiers took their buddy system very seriously. Their buddy was called their "mucker," and these Scottish soldiers believed that it was literally up to each of them to make sure their "mucker" survived. Angus's mucker, though, was dying, and everyone had given up on him, everyone, of course, but Angus. He had made up his mind that his friend would not die. Someone had stolen his mucker's blanket. So, Angus gave him his own, telling his mucker that he had "just come across an extra one." Likewise, every mealtime, Angus would get his rations and take them to his friend, stand over him and force him to eat them, again stating that he was able to get "extra food." Angus was going to do anything and everything to see that his buddy got what he needed to recover. But as Angus's mucker began to recover, Angus collapsed, slumped over, and died. The doctors discovered that he had died of starvation complicated by exhaustion. He had been giving of his own food and shelter. He had given everything he had -- even his very life. The ramifications of his acts of love and unselfishness had a startling impact on the compound. As word circulated of the reason for Angus McGillivray's death, the feel of the camp began to change. Suddenly, men be-

gan to focus on their mates, their friends, and humanity of living beyond survival, of giving oneself away. They began to pool their talents and help one another instead of living every man for himself, struggling to survive. The place was transformed; an all but smothered love revived, all because one man named Angus gave all he had for his friend. For many of those men this turnaround meant survival. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12). [Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat*, 1987, Word Books Publisher, pp. 146-147.] Naomi laid down her future to provide security for Ruth. Ruth laid down her future to save Naomi. And Boaz laid down himself to honor God and to rescue both of them. All three looked not on their own things, but on the things of others. They displayed in advance the very attitude of Jesus Christ. But you've seen what they couldn't, the greatest act of selflessness the world has ever known. Jesus laid down His life for you so that you could do the same for others in radical ways that He can use to change the world. Are you willing?

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Integrity: "The Man Will Not Rest" - 3:12-18

At this point in the story Boaz comes into the spotlight and becomes the main actor. Naomi gave Ruth a daring plan to request Boaz to redeem her through marrying her and buying back her property. She has gone to him in the night as he slept on the threshing floor, awakened him and privately called upon him to fulfill his duty to her. Now the ball is in his court. He must choose what he will do and in verse 11 he says he will do it. As I read what Boaz said and did in the verses that follow, the word that jumps out at me that best describes him is integrity. Simply defined in Christian terms, *integrity is the unwavering commitment to do what God declares to be right, no matter what*. The Bible regularly uses a different word that means the same thing: *righteousness*. Boaz was a righteous man, a person of integrity, and the kind of person that God would have all of us to be. As Boaz responds to Ruth in the dark of that night, his integrity shines brightly as an example to us in at least three different ways. First, Boaz illustrates for us that:

I. A Person Of Integrity Refuses To Neglect God's Commands (12-13) Just when you think that all has gone well, that Naomi and Ruth's risky plan has paid off and the happy ending is in sight, we find out that there is:

1. the glitch in Naomi's plan: there was a relative nearer than Boaz, another man who would be first in line to serve as a redeemer. Boaz says, "I will do it, BUT..." You can just see Ruth's heart sink and hear her sigh of anguish as she finds this out. We don't know whether Naomi had forgotten about this other relative or whether she simply knew that Boaz was a better man and hoped that he would forge ahead and marry Ruth without regard for the other guy. But that is exactly where Boaz' integrity shines:

2. Boaz refused to neglect the rightful claim his relative had According to the law in Israel, the closest relative had the responsibility and the privilege to redeem. By rights, Naomi sent Ruth to the wrong man and Boaz knew that the right thing to do was to inform his relative of the situation and offer him the opportunity to be the redeemer first and:

a. he allowed neither his nor Ruth's desires to deter him from it Of course it seems clear that this is not what Boaz wants to do. His first response to her is like a "Praise the Lord!" statement. He is genuinely glad that she has made this offer of marriage to him. And I don't know where this other guy has been for the past two months, but Boaz said the whole town knew about Ruth and her situation and regarded her as a woman of noble character. Surely, he hadn't missed that but he didn't step forward to help in any way. And I'm sure the mention that there was another man who had a right to marry her must have struck fear into the heart of Ruth. Even if she wasn't excited about marrying Boaz, at least she knew his kind heart and his love for the Lord and trusted him. She wanted him, not the other guy, but integrity does not let feelings get in the way. A person of integrity does what's right whether he or she feels like it or not and whether any other party feels they should or not. In fact, Boaz' integrity was such that:

b. he was willing to lose Ruth in order to do what was right If the other guy wanted to redeem her he said, "That is well and good." In other words, "It is right and proper and we have to accept that - even if it's not what we want!" You know, it's one thing to lose some money or some material thing because you choose to do what's right, but to lose someone you want to marry? To just hand her over to the other guy (who might be a schmuck!) on a platter, as it were, and stand by and watch, just because it's right? That's painful, but that's integrity! But on the other hand, just as Boaz refused to neglect this relative's rights:

3. Boaz also refused to neglect the rightful claim that Ruth had. We like romantic stories and always try to make this into one, but we can't truthfully presume to know the feelings and the thoughts that Boaz or Ruth had from the information we're given. It is possible that the exact opposite was true. Maybe marrying Ruth and buying back the land was a hard thing for Boaz; maybe it was something he really DIDN'T want to do. Maybe he already had a wife and this would really upset his apple cart! Maybe he liked life as it was and just didn't want to see it disrupted with a new wife and a hoped-for baby. We can't know for sure, but in any event, Boaz recognized that Ruth had a right to demand this redemption and:

a. he assured her strongly that he would fulfill his obligation He said it verbally twice in verses 11 and 13, "I will do it!" and he sealed his promise with an oath before the living God. I think he was assuring her that he was not

simply trying to get out of his obligation by shoving it off on the other relative. He knew that this was the right thing to do before God and was committed to do it, whether he wanted to or not, if the other was not willing. And in the process:

b. he assured her that he would immediately present her claim to the other relative He does not say to her, "You're asking the wrong guy. Go check with Joe and if he refuses, come back to me." He actually takes up her case for her. He intimates that he will find out for her the very next morning so that one way or the other she WILL get the help she has requested. Boaz was a man of integrity and:

4. we are called to follow his example and do the right thing whether we want to or not, whether we feel like it or not. James admonishes us: *So, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. - Jas. 4:17.* Ray Floyd is a professional golfer who has won numerous tournaments and four major titles on both the PGA Tour and Champions Tour. He was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 1989. On one occasion, as he was getting ready to tap in a routine 9 inch putt, he saw the ball move ever so slightly. According to the rule book, if the ball moves in this way the golfer must take a penalty stroke. Now on this day Floyd was among the leaders in a tournament that offered a top prize of \$108,000. To acknowledge that the ball had moved could mean he would lose his chance at big money. Others might have scanned the crowd to see whether anyone had noticed and simply tapped it in, but Ray Floyd didn't do that. He assessed himself a penalty stroke and wound up with a bogey on the hole. What would you have done? That's integrity, doing what is right because you know it is the right thing to do, even if nobody else will ever know the difference. God will.

Now secondly, in this passage Boaz illustrates for us that:

II. A Person Of Integrity Refuses Sexual Immorality (14) Now try and picture this situation. The two of them were totally alone in the dark, lying close to one another. She is much younger, perhaps beautiful, and smells freshly washed and anointed with oil. She asked him to marry her by saying, *Spread the corner of your garment over me...* Her whole future depends on him wanting her. I think it's safe to say that:

1. Boaz and Ruth were probably sorely tempted to cement their relationship right then and there in a sexual act. Boaz says, *Lie down until morning.* And look where she lays, not beside him or with him but *at his feet!* Why? **They both refused to violate God's command.** They knew it was wrong to have sex without being married and they thought, "We will wait until we are legitimately married." They didn't even consider giving in to temptation. They were people of integrity **like Joseph.** He was alone in Potiphar's house that morning. Potiphar's wife had been openly propositioning him for weeks, saying "Sleep with me!" Now she is literally starting to tear his clothes off and you have to know that this must have been tempting to him. He's a young, handsome, virile man but he's a slave. He has no wife. He's never had an opportunity like this. Surely his hormones are racing, but he says, *[My master] is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" - Gen. 39:9.* Wow! What a man of integrity! Not only would he not betray his master, but he saw clearly that this was great wickedness and a sin against God Himself, just as Boaz and Ruth did! Then notice in v. 14 that:

2. Boaz was concerned to protect Ruth's person and her reputation He could not send her back to town in the middle of the night alone without a light. It was not safe for her, so he kept her there to protect her. And yet he made sure that they got up very early and she left before anyone saw her in order to protect her reputation. He did not want her intentions misunderstood. He did not want her thought of as a harlot, an immoral woman. He did not want to risk any stain on her noble character, any appearance of evil, even if it wasn't accurate. Notice that he was focused on her well-being, not the satisfaction of his own needs. Both he and Ruth are people of integrity and:

3. we are called to follow their example and refuse sex outside of marriage Now we live in a culture that puts the thought of sex before us in every TV commercial, where having sex without being married is the norm, not the exception. We live in a time when I end up having to explain to young couples that having sex without being married is wrong before God; they don't know because nobody has ever told them that! We used to have a name for it in the King James. We called it fornication but nobody even recognizes the word any more. So let me say it clearly that to have sex with somebody you are not married to, whether it is before marriage, outside of marriage or with no thought of marriage, is morally wrong, sinful and wicked before God. Now inside the bond of marriage it is blessed, beautiful, immensely pleasurable and one of the deepest connections that two human beings can have. But God is wise enough to know that without that permanent life commitment, it can create the deepest wounds and scars a human being can carry, and he forbids it. The city of Corinth in Paul's day was a terribly immoral place, probably even more so than our culture. Sexual immorality of every description abounded and flourished; it was normal. That's why Paul made it so clear to the Corinthians that:

a. we're commanded to flee it for God's sake - 1 Cor. 6:18-20 The Greek word is *porneia*, which should sound familiar, and it meant everything from religious cult prostitution to homosexual acts and bestiality. It would certainly include pornography, whether internet or movie or paper types, adultery and simple casual sex. If it is not inside a committed marriage relationship, God says "Run away from it! Treat it like you found a bomb about to go off and

run for your life!", not "see how close you can get to it without crossing the line!" Young people, please hear what God is saying. Your body belongs to God; it is His and He says, "Follow the example of Ruth and Boaz and WAIT until you're married. Save yourself for that one whom you will be with for life! You'll be glad you did! And if you find yourself tempted, just say "NO" and run away from it; get yourself out of that situation!" And let me add this: young men, YOU should be like Boaz and be the one to protect the honor of the young lady and preserve her purity, not trying to take advantage of her for your own pleasure like so many of your buddies! I know it's not easy; I know that drive inside you is strong, but remember this:

b. God has promised to help us resist temptation - 1 Cor. 10:13 You are not the only one! We all face sexual temptation, but God is always there with you. He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to resist by His power. He will give you the strength to say "No!" and He will always make a way of escape for you, a way out of the situation. And so often that way out is the verb in verse 14. Flee! Run away! Get out of the situation. Get out of the relationship if you're being pressured. God will help you to be a person of sexual integrity if you really want Him to. And then I want to be sure to give a word of comfort along with it:

c. God will forgive those who have fallen in this area - 1 Cor. 6:9-11 *Such were some of you....* If you have fallen, if you have crossed the line, God will forgive you. God will wash you. God can make you holy if you ask Him. You can't undo the past, but you can start over again right now, be cleansed of your sin and walk forward in holiness, purity, integrity, from this point on.

And lest you have trouble believing that, just look at the last verse of the book, 4:21. Boaz' father, or more likely his grandfather or perhaps great-grandfather was Salmon, one of the spies Joshua sent into the city of Jericho. And Mt. 1:5 tells us that Salmon was married to Rahab. Rahab was a prostitute who sheltered the spies because of her new found faith in the God of Israel. James calls her a *pornee* (2:25) but proclaims that she was justified before God. Her works proved her faith. In whichever generation she actually was, God used a woman He rescued from a life of prostitution to shape the integrity of not only a man named Boaz, but to have him pass it on down to a King named David and ultimately to have the honor of being in the lineage of Jesus Christ Himself. God is a god of second chances who, instead of rubbing your nose in your sins the rest of your life, lets you start over again clean right where you are. Hallelujah! Now lastly, in this passage Boaz illustrates for us that:

III. A Person Of Integrity Keeps His Promise (15-18) Somehow Boaz realized that this whole plan was not Ruth's doing, but Naomi's, so:

1. Boaz sent Ruth home to Naomi with a large present The Hebrew doesn't specify what size of measure is meant, but most interpreters think it was a *seah*, which is 1/3 of an *ephah*. Therefore:

a. six measures of grain was probably 60 lbs. worth. It was **all she could carry** and note that it says that Boaz lifted it up and put it on her, that is her head or shoulder. It was a huge amount, twice as much as she had gleaned and brought home on her first day. Now why did he do that? Because somehow:

b. it communicated to Naomi the depth of commitment behind his words He did not want Ruth to go home to her mother-in-law empty handed with merely a verbal promise. He sent something tangible, the biggest thing he could give as a sign to her that he meant what he promised Ruth. And Naomi understood the message; look what she says in verse 18, *the man will not rest*, he will not forget and he will not stop until he has settled this. He is a man of integrity, a man you can trust to keep his word.

2. Naomi was convinced he would keep his promise without delay She knew he would not neglect it and not put it off but would pursue it right away. And that's exactly what he did (**4:1a**). While Ruth was walking back home to Naomi with her heavy load, Boaz was walking to the gate of Bethlehem. While Ruth was talking to Naomi, at that very moment Boaz was talking to the elders of the city, keeping his promise. Boaz was a man of integrity who did what he said he would do and:

3. we are called to follow his example and keep our promises James tells us that:

a. we should always mean what we say *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. -*

Jas. 5:12. In other words, when you say "yes", when you make a promise or a commitment, make sure you mean what you say and carry it out. You shouldn't have to swear an oath to prove it like the pagans do. And when you say "no", "I will not!", then don't. Speak the truth. Mean what you say like Jesus did, like Boaz did. And when we do make a promise, like Boaz:

b. we should not intentionally delay fulfilling it - Prov. 3:27-28 says, *Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it"—when you have it with you.* Now sometimes the commitment you make you can't fulfill right away. It may involve a goal that you have to save for or work toward over time. But when you have the power to keep your commitment

right now, don't put it off, don't delay on purpose out of reluctance. Do what you said you'd do! And do it as soon as you can.

In his book *Up From Slavery* Booker T. Washington describes meeting an ex-slave from Virginia: "I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the effect that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body; and while he was paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labor where and for whom he pleased. Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom came, he was still in debt to his master some three hundred dollars. Notwithstanding the fact that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater portion of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands. In talking to me about this, the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay his debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise." [Douglas E. Moore] That's the kind of integrity Boaz had. He kept his word. He kept himself pure. And he did what was right whether he felt like it or not. I want to be a person of integrity like Boaz. How about you?

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Redemption: "You Are Witnesses" - 4:1-10

At the beginning of chapter 4, we come to what seems to our western minds to be the most boring part of the book, but is in actuality the very crux of the whole story. Boaz is a *goel*, a near relative who is a redeemer and this is where his redemption is accomplished; this is the record of how Boaz actually redeems! The point of the whole book is expressed really well in verse 17 where the women of Bethlehem say to Naomi, *God has not left you without a redeemer!* In spite of all the suffering which Naomi's family endured and all the hopelessness they felt, God did not leave them without a redeemer in the end! And here he is in the very act of redeeming. Then of course, when we study this as believers, we can't help but see in this story a glorious picture of OUR Redeemer, Jesus Christ Himself, but we'll save that until we look at the details of the story. First notice:

I. The Setting Of The Redemption (1-2) The redeeming was done at:

1. the city gate Why? Because this was **the place of public transactions**. Bethlehem did not have a courthouse building or a township office. By the gate of the city, through which so many of its people would pass every day to their fields or flocks, there was an open area where public transactions took place, where court was held, where appeals were made and judgments handed down, where transactions were officialized. So, early in the morning Boaz, as one of the influential men of the city, took a seat in the gate and one by one as the elders of the city began to pass by, he hailed them and asked them to sit with him for an official purpose. Why? These 10 men served as:

2. the witnesses They were **the means of official ratification**. This was an era before the use of deeds and documents. There was no paper and scrolls were not yet common. The notary public of that day was literally the public itself, represented by ten of its most respected members. They certified that there would be an official public memory of the transaction that took place. And as Boaz was sitting there, he also hailed:

3. the relative as he passed by, the other potential redeemer that he spoke of to Ruth. He calls out to him literally, *Turn aside "so and so" and sit here*. No name is given. Why? Boaz certainly knew his name and surely didn't simply say, "Hey YOU!" But the author who wrote down this story deliberately left out the man's name and referred to him as "so and so", avoiding his actual name. I think it is because this man selfishly refused to do his duty as a redeemer to perpetuate Elimelech's name, so the author refused to perpetuate his name. It seems somehow extremely ironic that here we sit 3,000 years later and a world away and we know the name of Elimelech, but this relative who was so concerned about preserving his own inheritance has been for all these centuries **the man with the unremembered name**. Next let's look at:

II. The Means Of The Redemption in verses (3-6). But first let me help you understand something that we don't realize. Who is:

1. the person in need of redemption? Our western minds shout, "Ruth! Naomi! They're the ones that need rescued and a future provided for them!" But in Hebrew thinking it is neither Ruth nor Naomi who is being redeemed. It is **Elimelech (3)**. Note that redemption involved **A Purchase**, a buying back. But Naomi isn't selling the property itself; Elimelech had already sold it to someone else before they left for Moab a decade earlier. She's selling the right to redeem the property, the family's right to buy it back. You see, in Israel, property, the land itself, was a sacred trust given by God. Elimelech is the one whose God-given property has fallen into the hands of a stranger and will be taken away from the family forever once Naomi has died. Elimelech is the one who has no son, no posterity to inherit his land and continue his line. In Hebrew thinking, even though he's dead, Elimelech is the one who is just a hair's breadth from having everything of enduring meaning about his life be swept away into oblivion unless somebody rescues it by redeeming both his land and his line. This is what Boaz is proposing to do. First of all:

2. it required the redemption of Elimelech's property (4) Boaz makes Mr. No Name aware of his opportunity and responsibility to buy back the land. By paying the current landholder a purchase price, the land would revert back to Elimelech's family as represented in the redeemer. And, unexpectedly, the relative says, "Yes, I will redeem it; *I will restore all that belonged to Elimelech to the hands of his family*". It is in the hands of another and will soon be lost permanently but the redeemer will buy it back and restore the possession to its rightful owner. This the man is prepared to do, primarily because that means that when Naomi dies, it becomes his permanently to pass on to his own children! So whatever money he lays out, he ultimately gets the benefit of; he is in effect probably doubling his own inheritance. But Boaz masterfully waited to share that there was a catch. Redeeming the property was not enough by itself. To serve as a redeemer:

3. it required the redemption of Elimelech's posterity (5) Elimelech's line was not yet beyond the possibility of rescue. Naomi was too old to have children, but his son Mahlon's wife, Ruth, was not. Through her there was the possibility that a son could be born to Elimelech and to Mahlon through the family redeemer marrying her. To redeem is to say, "*I will raise up a son to perpetuate Elimelech's name on his property.*" He will not be forgotten; his family will not die out in Israel. I will marry his son's wife and have a son who will not be called mine but will be called by his name and who, when he is of age, will be given the property that belonged to his father and grandfather! Well, the land was one thing, but now we have:

4. the refusal of the relative to redeem (6) Suddenly there is a change of heart, a change of attitude. At the mention of having to marry Ruth, he is no longer willing to be a redeemer. Why? Well, some have said that he was obviously already married and didn't want trouble at home or that he wasn't willing to marry a foreigner. But the reason he himself gives is that it would spoil or ruin his own inheritance. Think about it. He already owns one field. If he has the money to buy Naomi's field back, he'll have two fields. He just has to support her until she's gone, then he's got twice as much to leave to his own children. But if he marries Ruth and produces a son, he'll put out all that money and when the son comes of age it will be his so he'll effectively LOSE probably half of what he has now and have much less to leave to his children. In other words, it seems to be a financial decision made on selfish grounds. But Boaz doesn't care that his relative said "No"; he's glad of it. He stands ready to redeem and now, there in front of the witnesses at the town gate he is ready to carry out:

III. The Sealing Of The Redemption (7-10) In later centuries a paper deed or contract would be written and a blob of wax would be placed on it and his own seal would be pressed into the wax, in effect making it an official signature. But at this early date transactions were all done verbally and visually. First came:

1. the symbolic action: the handing of the sandal (7-8) The sandal symbolized walking on the land which symbolized ownership. It probably stems from God's repeated promise to Israel, *Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours...* [Deut. 11:24, Josh. 1:3, 14:9]. When No Name took off his sandal and handed it to Boaz he was symbolically saying, "I officially give you the right of ownership, the right of redemption that is mine." Then the symbol was followed by:

2. the public proclamation (9-10) He tells them all: "***you are witnesses that I have redeemed!*** I am paying the money for the land and I am taking Ruth as my wife, right now, in your presence. I call you all to attest to the truth of what I am saying and doing right now! I have redeemed Elimelech and you are my signature to verify it!"

And with those words the great transaction was done. Redemption was accomplished for Elimelech and his family. Their property was bought back out of alien hands and the promise of posterity to come established. But what's most important here is not the rescue of one family in Bethlehem; rather it is:

IV. The Picture Of OUR Redemption that this story so beautifully revealed ahead of time. You see, just as Elimelech's inheritance needed to be redeemed:

1. WE were God's inheritance in need of redemption In Eph. 1:18 Paul prays that *...the eyes of your hearts [be] enlightened, that you may know... what are the riches of HIS glorious inheritance in the saints*. God has an inheritance! He has a wonderful possession that belongs by right to Him. And that possession is US! But through the famine of sin, we sold ourselves to another master; we became part of the kingdom of darkness ruled by Satan, the prince of this world, walking in the ways and the patterns he had established. We were in his hands and under his dominion but we were not rightfully his. We belonged to God and God wanted back what was rightfully his so He sent a Redeemer, His own Son, to rescue us! Now, not just anyone can be a redeemer. A redeemer must be a near relative, part of the same family in order to have the right to redeem. So, we read in Hebrews that:

2. Christ was QUALIFIED to be our Redeemer Look with me at Heb. 2:14-15, 17. He had to be made like us. He had to take on flesh and blood and become one of our human family so that He would qualify to rescue us from Satan's grip by paying the price for us. And out of that comes the Christmas miracle, the Divine Son of God taking to himself a human body in the womb of a virgin and being born as a man who is our very Brother, so He could be our Redeemer. He was eminently qualified to redeem us but being qualified is not enough. The nameless relative in the story

was qualified to be a redeemer but he was not willing to be one! A redeemer must WANT to redeem, must CHOOSE willingly to redeem. Aren't you glad that:

3. Christ was WILLING to be our Redeemer You remember Paul's words about Christ in **Phil. 2:6-8**, *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* Like Boaz, Jesus was selfless. He did not count his position and privilege as God in heaven something to be selfishly grasped for his own benefit. He emptied Himself! He set it all aside and let go of it to become a human being in order to redeem us. And even then, He did not seek any earthly prominence or advantage but humbled himself and gave up everything he had, even his very life in order to redeem us. He said, *no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord!* - **Jn. 10:18**. Oh, praise God, He was willing! When the opportunity was before Him, like Boaz He said, "Yes, I will redeem!" And then just as Boaz had to pay a large price to redeem Elimelech's inheritance, so:

4. Christ PURCHASED our redemption, but not with money. Look with me at **1 Pet. 1:18-19**. Christ redeemed us **with His own blood**. The *ransom*, the purchase price which could set us free from the bondage in which sin had enslaved us, was beyond the reach of gold or silver. It required the sacrifice of a perfect sinless lamb who was one of us, who would shed His precious blood and die in our place, who would give His life for ours and take our punishment upon Himself so that we might be set free. The cross is the "city gate" of our story, the place where Christ went up and made the great transaction to redeem us and His last words were, *It is finished!* Or they could also be translated, *It is paid!* In that moment our redemption was accomplished once and for all; the price of the precious blood that set us free was paid. It was done, accomplished, just as Boaz loudly proclaimed that morning, "I have bought it!" Now let's think about the effects of it. Just as Boaz' redemption restored Elimelech's land to his family once again, so:

5. Christ restored to the Father His rightful POSSESSION - **Titus 2:14** says that Christ *...gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession...*, a people that are His very own, to restore to God his rightful inheritance for all time. You see, God is not gratified by the fact that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He is not satisfied that the very heavens and the earth are His handiwork. His glory, His crown, His trophy, is His PEOPLE, a people that He has called out from among all the tribes and families of the earth to be restored to Him and belong to Him forever. That's what He wanted from the very beginning and it's why He created everything else. He wanted a world full of people who were like Him and belonged to Him and communed with Him with whom He could share eternity. Satan derailed that dream and stole what belonged to the Father, but Jesus redeemed us and restored to Him what was rightfully His! That is His thrill and His joy! Then, to look at the other aspect of it, just as Boaz restored to Elimelech the possibility of posterity, of children who would perpetuate his name, so:

6. Christ raised up for the Father CHILDREN to bear His Name - **Gal. 4:4-5** says that, *...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* We're not simply God's possession, His inheritance, we're His sons and daughters, His children who will bear His image and His name forever! Hebrews tells us that in the plan of salvation God's purpose was to bring many sons, many children, to glory and Romans says that the whole universe is waiting with bated breath for that amazing day when God reveals His children in all their glory. What a day that will be when He points to all of us and shouts, "These are My sons and daughters; these are My inheritance forever!" Hallelujah! But we're not done yet. Just as the unknown relative gave Boaz his sandal as a sign that the transaction was sealed and certain, so Christ gave us a seal:

7. Christ SEALED our redemption with His Spirit In **Eph. 4:30** it says, *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* In one sense our redemption is complete because the purchase price was paid, just as Boaz' redemption was complete that morning. Yet in another sense the fullness of our redemption does not come until our very bodies are redeemed in glory, just as Elimelech's redemption is not complete until Boaz and Ruth's child is born. But for this in between time, God has given us a sure proof that it will be fully completed; He has put His very signature on us by putting His own Holy Spirit inside each one of us. Just like that sandal, the Spirit is our seal, our guarantee, of the fullness of our redemption! It cannot fail to occur and His Spirit in us is the proof of it! And then finally, just as Boaz called the 10 elders of Bethlehem to be witnesses of his redemption, so Christ has called us:

8. we are the WITNESSES of His redemption *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* - **Acts 1:8**. "You will go and tell and testify to the whole world about the fact of My redemption! You'll be the ones to declare it wherever you go and attest to the fact that I have redeemed and call people everywhere to accept the blessing of being redeemed and reconciled unto God."

And really, we should want to do that out of thankfulness. Just as Ruth, I'm sure, couldn't wait to throw her arms in gratitude around Boaz who had just changed her future forever, our hearts should cling in love and thankfulness to our Re-

deemer. Leslie Flynn illustrates with this story: *An orphaned boy was living with his grandmother when their house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to get upstairs to rescue the boy, perished in the flames. The boy's cries for help were finally answered by a man who climbed an iron drainpipe and came back down with the boy hanging tightly to his neck. Several weeks later, a public hearing was held to determine who would receive custody of the child. A farmer, a teacher, and the town's wealthiest citizen all gave the reasons why they felt they should be chosen to give the boy a home. But as they talked, the lad's eyes remained focused on the floor. Then a stranger walked to the front and slowly took his hands from his pockets, revealing severe scars on them. As the crowd gasped, the boy cried out in recognition. This was the man who had saved his life. His hands had been burned when he climbed the hot pipe. With a leap the boy threw his arms around the man's neck and held on for dear life. The other men silently walked away, leaving the boy and his rescuer alone. Those marred hands had settled the issue.* Our Redeemer has purposely left the nail prints in the hands of His glorified body and the wound in His side so that we'll never forget how it was that He redeemed us. Oh, let's cling to Him in gratitude and serve Him in thankfulness.

Ruth: From Ruin To Redemption

Legacy: "Better Than Seven Sons" - 4:11-22

Today we come to the end of the story of Ruth and of the book. Elimelech's family has now come all the way from utter ruin to complete redemption. And the bold actions of the young Moabite widow named Ruth who placed her trust in God are the catalyst that God used to bring it all about. If Naomi is pretty much a female version of Job, then this last portion of chapter 4 is similar to the ending of the book of Job where we read how God blessed the latter days of Job more than His beginning. It is the record of how God blessed Naomi, and Ruth, in the end of their suffering and indeed it seems to be a greater blessing than the beginning. Now we love to hear stories that have a happy ending as this one does, but I don't want to leave you with the false impression that God always brings about a happy ending after we go through difficult suffering on this earth. Many times He does. He loves to bless His children. Often great blessing comes out of suffering and we see it later on. As a simple example, in 1992 our building burned and it seemed at the moment like a tragedy and a hardship as we lived in temporary quarters for a year. But by the end of 1993 we recognized what a great blessing it was that God had burned our building down because He gave us this much better new one! However, God doesn't always choose to do that. Sometimes the person we love dies without a happy ending. Sometimes the illness grows worse and we leave this earth in suffering and pain. Sometimes the passionate missionary dies as a martyr. The true legacy of the story of Ruth is not to assure us that there is always happiness at the end of suffering, but rather to convince us that God uses our suffering to accomplish His great Kingdom purposes, that He redeems all things, even if we endure what seems to be utter ruin, by causing them to work together for His good purpose of saving the world. Nevertheless, in this particular story God DOES bring about an ending filled with visible blessing. The first thing we read in this passage is:

I. The Blessing Pronounced Over Boaz by all the people at the city gate as he finished his act of redemption **(11-12)** A blessing in biblical terms is not simply a wish, but a prayer. The people and the leaders were awed at the selfless act that Boaz had just done in committing to redeem Elimelech's land and to marry Ruth and raise up a son to inherit it and they prayed **that God would use Ruth** to do three things. First, that He would use her:

1. to "build a house" for him like Rachel and Leah "built" the house of Israel. This is interesting. In our minds Jacob (who was renamed Israel) is the progenitor of the nation of Israel. He had 12 sons who multiplied into the 12 tribes. But in the eyes of the people of that day, God used Rachel and Leah, his two wives to do it. Do you remember the story of what I call their "baby wars"? Leah kept trying to get Jacob to love her by having babies one after the other. Rachel couldn't conceive so she got Jacob to have babies through her servant. Then Leah retaliated by giving him her servant and finally Rachel had a son and then another so that in the end there were 12. It's basically a story of selfishness to us, but God was at work in and through it the whole time; He used these two flawed women to build a nation for His glory and that nation remembered them as their "national mothers", so to speak. And the people prayed that likewise God would use Ruth to build an enduring house for Boaz, a lasting family of descendants far beyond the small beginning that would start with one child in Bethlehem. Now here's where it gets tricky; most translations make it sound like the people have switched objects and are telling Boaz to do something at the end of v. 11, which doesn't make sense to me. Literally the words seem to be saying, *and may she make you a chayil (a mighty man) in Ephra-
thah, one whose name is called out in Bethlehem.* In other words, they prayed for Ruth to build his house and:

2. to make him mighty and well known among his people He was already a *mighty man of valor, a gibbor chayil*, according to 2:1. But they prayed that through the household which Ruth would build for him, he would become great in the eyes of the eyes of the whole region, one whose name was on the lips of everyone in his town. When Solomon describes the ideal woman, the wife of excellence in Prov. 31, he says, *Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.* In other words, her behavior and the way she builds her household will cause him to be renowned in the eyes of the whole town. That's what they pray for Boaz, that Ruth would be the kind of wife that would make his reputation great, and then they ask that God would use her:

3. to produce a clan of descendants for him like Tamar did for Judah You remember the story of Tamar in Gen. 38, don't you? Like Ruth, Tamar was a non-Israelite that Judah chose to marry his son Er. But Er was wicked and God

killed him, so his brother Onan married her but wouldn't give her children, so God killed him too. Judah refused to marry her to his youngest son, so finally, like Ruth, she demands her proper right to continue the family line, though she does it in a less righteous way, by posing as a prostitute and Judah himself makes his own daughter in law pregnant. That's all a story for another day, but she had twins, one of whom, Perez became the ancestor of a full one-third of the tribe of Judah to which Boaz belonged and the ancestor of most of the people living in Bethlehem and his twin brother produced another third. Two thirds of the tribe of Judah came through Tamar and her bold action. God used a much younger woman, Tamar, to produce an entire clan of descendants for Judah through her son Perez and the people regarded her as their "mother". So likewise, the people pray that God would use young Ruth to produce a whole clan of descendants for Boaz.

Hey, have you noticed how God uses women to accomplish His purposes! Yes, the stories we have are often about the men, but all over the Bible there are women, often quietly and behind the scenes, but sometimes boldly and prominently serving His purpose and changing the world around them like Ruth! Boaz was blessed through her. The fact that we even recognize his name today and know who he was and what he was like is all because of Ruth! SHE made him a mighty and a famous man in the eyes of his people because of HER bold acts of faith which seemed so minor and insignificant at the time! Ladies, take heart; God has plans to use you! You may say, "But I'm just a mom, all I do is wipe noses and wash clothes all day!" or "I'm just a clerk; I just work a cash register and smile at people!" or "I'm just a single; I took care of my parents and I just work a job to make it!" No, no, no! God has plans for you! God is using you! You might feel like you're just a Ruth gleaning in some field, just struggling to make it day by day in a life that has no real meaning! But if you love and obey Him, GOD is at work doing so much more than you can ever think or imagine! In Jesus we are all one and He will use you just as much as the mightiest man that ever believed! Boaz was indeed blessed by Ruth, but now look at:

II. The Blessing God Gave To Ruth (13) A simple enough statement of fact, but think about what this meant for Ruth.

First of all, God:

1. He caused her, a despised foreigner, to become the wife of a godly man She was after all, a Moabite, living in the darkness and idolatry of the land of Moab. But God reached into that darkness by sending Naomi and her family into Ruth's life and their love touched her and brought her to choose faith in the true and living God, whom she never would have known. He made her to sorrow through widowhood and then by that same faith, He caused her to choose to stay with her mother-in-law and come to live among His own people, who would have rejected her outright. Yet by that same faith, God changed everything and gave her a husband and not just any husband, but the most respected, the most godly, the best one in all of Bethlehem, I dare say. God brought Ruth into the Kingdom of light among the people of light and gave her a husband full of light to share it with. And then think about this:

2. He caused her who had no children in a decade to conceive and bear a son For 10 years she had been married to Naomi's son Mahlon and had no child. Her culture saw her as defective; who would ever have married her? Yet by faith Boaz is willing to marry a proven-to-be-barren woman with the intent of producing a child to continue Elimelech's line, trusting that God will change that. And He did! God opened her womb; He gave her conception. After all these long years He gave her the joy she longed for of bearing a child, and a son at that, an heir to the estate of her deceased husband! Despite the suffering she had to endure, in that moment she must have known the same joy as Mary, who when she was assured she would be the mother of the Messiah said, *...My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed!* - Lk. 1:46-48.

Well just think what God has done for us! Paul prayed that we would be *giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son [Col. 1:12-13].* Peter exhorts us, *...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. [1 Pet. 2:9-10].* Ruth reminds us that despite whatever suffering we may have had to go through along the way, we were *without hope and without God in the world* and now *from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace*, one blessing after the other that we did not deserve! Ruth was indeed blessed by God but now look at:

III. The Blessing God Gave To Naomi (14-17) Nine months go by and the baby is born. And all of Naomi's neighbors and women friends in Bethlehem gather around her on this festive occasion and in verse 17 they actually take to them the privilege that is usually reserved for the child's father; they give the baby his name, *Obed*, which means a *servant*. And as they surround her with the baby lying on her lap, they bless and thank God for all that He has done for their friend Naomi. First, they say that:

1. He gave her who had no one a redeemer (14-15) Now who is the redeemer they are talking about? Not Boaz now, though he was the redeemer that rescued the family. The redeemer they mean is the one that Ruth gave birth to, they say at the end of verse 15. It is the son, the child, **Obed**. Naomi had nobody. Her family was gone. Her possessions were gone. Her life was gone, by her own admission, but the women say this baby:

a. he would "restore" her "empty" life He would fill her life back up with joy and meaning and purpose. She would have someone and something again to live for. And they say:

b. he would care for her in old age There was no social security system, no pension plan. Sons and grandsons after them were the only security in the end of life and still are in much of the world. Though Boaz would take care of her for now, when he dies there would still be one who would care for her; Obed would become the surety for her future and that of Ruth. Why? Because:

c. her daughter in law's amazing love would continue through him God gave to Naomi the wonderful gift of a daughter in law who loved her more than any daughter. If to have sons was the greatest blessing in that culture and to have the perfect number of sons, that is 7 sons, was the ultimate blessing, then what can it mean for her to have Ruth who is *better to have than seven sons!* That unbelievable tenacious love that Ruth had would surely live on, in and through Obed toward her. Then note this:

2. He gave her who had no child a child to raise (16) Remember, Naomi's two children were both dead. She was childless. But now she became Obed's caregiver. Yes, Ruth would nurse him, but she would rock him and play with him and change his messes. She would coo him to sleep and soothe his tears. And as he grew older, she would teach him and instruct him and admonish him to love the Lord who was the true God and never worship idols. God made it possible for she who was no longer a mother to be a mother once more! And likewise:

3. He gave her who had no son a son to preserve her line Notice what the women say in verse (17a) Not, *Ruth has a son*, but *NAOMI* does! Naomi's sons were dead; Elimelech's line was finished. His memory would be blotted out of Israel and his property belong to another. But now, through the miracle of God, Naomi has been given a son. Her line will live on. Elimelech will not be forgotten and his property dispersed. Through this miracle baby, he, along with Naomi, has been rescued from oblivion. And then comes the icing on the cake for Naomi. God:

4. He made her the great grandmother of Israel's first king (17b) It turns out that Naomi's line, ends up being the royal line of Judah, the line through which the Ruler would come, and in just three generations the son to be born would become David, King of Israel. And by the way, where do you think David learned to face lions and bears and giant Philistines unafraid? Where do you think David learned to have enduring faith in God that carried him through 10 years of being hunted in the wilderness as a fugitive? Where do you think David learned to express himself to God so beautifully in the Psalms through all the thick and thin of life, sharing both his complaint and his praise? I wager that he learned it from his father Jesse and his father Jesse learned it from his father Obed who, I'm sure got much of it sitting on the lap of his grandmother Naomi and listening to his mother Ruth tell her story. The reason that David was such a great king can probably be closely traced to what his grandfather told him about his own mother and grandmother, the story of Ruth and Naomi! Their legacy produced a man after God's own heart and the greatest King Israel ever had. And now as we close, I'd like us to step back and look at the bigger picture:

IV. The Legacy God Gave To Us Through Naomi and Ruth It's expressed in the form of a genealogy in verses (18-22). The writer omitted some generations to make the number an even 10 for easy memorizing. It starts with Perez, the generation that was born in Canaan and moves through the generations who lived in the suffering of Egypt to the generation of Salmon the spy who went with Joshua into the promised land and then through Boaz to those who lived in the dark days of the Judges to David who ushered in the Kingdom. Through all these generations, God had a plan and was accomplishing a purpose. I'd sum it up in the words of **Jer. 29:11**, *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* The story of Ruth teaches that God has a plan, a good plan that leads to a certain and better future. First of all, in this story we see that:

1. through Naomi's dark years of suffering, God was preparing a blessing for her that she could not imagine And God is doing the same for you. Paul said, *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* - **2 Cor. 4:16-18**. When you suffer in life, don't look at the things you see; instead gaze at God whom you can't see, who is achieving an eternal glory through what you're enduring right now and wait with hope to see it. Second, in this story we can see that:

2. through Israel's darkest era of the Judges God was preparing a great King for Israel The book begins in 1:1 with, *In the days when the judges ruled...* and it ends in v. 17 with David. And when Matthew repeats this genealogy in **1:6** he adds two words, *David the King*. The era of the Judges was 300 years of the worst of Israel's history, unfaithfulness, being conquered and overrun by enemies. But in the midst of it all, God was preparing to send His King to set Israel straight. They weren't even supposed to want a king; it was wrong for Israel to ask for a king, but even so, God knew they would and had been preparing all along to send one and the story of Naomi and Ruth was a large part of that preparation. Even when you can't see Him, God is faithfully at work carrying out His good plans! In fact, it goes deeper than David:

3. through the daring faith of Ruth in her suffering, God was rescuing the lineage through which He planned to send our Redeemer, Jesus If you read that genealogy in Matthew 1, it goes on from David the King through another

14 generations to say, *and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.* - **Mt. 1:16.** Elimelech's line is the line through which God planned to send the Savior of the world and it was almost lost; it was nearly extinct. But Ruth, by her bold choices to follow God, rescued it! And it earned her eternal mention in the record of Christ's line in Scripture, along with brave Tamar and bold Rahab whom God used before her. Friends, we are all part of a way larger plan that God is carrying out, a plan we can't see and couldn't comprehend, but which is part of His bringing salvation to the world! And finally in this story we can see that:

4. God deliberately uses the weakest and most despised of us all to advance His Kingdom Powerless destitute widows, despised Moabites, they become God's finest instruments. *God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.* -

1 Cor. 1:27-29. That's His principle! If God delighted to use Ruth and Naomi for such grand purposes, then He can use YOU to advance His Kingdom on earth, no matter how little or weak or young or old or poor or sick you may be. In fact, He delights in doing it because He gets all the glory.

St. Francis de Sales said, Some men become proud and insolent because they ride a fine horse, wear a feather in their hat or are dressed in a fine suit of clothes. Who does not see the folly of this? If there be any glory in such things, the glory belongs to the horse, the bird and the tailor. Sadhu Sundar Singh was converted by a vision of Christ which he had as he contemplated suicide. He roamed the north of India and Tibet in the early 1900's, dressed as a *sadhu*, an Indian holy man, but sharing his faith in Christ. He said, *"I am not worthy to follow in the steps of my Lord," he said, "but, like Him, I want no home, no possessions. Like Him I will belong to the road, sharing the suffering of my people, eating with those who will give me shelter, and telling all men of the love of God."* His life was given to sharing the love of Christ with the poor, but his reputation became known worldwide and he received wide acclaim by the church. Twice he had opportunity to travel abroad. Corrie Ten Boom writes of her experience in the early 1920's: *When I saw Sadhu Sundar Singh in Europe, he had completed a tour around the world. People asked him, "Doesn't it do harm, your getting so much honor?" The Sadhu's answer was, "No. The donkey went into Jerusalem, and they put garments on the ground before him. He was not proud. He knew it was not done to honor him, but for Jesus, who was sitting on his back. When people honor me, I know it is not me, but the Lord, who does the job."* [Corrie Ten Boom, *Each New Day*.] Naomi and Ruth were simple, ordinary, suffering people who loved God and dared to follow Him. They had no illusions of grandeur, yet God used them to shape the very faith that we hold so dear and to Him goes all the glory. Let's give Him the praise and ask for His grace to be like them.

1 and 2 SAMUEL

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1 SAM. 1-7 THE RESTORATION OF A NATION

We are not going to commit selves to study whole of 1 Samuel now, only chapters 1-7. The reason is that it was a time and situation much like our own. Unfortunately we often read Bible books in isolation from one another. Remember that this book follows Judges! Israel is not the obedient and successful nation she once was. She has decayed morally and spiritually and lost her greatness in the eyes of the nations, becoming a servant to the Philistines and their iron chariots. This is the story of how God reclaims and restores her and makes her the great nation that under Solomon ruled the whole Near East. The purpose of our study is to make application to our own nation, even though we are not God's chosen people like Israel, and also to make application to our own spiritual lives.

OUTLINE:

- I. Israel's Ruin: The State She Was In
 - 1. the family deteriorated - 1:1-8
 - 2. the "church" decadent - 2:12-36
 - 3. the state defeated - Chs. 4-6
- II. Israel's Remaking: God Sends A Man - 1:9-2:11
 - 1. God sends a man - 1:9-2:11
 - 2. God uses a man - Ch. 7

Israel's Ruin: The Family Deteriorated 1:1-8

There is a progression in thought here. The deterioration of the family leads to decadence in the church (and also vice versa!) and that in turn leads to a defeated and miserable nation! O have we not seen this process at work in America? We'll take it apart and see the things that are pulling our society downhill; today we'll look at the family. 1 Samuel begins with the story of an Israelite family, perhaps more or less typical, the family of Elkanah who lived in Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. It was not a heathen family who had fallen into idol worship, but a believing family who worshipped the Lord. Yet notice here:

I. The Breakdown of Family Structure When God designed the family, He designed it tight and close-knit; it was to be one man, one woman, and their children. God instituted an order of responsibility in the home, making the husband the head and wife the helper, forming a complementary whole, permanently knit together as one flesh. But note the structure of this family:

1. the plurality of wives (2) This was never God's intent and plan although He did tolerate it in those days, just as Moses conceded the procedure of divorce to Israel, though Jesus said it was not God's plan from the beginning. But if you will notice, in every case of polygamy in the Old Testament, you will see that breaking God's intended family structure always leads to unhappiness. You can see it in Rachel and Leah, in Hannah and Peninnah, in David and Bathsheba and Solomon and the trouble they had with David's other sons by other wives. Solomon's many wives were his downfall. By Jesus' day polygamy was gone but another method had become common, divorce for any cause. There were schools of thought built around just what it took to divorce a wife and marry another. Evidently the practice of having two wives in succession was common but not like in our own day! I read that the current statistic in the US is that half of all marriages end in divorce! God's intended family structure is being violated on every hand. Further, note:

2. the utilitarian view of marriage Notice in verse 2 that Hannah is mentioned first. It is probably because she was the first wife. See in verse 5 how much her husband loved her and sought to comfort her, in spite of her barrenness. She got the double portion but her sister wife Peninnah always taunted her about having children. It is very probable that Elkanah married Hannah first for love and, after finding her barren for some years, married Peninnah to have children. It is much like Abraham and Sarah and their plan with Hagar or like Rachel giving Jacob her handmaid as a wife, where the second woman was taken simply to have a child. And because marriage was something that could be entered into for very utilitarian reasons, there was a low view of family structure. People all around us marry with a low view of marriage; they want money, sex, and the American dream. But when people view marriage as serving their own purpose, it is all too easy to break and change partners. Marriage is no longer a sacred covenant merging two lives into one, but a contract that can be broken for \$75 by a lawyer for any reason. In Jesus' day Rabbi Akiba taught that a husband might divorce his wife simply to marry another fairer than she and still fulfill the Law. Today it happens all the time. Then notice:

3. the tension in the home (6-7) See the jealous rivalry here. Think how it must have hampered the husband. Think of the children, how Peninnah's kids must have felt. They have two "moms" who are at war and dad likes other one best! How many children are there today that now have two sets of parents, even Christian homes. We see it in our Nursery School and Pioneer Clubs so often. When the family structure is broken or cracking, the home is full of tension and falls apart. Is it any wonder that here there is also:

II. The Neglect of Family Religion Note two interesting things about this family which seems really devout at first glance, like so many church-going families today there is:

1. neglect of proper worship Compare 1:7, 2:19. They lived in Ramah, approximately 20 miles from Shiloh where the Tabernacle was (one day's travel), yet they only came up to worship once a year, perhaps like some "Easter Christians"! Remember the command in Exodus? All males were commanded to appear three times each year to celebrate the three great feast times; they came only for Passover! I can hardly conceive of Elkanah teaching the children about the Lord, having a family prayer time with them and so on. O, in Christian circles today there is a dearth of families seriously devoted to God. How many of US go to worship regularly, take time to teach our children about the Lord and pray with them?

2. adoption of improper values verse 2 seems to say that Elkanah was an Ephraimite, by which it means that he lived in the territory of Ephraim. Compare 1 Chr. 6:27-28, 31-34. Elkanah was actually a Levite of family of Kohath. That means he was supposed to be engaged in a life work of aiding the priests in the service of the Tabernacle and of knowing and teaching the Law to the people. Evidently he gave that up for some secular work; it seems there were no Levites at the Tabernacle in Eli's days. The only helpers the priests had were some women who had taken over the Levites' function! That says to me that Elimelech is a man who has adopted improper values, who loves the Lord but has no intent of serving Him in any serious way. We have churches full of people like this, folks whose priorities are mixed up, who choose anything else over serving God, who worship when they feel like it, and pray and read when they feel like it. But what are:

III. The Sources of Family Deterioration? What caused this sad state of the Israelite family? The same things that cause family to deteriorate today:

1. the environment Compare Jud. 21:25. Remember this is the time of the Judges. The whole society has a me-centered mentality and lives to please themselves first above all. No wonder that some of this has crept in to real believing homes. We have a whole society that has changed its values from freedom and truth and justice to materialism and pleasure-seeking. No wonder Christian families begin to act that way too.

2. the failure of fathers to lead Compare verse 8. Elkanah couldn't rule his own home; he couldn't bring things into line, he could only console the loser. Look at Eli in 2:12. His sons were wicked men who didn't know the Lord. Even the high priest wasn't able to lead his own children into a real walk with the Lord. Men today are not doing their job in the home; they are not leading, but simply moderating, if that!

3. the lack of spiritual leaders (3) Eli was now too old to really do much actual work; the only spiritual leaders left were his sons. How tragic! The faithful had nobody to challenge them and model a godly life for them. Exemplary leaders are hard to come by even today!

4. the lack of discipline Compare 2:29, 3:13. Eli indulged his sons. He said, "Now boys, don't do that!" but took no steps to correct them and probably hadn't corrected them all their lives! Did you ever notice how Samuel had the exact same problem in 8:3, probably because he was raised by permissive old Eli and was never disciplined either! I am appalled at what kids get away with now, how many Christian parents believe it's actually wrong to spank a child. They give them everything they want or let them miss spiritual opportunities just because they don't feel like going!

Do you see that we're in trouble? As goes the family, so goes the country. O let's get our families in order, give our kids an environment where they learn to love and serve God and be holy! *Over 150 years ago five young men from Pennsylvania left their homes as pioneers to go west. After many years one returned to visit his parents. He had become a strong Christian. When asked why he had not followed the sinful ways of his four companions, he said "Because I carried in my heart a picture of my Christian home. Our last morning together after breakfast Father took down the old family Bible (like always) and started to read a favorite passage. He was soon choked up by tears. Mother finished the passage and we all knelt to pray. Father cried again and Mother put an arm around me and asked God to keep me in His care. The vision of that morning in my godly home and that tender petition has steered me right. I couldn't bear the thought of breaking the hearts of my Christian parents and dishonoring the Savior they taught me to love.*

1 SAM. 1-7 THE RESTORATION OF A NATION

Israel's Ruin: The "Church" Decadent 2:12-36

Let's talk now about the religious institution in Israel and compare it for our purposes to the organized church in America. It is obvious from reading the text that it had become decadent. Webster defines decadent to mean *marked by decay*! Oh how differently this chapter reads from the days of Moses and Joshua! The same decay that had deteriorated the family had also been at work among the priesthood and religious leaders. Spiritually speaking, Israel was ruined by this! There has been a horrendous decaying in the church in the USA over the past century. We still have a tremendous Christian presence and impact on the world, but there is a tremendous spiritual downward trend that has a death-grip on our major church denominations. I have watched it at work in the one I grew up in and talked to others who have seen it in theirs. It is not pulpit talk or hearsay but cold hard fact as real and serious as the desecrations in this text. Let's consider three things. First:

I. The State of Religious Leaders The task is easy because in the story it seems there were only three, Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. (By the way, in Hebrew *Hophni* means *fists*, that is *bully* and *Phinehas* means *mouth of a serpent*! How appropriate!) All the rest seem to have disappeared and gone back to secular life, like the Levite of Judges 17 who was out of work and looking for place to stay! You can see four things here:

1. laxness among older leaders (29) How different is Eli from Moses! Every time you see him it says he was old and couldn't see and he's sitting in a chair or lying down! He probably loved the Lord very much, but we saw last time that he didn't discipline his sons. This verse implies that not only is Eli letting his sons desecrate the offerings, but he's eating the meat with them, tolerating and participating in what he knew was wrong. I have sat amazed at older pastors who tolerated false doctrine for the sake of unity or peace and worried only about getting their pension! I have watched them sit in denominational meetings where things like divorce and homosexuality and inerrancy were brought up and not say a word! As young person I left my denomination over things I could not overlook!

2. unsaved leaders in high positions (12) The KJV calls them *Sons of Belial* which means *worthless men*, but it does not just mean *useless*; it means *wicked*. They didn't know the Lord by experience. They knew a lot about Him and how to lead worship and offer sacrifices, and so on, but they never entered into a relationship with Him. Instead they practiced wickedness, yet they were allowed to continue in holy office! Need I say that many major denominations are run by people who do not genuinely know Christ. It is difficult today for an evangelical to hold a high church office without compromising beliefs.

3. entrance of the profit motive (16) Their needs were met by the people giving, so they became aware of the profit to be had in the priestly office and became greedy for it. In profit hungry America, Christianity has attracted all kinds of charlatans like these whose chief aim is to get ahead. One man who had a program on the radio used to say outright, "Send me your tithe..." But even in more or less legitimate churches, you would be surprised at way pastors look at the size of the congregation and the salary package and the niceness of the parsonage as primary factors in deciding whether to serve in a particular church!

4. involvement in immorality (22) From the time of Moses there were women who served at the entrance to the Tabernacle in helpful ways, godly and pure. Hophni and Phinehas saw them as an opportunity for personal gratification. O how many of our esteemed clergy have dirty laundry like this. Clergy divorce is rampant and seminary students are carefully warned about the dangers of counseling women because it's happening again and again. The pastor that I followed at a church in Ohio during seminary had had an affair in the church and the man that followed me as pastor left his wife and three children to have an affair with and then marry a divorced counselee. Examples abound.

And as go the leaders, so go the people. Do we wonder why immorality abounds in Christian circles, why Christians seem concerned for material things, why unsaved people join churches and nobody says anything? It's our religious leadership! We'd better start being careful about the kind of people we ordain to the ministry! Now let's consider:

II. The State of Religion itself. Note some real peculiarities about things going on in this story; they show that overall there is:

1. disregard of the commands of God (3:3) Notice just couple of little things, like what happened to the lampstand. It was evidently normally allowed to go out at night. But compare Ex. 27:20-21. It was never to be allowed to go out, specifically from evening to morning. And where was Samuel bedded down? Probably in the Holy Place, and the implication is even that it was near the Ark of God. Perhaps the veil had been removed! That would never have been done in Moses' day! That was a holy place and those were holy things and only to be touched and worked with as commanded by God. But the commands of God didn't seem to matter very much anymore, not to Elkanah who only came to Shiloh once a year, not to Eli who did what he pleased in the Tabernacle, not to the sons who broke the seventh commandment, even though 4:19 says that Phinehas was married and had pregnant wife who was about to deliver! They don't seem to matter much to lots of Christians in our day. Young Christians marry unbelievers, adults fail

to have a devotional life, parents fail to teach children, church members forsake assembling together or lose their tempers in public, even though all of these things are against the commands of God. Somehow that doesn't matter so much anymore. And along with that there is:

2. disrespect for the things of God Look at two examples:

a. the treatment of offerings (17) They treated sacrifices offered to God with contempt, as a common ordinary thing. Compare Lev. 7:28-35. God has proper treatment spelled out there. The worshipper is to bring the Lord's part of the fellowship offering with his own hands, that is, the fat to burn and the breast to wave, and then give these to priest along with the right thigh. Well, Eli's sons instituted a new custom **(13-14)** You might call it "fork lotto", taking whatever the fork brings up, and Eli's sons abused even that to take what they wanted when they wanted it! Further it was not cooked before offering it to God. They just had no respect for God's things. I'm reminded of the Christians in Corinth who treated the Lord's Supper with contempt and I know a whole lot more do now! Communion is just a pretty service, a wedding is just a gorgeous ceremony, an offering is almost a necessary evil. No, all of these things are holy to God!

b. the treatment of worship (1:13-14) Why would Eli accuse Hannah of being drunk if that were not common to some degree? Who would think of coming to the Tabernacle drunk in Moses' day? No one! The House of God was a holy place, the worship of God a sacred thing. Too often today it seems to be a play, a show, a drama to watch. No, it is the divine worship of Almighty God! It springs out of a personal relationship with Him, focuses on Him and is directed to Him. Now here is overall:

III. The State of Affairs Two very sad statements are made here about the general state of things from God's perspective:

1. the withdrawing of God's Presence (3:1) Is it any wonder that God's Word was scarce, that nobody could say "thus saith the Lord"? The Bible plainly says, *Draw near to Me and I will draw near to you*, but it also works in reverse! True messages from from the inerrant Word are fairly scarce today; not many preachers take stands on moral issues anymore. And the evidence of God's power seems scarcer too. Where are the people falling on their knees under conviction of sin like in Jonathan Edwards' day? Where are the revivals and transformed lives of the latter part of the 1800's and the early part of the 1900's. Of course God is doing things today, but God's power is not nearly as evident in the church in the USA as it once was and in many churches not at all!

2. the judgment to fall (25) God cannot allow this state of things to go on forever. When you sin directly against God there is no one to decide the case in your favor; God's will win and punishment will eventually come. I would not want to be in the shoes of some church leaders of today when they stand before God individually. Historically and biblically, God seems to often use suffering to purify His people, both Israel and the church. I wouldn't doubt that if there is no real revival in this land, the church here will see suffering before the Lord comes.

Let's set an example as a church. Let's be godly; let's treat God's things with respect, His commands with obedience, His worship with sincerity and His leadership with gravity!

1 SAM 1-7 THE RESTORATION OF A NATION

The Ruin of Israel: The State Defeated Chs. 4-6

It is only natural that the third phase of Israel's ruin after the deterioration of the family and decay of the "church" is the defeat of the state. Compare Deut 28:1-2, 15, 25. This law is not just for Israel but God has a law ordained for all nations, Jer. 18:7-10. The whole book of Jonah shows how God applied this to Nineveh, a pagan city-state. When a nation ignores even the most basic levels of Divinely ordained morality and rejects the light it has, there is grave danger of calamity! So see how:

I. God deals with Israel (ch. 4) - He cannot let her go on in the downward trend she has pursued and so:

1. Israel is defeated before her enemies (1-2) Israel got haughty and set out to attack her enemies, the Philistines, but God turned it into a great defeat. Now they expected a victory; they had been used to victory. After all they still had the Tabernacle among them and worship of Jehovah. But God wanted to teach them a lesson and allowed a minor defeat first (compared to v. 10!). The USA was used to winning every war we'd gotten into, but then came the tragedy in Vietnam, then the Iran hostage crisis, then our men in Lebanon being killed. I wonder if God isn't trying to tell us something, that is, if we do not return to God and obey the light we have, our nation's future is in grave danger! But look at the effect this had:

a. effect 1: pondering (3a) They evidently felt militarily well-matched; they didn't try to blame circumstances, but attributed it directly to the Lord. This much was good and so is the real questioning going on in hearts of many people today, "What is God doing with America?" But it led to a wrong effect:

b. effect 2: religion not repentance (3b-4) They sent for the ark, thinking that if it went before them like it had at Jericho, that God would bring victory. But they put their confidence in the thing rather than God. They displayed no sorrow for their sin. The apostate priests Hophni and Phinehas still carried the ark! They still had no concept of the holiness of God. I'm so afraid that this is what's happening today. There's a movement toward conservatism across the land, a return to some basic convictions and that's well and good, but where is repentance, where is confession of sin, sackcloth and ashes? I fear we'll have renewed religiosity but it may not mean repentance and change in our nation! And if not look at:

c. their final defeat (10-11) It's an even greater calamity; 30,000 men die, the army is dispersed and the Philistines rule over Israel. Furthermore, the ark is captured and the priests are slain. Let's pray and work mightily so God doesn't have to bring a greater calamity here! But there is another, more serious effect:

2. God is dishonored before their enemies - Israel alone is not at stake here; they are known as God's people, the people who trust in Jehovah, not Dagon or Baal or Allah or Buddha. Like David's sin, their sin gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Notice:

a. their initial respect of God (6-9) The Philistines had not forgotten what they heard about how God brought Israel out of Egypt. They also hadn't forgotten the days of Samson not long before and the collapse of their temple of Dagon. They initially had more respect for God than Israel did and they redoubled their efforts to win the battle. So you can imagine the effect on them when they won:

b. their new contempt for God (5:2) They took the ark, symbol of His presence and set it as the booty of war in temple of their idol Dagon. By doing that they ascribed to him the glory for their victory. When we are defeated, as we suffer humiliation, because the world sees us as a Christian nation, they blasphemes. They extol their religion or lack thereof. When you are identified with God, your sin brings Him dishonor. That's true nationally but also personally! When you sin, the enemies of God who see it are confirmed in their negative thoughts about God!

3. the summary: Ichabod (19-21) Phinehas' wife in her dying moment names her son Ichabod, *the glory is departed*. It means that the Shekinah, the glory-cloud, the visible presence of God is gone. God has withdrawn His Presence from Israel and left her to herself, not that God is not there in His omnipresence, but He will no longer help Israel. Oh, pray that we don't get here, that Ichabod is never written on the tombstone of fallen America! But there's a whole second lesson here:

II. God deals without Israel! (chs. 5-6) Israel was not indispensable. God had gotten glory through Israel to this point, but God was well able to get Himself glory, to make Himself known and defend His reputation among the Philistines without them! Some of us harbor the secret opinion that we are indispensable to God, that He needs USA to get the task of world evangelization done, to reveal His glory among the nations. We're not! More and more God is using other nations, third world countries, raising up missionaries from other places. See how:

1. He teaches the Philistines a lesson (ch. 5)

a. about their god (1-5) The Philistines worshipped Dagon the fish-god; he had head and chest of man and the body of a fish. God knocked his statue over prostrate before the ark the very first night as though he were worshipping Jehovah! The next night God cut off his hands and head and laid them by the door so only the fish part remained. That made a lasting impression, verse 5!

b. about His power (6-12) He taught them He didn't need an army to defeat them; He could do it all by Himself! He sent a plague of field mice or rats to ruin the crops and some kind of serious disease that caused tumors (perhaps a cancer?). Everyplace they took the Ark, destruction and misery followed. They came to fear Jehovah and decided to send the ark back; they could not stand before this God, Jehovah! And they sent it back with a guilt offering (6:4-6)! They never came to true faith, but this is better than Israel's treatment of God; at least they honored Him while Israel treated Him with contempt! Oh, if we go down the tubes, God will still win; the nations will still be reached and Christ will still return on schedule! Then, He not only teaches this lesson to the Philistines, but:

2. He teaches Israel a lesson (ch. 6)

a. the return of the Ark (10-13) Just imagine the surprise of the men of Beth Shemesh standing in the fields when the ark tops the hill followed by a Philistine delegation who stop reverently and watch. Hear them singing glory to God! Can't you just hear the lesson of Is. 59:1, *Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save nor his ear too dull to hear!* It is not that God couldn't have delivered them. He showed His power to them this way but also:

b. the holiness of His Presence (19-21) God put some of them to death and they learned that their God was a Holy God, at last! Hear the lesson of Is. 59:2 coming through loud and clear, *Your iniquities have separated you from your God and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear!* God showed them the missing ingredient: His holiness and their sin, and with that comes the first step toward a revival!

Oh let's pray that this lesson will come to us without the disaster, that once again we as a nation will recognize the holiness of God and how offended He is by the filth on our TVs and the magazines on our shelves and our 1 ½ million annual abortions and our exaltation of homosexuality. It has happened here before, you know. I believe it is time for a third Great Awakening!

1 SAM. 1-7 THE RESTORATION OF A NATION

Israel's Remaking: God Sends a Man 1:9-2:11

The first three messages in this series dealt with the Ruin of Israel, that is, the deterioration in the family, the decadence in their religion, and the defeat of the state before the Philistines. She was in a pitiful condition, but God was not finished with her yet. God in His Sovereign plan wanted to bring her back to Himself and to blessing and so into this mess God sends a man named Samuel. It seems like that is how God works. When He wants to bring revival in a nation, it comes through a man. In Egypt God sent Moses; in later years it was a king like Hezekiah or Josiah; after the return from Babylon it was the priest Ezra and the governor Nehemiah along with prophets Haggai and Zechariah. When God has a job to do He chooses and sends a man or small group of men. Jesus chose 12! Now we're a bigger nation that covers a much bigger area so it'll take more but if God is going to turn the USA back to Himself, He will still do it by raising up a bunch of godly leaders. Now how does God raise up godly leaders like these? IT BEGINS IN THE HOME!! Let's look at the unusual circumstances through which God sent Israel her man for this hour:

I. Hannah's three-fold desire (1:10-11) You remember the problem in Elkanah's home with the jealousy of the second wife and her constant digging and badgering poor Hannah for not having children. Finally one year she takes her problem to God and prays for a son. Now analyze her desires:

1. to silence her constant torment (1:6-7) It sounds childish but this kept up year after year, not just on a daily basis at home, but especially when they would go up to Shiloh to the Tabernacle to worship each year and when the sacrifice was divided up Peninnah would say something like, "Too bad the Lord has cursed you and kept you from having children; after all they are the heritage of the Lord and if you were blessed like me your quiver would be full of them!" Her husband would give her portion for two as if to say, "I love you just as though you had children!" and then lean over and kiss her and say, "Aren't I better than 10 sons?" But it wasn't enough; the misery was more than she could bear. However, note the kind of person she was. Compare 2:3. She didn't pray for God to strike Peninnah or her children or for her husband to divorce her to show that He loved Hannah. Her heart was not full of hatred but she did want to be free from this misery, so she prayed for a child.

2. to be a mother in Israel (2:5) She really did want a child. Israelite women felt the bearing and raising of children was a primary goal in life. Plus, the hope of every Jewish wife was to be the mother or at least in the line of the promised Messiah, the Desire of Women. However, if motherhood was her only desire, wouldn't a daughter to love and cherish have been enough? Yet she prayed specifically for a son.

3. to have a son God could use (2:1,4,10) I believe Hannah was not just praying selfishly. Look at what she says when Samuel is born. What's on her mind goes beyond her family quarrel to the deliverance of Israel and victory over her enemies. She knows it is not enough to want a son just for herself; she has to want him for God, a son that God can use to change the deplorable state of things. So she pledges him to the Lord before he is ever conceived. I tell you it is time for some godly Christian women in America to start praying for God to give them sons He can use, to pray that their sons will become great men of God and leaders of the faith who will turn many back to God. Think of the blessedness of Billy Graham's mother or Susannah Wesley whose 2 sons shook all England. That could be you! Why not pray for that privilege, for your motherhood, your parenthood to be used of God to change the course of this land!

II. God's gracious answer (1:19-20)

1. He answered her prayer Samuel's very name means "God heard"; in short order God granted her a son but not only this:

2. He granted the desire of her heart (2:20-21) in two ways:

a. in regard to children He gave her five more! He blessed her with a family.

b. in regard to Samuel He stayed there before the Lord and grew up in the presence of the Lord! Oh what a privilege! She wanted him to be used of God and here he is growing up with the High Priest Eli at the House of God. Even in the midst of the decadence, God's presence was still to be found there. I think sometimes we spend too much time praying our kids will stay healthy and do well in school and forget to pray that God will impact their young lives and shape them for His purposes! But He would do it if we would ask!

III. Hannah's Godly Actions Prayer is not enough. Hannah took some very difficult but essential steps with Samuel that made him the one God could use:

1. she raised her son as a perpetual Nazirite (1:11) That's what this vow means; he would be a Nazirite from birth. You remember what this meant. He could drink no wine nor touch any grape products, He would have to leave his hair uncut and never touch anything dead to defile himself. From his earliest days he knew he was different from other boys, that he belonged to God. Now that was a rather external distinction for him and that is no longer necessary but don't you think the way godly leaders come about is not by accident, but rather by godly mothers that teach them from little on up that they belong to God and the sole purpose of their life is to serve Him? I don't mean teaching them that the purpose of their life is keeping a bunch of rules for God. Think a moment about another Nazirite, Samson, and listen to what Alfred Edersheim says, "Samuel was God-granted; Samson was God-sent. Samuel was God-dedicated; Samson was God-demanded. Both were Nazirites, the one spiritually, the other outwardly; both prevailed, but the one spiritually and the other outwardly. The work of Samson ended in self-indulgence, failure, and death; that of Samuel opened up into the royalty of David, Israel's great Type-King." Hannah's one desire was for her son to know and be used of God and so to that end:

2. she surrendered him to the Lord (1:24-28) Probably at age three or so she weaned him and took him up to the tabernacle and did the hardest thing she ever did in her life; she left him there to be cared for and raised by Eli and the women who helped serve at the tabernacle. Now very seldom does God want this kind of physical surrender from us and yet He wants us all to do what she did with him, to let go. Let God take and guide and use our child's life in whatever way He sees fit. It may mean being far away or never having much success in worldly terms as they grow older. It may mean their being unpopular or not getting to see very much of your grandchildren. It may mean a sword piercing your heart like that of Mary as she stood by the cross. Yet the only way God can make spiritual giants who can change the course of a nation and of history is for parents to let go. Moses' mother let him go into the home of an Egyptian princess; Jesus' mother let Him go into an itinerant ministry and a cross. So must we. How do you pray for your children? How are you training them? How are you doing at surrendering them? How badly do you want to see God work in this land?

1 SAM. 1-7 THE RESTORATION OF A NATION

Israel's Remaking: God Uses A Man (ch. 7)

Having looked at the sad state Israel was in, we saw last time how God in His Sovereignty and Omniscience sent a man into the midst of it, Samuel. We saw the role godly parents can play in bringing spiritual leaders into the world. Now we're going to see how God finally brings about spiritual revival in Israel and remakes and restores her. But first we have to see God's plan at work over a period of years, simultaneously in the life of Samuel and in the life of Israel.

I. God Prepares Samuel (2:26) God continued to work in Samuel's life after he was brought to live at the Tabernacle. He grew not only physically but spiritually; he became more and more prepared to be God's instrument. Not only that, but God worked in his relationship with other people. Does this verse sound familiar? Compare Lk. 2:52. It was just like the Lord Jesus; indeed Samuel is a type of Christ in many ways:

- both had a special birth; both grew in wisdom
- both served God from a young age
- both came to decadent time in Israel's history
- both were prophets with true words
- both were priests of different order (Samuel was a Levite but not of the priestly line of Aaron); both were appointed by God

God prepared even His own Son. Spiritual leaders do not just happen; God grows them. In fact He could do it with you or with your children if serving Him is your foremost desire.

1. God taught him to hear and transmit His Word (3:1, 21) Remember the decadence of the time; God was not talking to anyone; nobody was listening with a pure heart! Yet you know the story of how God first talked to Samuel and taught him to listen to His voice; He showed Samuel to listen carefully and then pass on His Word to Eli and others. Verse 21 says God continued to do this with Samuel all through his growing up years. Of course, God rarely speaks in an audible voice or a vision, but a spiritual leader must still learn to hear His voice in the written Word and in his heart and discern what He's saying and transmit it clearly.

2. God taught the people he was a prophet (3:19-20) God built a reputation for Samuel among the people. What he told them from God, God did, until the whole land from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north knew that he was God's spokesman. Compare 9:6. See his reputation years later, "What he says comes true!" God not only has to build up a spiritual leader personally, He has to build him up in the eyes of people so they will listen. He told Joshua (3:7), *Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel so they may know I am with you.* This is important. It usually takes God years to raise up a spiritual leader, not only because he must grow him, but he must also grow a reputation of trustworthiness and integrity for him. Now at same time God was preparing Samuel to be used:

II. God Prepares Israel for a time of revival How?

1. through 20 years of hearing (3:21-4:1) You must read the Old Testament carefully because often the small phrases are important. At the same time God was building Samuel's reputation, Israel was hearing God's Word from him. What did he say? We don't know but He probably denounced the worship of Baal and Ashtaroah that abounded everywhere and was encouraged by the Philistines who dominated them. He might have used words like Is. 59:1-2. This message went out year after year and God used it; it did not go out in vain. It began to have an effect on the hearts of Israel.

2. through 20 years of suffering (7:1-2) Note the words *a long time!* Remember in chapters. 5-6 Israel had fought the Philistines and lost the ark of God. They returned it but they didn't stop dominating Israel. They exacted tribute, confiscated their iron weapons (13:20) and removed blacksmiths who could make them. I'm sure they were harsh taskmasters and Israel lived in the shadow of fear and suffering. God let this go on for 20 years; that's a long time! That's how long it took before they began to mourn and seek God. But the Word of Samuel combined with their daily suffering finally began to make an impact and produce in them a new attitude almost like those at Pentecost who understood their sin and said to the apostles, "What shall we do?" Israel finally came to Samuel to seek God. God used this pattern with Israel a number of times, combining the Word with suffering to bring revival. He has also done it in other lands, China, for example. I would not think it unreasonable that God would use it here. The Word is going forth clearly by every possible medium, so I would expect God to use suffering to impress us with it! If economic woes are not enough, who knows what it may take! Pray that revival will come before this is necessary!

III. God Now Uses Samuel See how God used Samuel when the time was right and what a blessing he was:

1. in the spiritual life of Israel When they realized their spiritual need they came to him and:

a. he led them to forsake their sin (7:3-4) He told them exactly like it was. All the Baals and Ashtaroths had to go; their shrines had to be torn down. God is a jealous god and will not share his glory with another. They have to worship Him and Him alone. There has to be whole-hearted commitment to Him which includes readiness to obey. To be honest this is what I don't see in the Christian church in large measure just now. There may be many coming to Christ as Savior, but I see in life after life a real resistance or disregard for things of God even among the most pious of families both here and elsewhere. Either Jesus is Lord of all or He's not Lord at all, and that's what God used Samuel to show Israel.

b. he led them to confession and prayer (7:5-6) He called a national assembly at Mizpah in Benjamin and they had a time of genuine confession and fasting. They drew water and poured it out to God as a symbol of their repentance:

- of their utter helplessness - 2 Sam. 14:14

- of their dedication to God - 2 Sam. 23:16-17

They were saying, "God we've sinned! You are righteous; we are wicked and do not deserve mercy!" They got a proper view of God as righteous, holy, and just and of the vileness of their own behavior. If revival comes to us it must begin with this both nationally and publicly!

2. in the national life of Israel (7:8-10) The Philistines evidently didn't like that Israel was holding a big national meeting, no matter what it was for, and sent out their army. Through Samuel's prayer and leadership God routed the Philistines before Israel. Look at 13-14. God blessed the nation and restored its freedom and tranquility and bounty once again. So his ministry had an effect on the national well-being. Don't forget that your ministry is important. The ministry of a spiritual leader is important because it affects the course of history and the world!

3. in the continuing life of Israel Samuel didn't retire and go fishing in the Sea of Galilee, but continued to serve God as prophet, judge, and priest.

a. he gave them a lifetime of service (7:15-17) All his days he led Israel in worship, judged her people with all their civil problems, and brought them the Word of God. A man's ministry is never done. But more than that:

b. he gave them a perpetual example Compare Heb. 11:32-33. By faith he administered justice. Not only was he a spiritual example to them all the days of his life, but later generations looked back to him as the first of the prophets. His name was mentioned in Ps. 99:6 along with Moses and Aaron as one who called on God; it's mentioned in Jer. 15:1 along with Moses as an example of a righteous man. And finally, when God had the roll call of the saints written in Hebrews, there he was, an example for all time of a man consecrated to God. His influence was never forgotten.

Lord, send us some Samuels today! Raise up some spiritual leaders that you can use in this land to turn us back to righteousness! Let's determine by God's grace to be like him, to let God use us and raise our kids so God can use them! Let's change the course of history!

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Serving Heart: 1 Sam. 16

Today we begin a series of twelve messages or so on the life of David. If you had to pick out the most outstanding characters in the Old Testament, they would be Abraham, Moses, and David. A greater volume of Scripture is given to the record of their lives than any other. They are the ones that stuck in the Jewish mind for centuries. The Jews of Jesus' time regarded Abraham as their Father, Moses as their Law-giver and David as their King. Each was known for their special relationship to God. Abraham was said to be God's friend, Moses was said to speak with God face to face, but David was said to be a man after God's own heart. Turn with me to 1 Sam. 16 please: **(read 1-13)**

Introduction: As we begin, please notice with me two things:

1. what God looks for in a person (7) He's not concerned about the outward appearance, how tall and strong and handsome you are, how beautiful and charming and fair you are. God sees through all that. When God looks for a person to use, He looks at their heart. He looks for the right kind of heart. God chose David not because he was ruddy and handsome but because his heart was right. Now look:

2. what God found in David (Acts 13:22) He looked down deep and found a heart after His own heart, literally, a man "according to" his own, that is, with a heart that was like His own or at least that was in agreement with His own. That's what God wants to find in you. He's not so much looking for talent, for ability, for appearance, for qualifications and degrees. He's looking at your heart and whether it is like His or not so that He can use you. And of course, the kind of heart David had was displayed in the incidents of his life. So, over the next few weeks we'll study the major incidents of David's life in the hope that it will tell us something of the heart God wants to produce in us. When David comes on the scene, the first thing we notice about him is that he has a serving heart, a heart that was dedicated to the service of others above himself. And that service began right at home:

I. His Service at Home (1-13) Now you may never have thought about it before, but David's home life must not have been easy. He was the youngest of eight brothers. Do you know what it means to be the youngest of eight? In my experience, the younger you are, the more of a servant you get to be. For David you can see the kind of things he had to do:

1. the manner of his service

a. tending sheep (11) Now notice, there is a party going on, a sacrifice and a feast. Somebody has to stay with the flocks. Guess who's elected? Now if you think shepherding is exciting, think again. Mostly it is days and days of sitting and watching sheep eat or leading them from pasture to pasture. Sure, there may be emergencies but probably only rarely. And compare 17:14-15. Wartime comes with the Philistines. The oldest sons get to join the army and go fight. Where's David? Tending the sheep, even though by this time he's been employed by Saul as a singer; he still has to go home to the sheep.

b. running errands (17:17-19) No doubt this incident was typical. You know yourself that as your kids grow older it is the youngest who you get to do errands like get the mail or let the dog in, a lot of thankless jobs. A lot of David's service was in typical everyday things just like you may be called on to do. But the important thing is to see:

2. the nature of his service Look how he did it:

a. he did it whole-heartedly (17:34-35) I would probably have taken off at the first sight of the bear and said, "Dad, sorry about that, but this bear came along..." Not David. He tended those sheep well, boring as it may have been normally. He loved them and cared for them. And when the chips were down, you can see his heart was in it. That's what God wants to see in you: no matter what kind of service you are called on to do, that you do it with all your heart! Listen kids, how well do you do your chores? Do you sweep the dirt under the rug or throw the toys into a closet where they're hidden and say the room is clean?

b. he did it good-naturedly (17:28-29) Of course, having come all that way with the goodies for his brothers, they get mad at him when he asks curious questions! Sound familiar? Yet he didn't bring that up to them, didn't act hurt or get angry, he just talked to others. He was good-natured. He did what he had to do without complaining and griping about it. And that's what God wants to see in you: not just that you do what you must do well, but that you do it willingly and without complaint. And all this service begins at home, begins right where you live in the day to day seemingly unimportant things. That's where God tests you. But it is not in vain. Look at:

II. His Promotion to Greater Service (14-20) Now I want you to compare Prov. 22:29. This is not to say that every skilled person who serves well will end up working for the President, but simply to say that faithfulness at home in the everyday things will be noticed and lead to greater things. For David it was literally true. From his service at home, he came to serve Saul the King of Israel, all because one of Saul's attendants knew him and observed him. I would point out three things:

1. his skills were noticed (18) This man saw David playing and singing to the sheep and was impressed that here's a man that knows how to play and sing. People notice your skills, the things you do well.

2. his service was noticed The man must have seen David take on a bear or a lion and knew the kind of bravery and faithful service he performed. People not only notice what you do but how you do things; they notice whether you are a genuine servant or not.

3. his spirituality was noticed The man knew David loved God and was close to Him. If you're letting your light shine, people notice your relationship to God as well. And when people notice these things, opportunities for greater service and more important things will probably start to come your way. And whether they notice it or not, God does and as He sees in you the kind of heart that He wants, He will begin to provide you with greater opportunities for serving Him. That's what God did with me. I started out assisting in teaching Sunday School, then a campground ministry, then a church ministry, then a bigger one, and so on. Now before we quit let's look at:

III. His Service at the Court (21-23) Now David comes to stay at least for a while with Saul and to exercise his skills and service in a new realm. Let me point out three things about it:

1. it was surprisingly like his service at home At home he played and sang Psalms for sheep; now he did it for a troubled king. And it had the same effect! He was also one of Saul's armor-bearers. Now since there was no war on just at that moment, I suspect that meant carrying the king's weapons around and having to help the king dressed in armor every day. Pretty mundane stuff. We always think it must be so exciting for those who serve at some higher level than we do, but it's just as tough and full of boring tasks as where we are now!

2. his service at home prepared him for it The sheep-tending and errand-running made him a good attendant for the King. The things you do in your daily home life to serve others and serve God are God's training ground for you; He's preparing you and molding you.

3. it in turn prepared him for sovereignty His service as Saul's attendant here and later prepared him to be the kind of wonderful King he was later in life. He saw what a King's responsibilities were. He saw in Saul how not to act! His place of service prepared him to be the greatest king Israel ever had. And it all began with tending sheep.

Well, my friend, how is your heart? Do you have the heart of a servant or is your heart a selfish heart that insists on its own way or does its daily tasks in a grudging fashion? I would leave you with these words from Phil. 2:5-8. That is the mind and the heart that were in Jesus Christ. Let that same heart be in you!

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Humble Heart: 1 Sam. 18

The trail of David's life leads now from the sheepfold to the army. Having proved himself in battle against Goliath, he now moves into the service of King Saul, living the life of an army officer. He is also still playing the harp and singing for Saul. As I read this 18th chapter in the NIV, a word kept jumping out at me, the word *success* (5, 13-16, 30). David in this period of his life was a man for whom everything went right, who never seemed to mess up or fail. But what impressed me so much was that in spite of all the success, David remained humble to the end. And that can only be because his heart was humble in nature. That's another aspect of the kind of heart God wants to find in you. So, let's trace:

I. The Trail of Prosperity Notice that:

1. David succeeded in whatever he did First, verse 5 shows us that he succeeded within the army. He was given a high rank there. Verses 13-14 tell us he was later given command over a thousand men and stationed away from the palace on his own. He led the troops in battles against the Philistines and defeated them repeatedly. Verse 30 says this continued and David was able to win more battles than the rest of Saul's officers. In essence, David rose in a very short time from being a young lad who stoned Goliath to being the most valuable person in the army of Israel.

2. David behaved wisely (with insight) If you're reading the KJV, you have probably been sitting there wondering where I keep getting the word success from. In all those verses your Bible reads that David behaved wisely! The reason for that is this. The Hebrew word in all those spots means to act with understanding or insight of the situation and therefore to succeed or prosper in what you do. The reason David was so successful as a military leader was that he had great depth of insight. He knew his men and their capabilities and their limits. He knew his enemy and how they fought. He did not rush into battle with cocky confidence but carefully thought out his actions. And with each battle his insight was increased. But that's not the whole story:

3. David's secret of success (12, 14, 28) The Lord was with him! Yes, his own effort played a part in it, but it was the Lord who increased it and worked with Him in everything. Now it's not the point of this message, but there's the secret of success. You have to behave yourself wisely; you have to think and pray over your actions. But you also have to walk close to the Lord in a daily fellowship and depend on Him for wisdom and understanding and for the end result. Now once things begin to go well, the trail of success can lead to:

II. The Trap of Popularity David was a general; his successes were not done in a corner somewhere. Everyone saw it and here is what happened:

1. David pleased the people (5) He was a hero. They were elated by the triumph he had brought about in slaying Goliath. Further:

2. David was praised by the people (6-7) They began to sing to him and about him. They credited him with the success of the whole thing. They gave him more credit than Saul the King!

3. David was loved by the people (16) This continued on. It was more than just one occasion; the more David led the troops, the more the people of Israel loved him. And so, there was:

4. the obvious temptation (8b) Saul recognized it right away. Why not the Kingdom? Why not overthrow Saul or wait until he is old and then take it from him? After all he is a lousy king and disobedient to the Lord. You see along with success can come pride and when pride simmers awhile it leads to sin. You've seen examples of that. It's true in all of life and even for Christians. Perhaps the reason Saul was so suspicious of David was that this very thing had happened to him! He had started out with good success and was loved by the people but became proud and intruded into the priest's office and didn't obey God fully in the slaying of the Amalekites. So, God set him aside. But David never fell into the trap! One of the reasons God chose him to be the next king, I believe, is that his heart was genuinely humble. Now let's look at his own actions and reactions during this period and try to find:

III. The Marks of Humility They may surprise you.

1. not retaliating when attacked (9-11) Saul was jealous of David from the very first and now that the Holy Spirit had left him and he was troubled by this demonic influence, he actually stooped to trying to kill David in an unsuspecting moment with his spear. The thing that gets me is that it was not once but twice! David must have come back! Now if David ever needed an excuse to attack Saul, this was it. But David wouldn't raise a hand against him. Why not? compare 24:6. He knew it wasn't right before God! Humility means putting up with being wronged! Are you humble? Do you fight back all the time, get even with people, feel like you always have to come out on top?

2. forgiving when wronged The fact that David came back to play for Saul after the first time shows that he was willing to forgive. Not only did David never attack in return, he never became bitter, never spoke evil of Saul, never hated him. But the capstone is that he forgave him and went back! *Is.53:7* says of Jesus *He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet He did not open His mouth! He was led as a sheep to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not His mouth.* How about you? Do you get vindictive or hateful when someone does you wrong? Do you hold it against them? Or do you forgive them, knowing that you too have sinned and done wrong and been forgiven!

3. estimating oneself truly (17-18) Saul's second attempt at getting rid of him had to do with offering him one of his own daughters in marriage. It happened twice. The first time Saul simply gave the daughter to someone else. The second time Saul got the idea of requiring David to kill 100 Philistines as a bride-price, hoping he would get killed in the attempt. However, note David's words in the midst of all this. "Who am I?" David doesn't see himself as the great hero like everyone else does. He says "I'm not an important person; I don't come from a famous family; why should I qualify to be the king's son-in-law?" David never forgot who he was, just a shepherd boy from Bethlehem. Paul wrote, *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...* (Rom. 12:3). Think of yourself the way God can see you, right down to the heart. Remember you are only a sinner saved by grace and when you see someone else sin, think, "There but for the grace of God, go I."

4. recognizing the honor of opportunity (23) Now most people would jump at opportunity, whether it's to marry the king's daughter or to receive an award. David thought about whether he deserved the opportunity! Why should the king be related to a common man with no money? Now David did accept, but he did it with the attitude that it was a gracious undeserved blessing. If we were honest, most of us really feel we deserve everything and anything we get. *Prov. 27:2* says, *Let another praise you and not your own mouth; someone else and not your own lips.* If I could adapt that a bit I would say, "Let your praise come from others, not from your own heart!" Jesus said *So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do should say, 'we are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'.* Be humble about the blessings that come your way.

5. not seeing yourself as the exception to the rule The mention of money here goes a little deeper. In those days the groom paid the bride's father a bride-price (not quite like shopping for the cheapest one). David knew he had no money and the king would surely want a high price. If you or I were David, we might have thought, "Oh well, the king shouldn't require that of me; after all, look at all I've done for him, slaying Goliath, winning battles, etc." That's the American way of thinking, "Why should I have to...". David didn't see himself as above others or above the rules of the day; he saw himself as subject to the same rules as everyone else. Do you?

6. doing more than is required (24-27) Saul didn't want money. He required only proof that David had slain 100 of the King's enemies, the Philistines. How many did David bring? 200! He went the second mile, literally! So many times when we try to please people or do what is required, we try to see how little we can get by with. We do things half-heartedly. We do them grudgingly. David had a willing heart that responded to the spirit of the request, not the letter. Real humility is pitching in with all your heart wherever and whenever you're needed, not strictly carrying out orders in the letter of the law.

Well, my friend, is your heart a humble heart? Are you a forbearing person, a forgiving person? Do you see yourself and the things that come your way as God sees them? Are you little in your own eyes? And you know that's tough to answer because humility is a paradoxical thing: thinking you have complete humility is a sure sign you don't! It's something we keep working at and praying for God to cultivate in us all our lives. Let me just close with an illustration of humility. *A traveling man arrived at a hotel late one evening and was told there was no room available and other nearby hotels were full. As he was dejectedly leaving a man approached and offered to share his room with him. He accepted. Before retiring, the host knelt and prayed aloud, asking God to bless the stranger by name. In the morning he told the guest it was his habit to pray and read the Bible at the start of each day and asked if he would care to join him. The Holy Spirit had been working in the stranger and it was not very long before he willingly received Christ as Savior. When the two were ready to part, they exchanged business cards. The new believer was amazed to read "William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State".*

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Faithful Heart: 1 Sam. 20

David's unbeatable success in the 18th chapter soon gave way to problems. The more David succeeded, the more Saul hated him and determined to kill him. In chapter 19 Saul tries three times. First he tells his attendants to kill him but Jonathan talks him out of it, then he tries again with his spear but David runs out and then he sends men to David's house to kill him, but David's wife Michal helps him escape out a window. So now David becomes a fugitive and for the rest of the book he is living the life of a hunted person, always in the wilderness or somewhere looking over his shoulder and fleeing from Saul. In chapter 20 it is just finally being made clear to David that his relationship with Saul is totally over. But the bright spot in all of this is the relationship between David and Saul's son Jonathan. What makes it so noteworthy is that it goes against nature. Usually it's "like father, like son". If your father hated someone and despised them, chances are good you would side with him! And if someone's father was trying to kill you, you probably wouldn't like them either! But Jonathan and David remained true and faithful to each other while living on opposite sides of what amounted to an open war. And that quality of faithfulness is one of the things that made David a man with a heart like God's own, for after all, God is faithful, isn't He? Then certainly, faithfulness is not only one of the fruits of the Spirit that God plants in us when we are saved but something He wants to see come to maturity in us so that He can use us. Now notice first that David and Jonathan had:

I. The Covenant of Faithfulness There must be something to be faithful to and that something is a covenant. A covenant is a sacred promise or vow. Jonathan and David made a covenant with each other when they first met and renewed it on several occasions. See first:

1. it's basis: love (18:1-4) Twice it says, *He loved him as himself*. Compare **20:17; 2 Sam. 1:25-26**. This love that David and Jonathan had for each other was fierce, self-sacrificial, putting aside all thought of personal well-being for the other. And that love was the basis for the covenant they made with each other. We too are involved in a covenant. Compare **Mt. 26:26-28**. Even as in the Old Testament the making of a covenant usually involved sacrifice, so the Lord Jesus shed his blood to seal a New Covenant with us. Now notice that the covenant is not just between Him and us, but He says, "Drink from it all of you". We are not in this thing alone with Him. We are in it together with each other. And look at **Jn. 13:34-35** to find the basis of this new covenant, a new commandment which is to love each other as Christ loved us! With the self-sacrificing, giving, total agape love of God. 1 Jn. 4:19 puts it like this, *We love (not Him as in the KJV) because He first loved us*. What I'm saying is this: this relationship between David and Jonathan is not some special unique thing; it is the kind of relationship that should exist between us, between you and every brother and sister in Christ, between you and every person in this church! You're part of a Covenant with them by being in Christ. That's why we have a Church Covenant as an outward reminder of what is already true. We are bound too in a sacred covenant with each other in Christ. Now what are:

2. it's terms: unfailing kindness (20:12-17) Verse 14. The Hebrew word is *hesed*, a special word. It means God's love and mercy and faithfulness all wrapped up in one. It is the *agape* of the Old Testament. So, David and Jonathan promised to treat each other with same unfailing kindness and love that God had shown to them. Despite the animosity of Saul, they would never become enemies and never do anything to harm one another. David would never cut off Jonathan's descendants when he got the throne, which was the normal kingly custom to kill all potential rivals. And, of course, the expectation is that we are to treat one another with the same unfailing kindness that God has shown to us. Compare **Rom. 12:10**. Here is the key to loving actions: to honor the other above yourself, to consider him above you,

to think first of his needs and welfare ahead of your own. That is what it means to be part of the body of Christ. Now what if you don't? In a covenant someone has to be the keeper, the one to see that it is made good:

3. it's keeper: the Lord (20:13, 16) Jonathan calls on the Lord to deal with him severely if he failed to love and help David and vice versa. The covenant that binds us is sealed in Christ's blood; He is its keeper and if we fail to be faithful in our covenant of love, He is obligated to discipline us and bring us to the place of faithfulness.

II. The Aspects of Faithfulness Just what does it mean to be faithful to one another in Christ. How does it work out in our actions? Well, if we look at how David and Jonathan treat each other in these chapters, we'll see an example of it in action. Surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, this list reads very much like 1 Cor. 13!

1. interceding for the other (19:4) Here's the first time Saul tells Jonathan and attendants to kill David and Jonathan goes to bat for him right away. He speaks on his behalf and turns away Saul's wrath. You know, sometimes being faithful to another means speaking up for them! It means taking their side and not letting them sit there and take the consequences all alone. It means defending them to others. For example, in Jer. 38 the officials of Judah were mad at Jeremiah for his prophecies and got permission from the king to throw him into a cistern and leave him to die. But Jeremiah had a faithful friend named Ebed-melech who found out and went to the king and interceded for Jeremiah and got him pulled out! That's how we need to be for our brothers and sisters!

2. believing the other (20:2-4) This time Saul kept his intent secret from Jonathan and he just couldn't believe it when David came and told him his dad was trying to take his life again. Yet in the end he said in effect, "I believe you; I will do whatever you want". Paul wrote, *Love always trusts*. Faithfulness means believing somebody until you are dead certain they're wrong and have facts to back it up. It means not being suspicious or quickly offended but trusting the intent and motives of the other.

3. helping the other (4) Jonathan was ready to do anything to help David, whatever it took. That's what being faithful to someone means: you're there to help when they need you. If they're sick, you're there with a meal. If they're sad, you're there to support them. If they need a hand, you're there to lend it.

4. warning the other (9) Jonathan knew this was a part of being faithful to David, warning him of any danger he knew about. A person who is faithful to us will never let us walk into trouble if he knows about it without at least a word of advice. We may be ignorant of the thing; we may have a kid on drugs and be too blind to see it but a friend knows and lovingly warns us. We may be about to make an unwise decision but a faithful brother stops and says, "Be careful!"

5. empathizing with the other (34, 41) Jonathan checked things out with his dad and almost got himself speared against the wall for it. Then he went out and warned David in the field by the incident of shooting the arrows and sending the boy to find them. But the point I want to make is that he was incensed at his father's treatment of his friend. Then he and David wept with each other. They wept because of injustice, of separation from each other, of their being forced to be on opposite sides. But David wept the most! He felt for Jonathan having to live with a father who would try to kill him in a fit of temper and who might well one day get him killed through his own disobedience to the Lord. Being faithful means empathizing with the other person, not just sympathizing, saying "Aw, isn't that too bad!" but feeling what they feel, hurting when they hurt, weeping when they weep, rejoicing when they rejoice.

6. encouraging the other (23:17-18) Later on David is hiding from Saul in the wilderness at Horesh and who comes but Jonathan, and what for? To encourage him in the gloom of his problem! To remind him of God's promise that he would be King and that God's word never fails. Isn't that what faithful brothers and sisters are for, to say, "Hang in there!", to get out the Bible and remind us of God's faithfulness, to encourage us when the chips are down?

7. continuing for the other Jonathan eventually died in battle against the Philistines along with Saul. But on two occasions, even after he became King, David continued faithful even though death had intervened. Compare **2 Sam. 9:7, 21:7**. Love never fails; it never runs dry or quits. It continues. And so does being faithful. God's faithfulness is expressed to us in Heb. 13:5, *I will never leave you nor forsake you*. That is how we are to be to one another.

And that's what was in David's heart that made God use him so. Saul was a powerful warrior King but he was not faithful to his loved ones and not to God either. David was faithful to others and by that God knew he would be faithful to Him also. If you can't stand by your brother whom you can see, how will you stand by God whom you can't? Are you faithful to your brothers and sisters? Can they count on you? God wants to use you so much but you must prove faithful! But when you do, just think of the joy of one day hearing him say *Well done, thou good and FAITHFUL servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord!*

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Forgiving Heart: 1 Sam. 24 and 26

David was no more than 20 when he was driven out of Saul's court and began the life of a fugitive in the wilderness. And since he was 30 when he became king, that very difficult period was about 10 years long! Now 10 years of scurrying about like a rabbit being hunted by a fox should tend to do some obvious things to your personality. It should tend to breed bitterness and hatred for the one oppressing you and a desire for vengeance. But David had something that is very hard to come by, even among Christian people today, a forgiving heart. In fact, that forgiveness was so genuine that you can look at what David said when he heard about Saul's death in battle. Compare **2 Sam. 1:22-24**. Then he executed the man who claimed to have slain Saul! You see, God couldn't put a man on the throne of Israel who was vindictive and self-seeking. He wanted a man with a forgiving heart, a heart just like His own, one who would see the sin of others and reach out to them in love anyway. And that's the heart God wants to grow in you so He can use you too. Now, of course, we have the record of only a few of the major things that happened in those years, but two of the incidents are nearly identical and get right at how David's heart was in the midst of his suffering. From the first incident we learn that:

I. Forgiving Means Forbearing (Ch. 24) Out in the little oasis of En-Gedi by the shores of the Dead Sea David had an amazing opportunity, one that is almost unbelievable:

1. the opportunity (1-4) Above En-Gedi, rising to the heights are rocky crags and rough terrain. There are also caves there, one of them reputedly large enough to hold 30,000 men. Some of them seem to have been used as sheepfolds. David and his following that had grown to 600 in number had chosen one of these as a hiding place. And as Saul and his army passed by, Saul needed a private place, not to take a nap as we usually think of it but actually to go to the bathroom! So here he comes trotting in all alone and probably without weapons to the very cave where David is hiding! What an opportunity this is for vengeance, to end this chase once and for all. The pressure was on, from the old nature, and from the men next to David who even told him it must be from the Lord! It was from the Lord, but it was a test to see what kind of heart David had!

2. the restraint (5-7) David held back both himself and his men. The only thing he did was to sneak up and cut off a piece of Saul's robe that he had laid aside for the moment. And this kind of restraint and forbearance is exactly what God wants to build in you. Compare **Rom. 12:17-21**. Justice and punishment are God's personal realm; it is not up to us to pay people back for the wrong they do! Verse 18 tells us to do what we can to live at peace with others. David turned this situation into an opportunity to do just that.

3. the proof (8-11) David used the piece of robe to prove his own innocence of any desire to harm Saul or take his kingdom. You may have to find ways to do the same thing. Often when people have something against you or wrong you, they really don't know you; they've read their own kind of thinking into you. You may have to look for ways to show them what you're really like. What did we just read? *If your enemy's hungry, feed him*" Find a need in his life and meet it! True forgiveness doesn't content itself with enduring the wrong but with patching the relationship!

4. the motive (12-15) David wanted to be true to the Lord. Saul was the Lord's anointed king and David wanted to please the Lord so much that it bothered his conscience that he had even cut off the corner of Saul's robe. Yes, there ought to be concern for the person; Jesus said "love your enemy". But there also ought to be an intense desire to please God in the matter and to do right. Two wrongs never did make a right and when you return wrong for wrong, even if you seem justified in doing so, your wrong is still not right! However, there may be:

5. the reward (16-22) Saul was repentant; his heart was touched, though in his case, it was short-lived. Sometimes your brother will hear you and you have gained your brother! But in any case, forgiving means forbearing, enduring the wrongs of others without retaliation, trusting God to work out the situation and leaving it in His hands. But it also means something even harder:

II. Forgiving Means Repeating (Ch. 26) Doing it over and over again if necessary. Chapter 26 is almost identical to chapter 24. Note:

1. the repeated offense (1-2) Saul's promise was short-lived and before long his remorse was forgotten and he was back out in the wilderness hunting David again. Having a forgiving attitude toward someone is no guarantee that they won't wrong you again!

2. the repeated temptation (5-8) David and Abishai sneak down to Saul's camp and make it all the way in past the guards and sleeping soldiers. Once again temptation presents itself, "Kill him, go ahead, he's hunted you..." And you know, I think temptation in this area is harder the second time around! When someone wrongs you after you've just finished forgiving them, it's much harder the second time. But see:

3. the repeated response (9-12) David still won't lay a hand on him! He still wants to trust the whole thing into the Lord's hands and not take it into his own. What a heart David had, a heart that would not only forbear retaliating

against an enemy, but would do it repeatedly. I'm reminded of Jesus' words, compare **Mt. 18:21-22**. Not once or even seven times, but as many times as the offense was repeated. And that causes us to notice that:

III. Forgiving Means Patience In order to have a forgiving heart, we must have a patient heart. There are three kinds of patience:

1. patience with others (27:1) David knew Saul's heart and knew that he would be back again. So he set himself to cope with that the best way he knew how. We've got to be patient with others; sometimes it takes many years for them to change and sometimes they never do. But we've got to patiently continue forbearing and forgiving in our heart and loving.

2. patience with circumstances Ten long years David had to wait before things changed, before he could show his face in Israel and breathe freely. But we get so impatient with our circumstances! If things aren't the way we want them, we want them changed now. If we're sick, we want health tomorrow; if we have a broken relationship with someone, we want it fixed today. But the Bible says that trials produce patience in us and perseverance. God uses them to build in us things that can come in no other way. So, we must be patient with our circumstances.

3. patience with God (26:10) David was resolved that the Lord would settle it in his own time. One of the negatives of suffering is that we can become angry with God for not doing something, for not changing things for us. Oh, we must learn to do what David did and what David said to do in Ps. 27:14, *Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord!* Paul said, *Therefore we do not lose heart...for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us and eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

That's what God wants, a patient heart, one that does not take things into its own hands but is able to leave them in God's hands and be forgiving toward others. After Jesus told Peter about forgiving seventy times seven, he told a story about a man who had a servant who owed him money and couldn't pay, so the master was kind and forgave his debt. But the servant himself had loaned some money to another servant and grabbed him and choked him and had him put in jail. When the master heard about it, he was furious and had the unforgiving servant put in jail himself. Jesus concluded the story with Mt. 18:35. This is what God wants, forgiving from the heart and forgiving from the heart means not just once but repeatedly and truly. And it begins with knowing just how much God has forgiven us, how repeatedly we have sinned against Him and He has forgiven us time after time. David didn't know it yet but there was coming a time in his life when he would need the forgiveness of God even more than Saul, for he actually killed an innocent person, the very thing Saul was attempting to do. Oh my friend, the very things people do to us, we are inclined to do to others! Our hearts are deceitful and wicked above all things! The heart God wants recognizes how much it has been forgiven and stands ready to forgive and to patiently bear with the sins of others.

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Correctable Heart: 1 Sam. 25

If you're not careful, it might be easy to get the impression that David was a kind of superman. After all, he had such patience with his own family in his early life. He had such faith that he killed Goliath. He had such love for Jonathan, his enemy's son. He had such restraint that he wouldn't harm Saul who was oppressing him when he had the opportunity. But David was human like the rest of us are! And one of the beautiful things about the Bible is that God shares with us the flaws of its characters as well as their faith. Sooner or later, we'll see David was prone to lust, pride, grudge-holding, being unappreciative, and even capable of plotting to cover sin and arranging a murder. But the thing that made David a man after God's own heart is that his heart was correctable. When he was headed for sin, he was willing to take the advice and the warning of others. God could use other people, his close friends and associates, and even strangers to straighten his thinking and either keep him from sinning or at least from continuing in it. And that's what is shown to us graphically in chapter 25:

I. An Incident of Correction This is the story of David and Abigail. Now from chapter 24 (Saul in the cave), it is clear that David knew the principle of not taking vengeance but letting that up to God. However, not long after, God tested that forgiving heart of his by allowing him to be offended by someone who wasn't the King, who wasn't God's anointed, someone whose name was Nabal, which means "fool", and who acted just like his name! You know, it's one thing to forgive people you know you really have to, like family, friends, or fellow-believers. But what about those rank fools out there with no love of God who try to cheat you out of money? David nearly failed the test had it not been for Nabal's godly wife Abigail. Let's look at the overall story and see first:

1. the personal offense (2-11) David and his small army of 600 men had been circulating in the south of Judah and down into the upper Sinai area. This was a sheep-grazing area and one of the good things David and his men did while there was to protect the shepherds of that area from the marauding raids of some of the desert peoples to the south and east. Nabal was evidently a rich man with lots of flocks and David had given repeated protection to his shepherds and their flocks. Now it was sheep-shearing time, harvest time, a time of feasting and celebration. David sent some men to humbly ask for a little contribution to help their survival in the wilderness. But instead Nabal, not only

refused, but railed against David and his men in spite of all they had done! Doesn't ingratitude get to you? Don't you just flare up in anger when someone spits in your face after you've just helped them? David did. See:

2. the natural response (12-13, 21-22) Listen to his thinking. David didn't pray; he didn't think of the Lord; he didn't recall the scriptures. He operated on his emotions. He was ready to kill for ingratitude. He had put the lives of his men on the line for Nabal and in himself he couldn't see forgiving that. It's surprising what you and I are capable of when we are controlled by the flesh instead of being filled with the Spirit! But God did something about it:

3. the providential rebuke (18-20, 23-31) God used a woman, Abigail, Nabal's intelligent and godly wife (How those two wound up together is beyond me; it must have been an arranged marriage!). She heard of the offense and took it upon herself, not only for the sake of her husband but for the sake of David! Evidently many Israelites already knew of David's anointing and, having seen God's hand on him, knew he was going to be the next king. She didn't want to see David the future king with blood on his hands. So, she sent a present and she spoke to him from the heart. Sometimes God needs to use us that way. Sometimes we need to go, we need to be His instrument to turn another from sin. But other times God will send folks into our lives to do the same thing. It's a two-way street and we have to recognize it. It was just what David needed. See:

4. the grateful repentance (32-35) Oh look at him melt; look at the emotions drain away. See the conviction in his heart and the change in his thinking. He was so glad for Abigail and he changed his behavior immediately. He left justice in God's hands instead of taking it into his own and, in the end, you can see:

5. the judicial recompense (36-39) Foolish Nabal reminds you of the rich fool Jesus spoke of. His soul was required of him and what good were his riches then! In ten days, he was dead. David left it in God's hands and God showed David clearly that that was the right thing to do. But while we are looking at this incident, beautiful and meaningful as it is in general terms, we want to go back and look at the details because here we can see in Abigail and David:

II. The Principles of Correction from both sides, first:

1. how to give correction The writer is correct; she was intelligent. She knew just how to help someone see their problem and in that there are four suggestions for us:

a. do it swiftly (18a) She lost no time. Don't wait to see if they will discover it for themselves. Too much damage might be done in the meantime. I know it's not pleasant but the longer you wait, the harder it will be. Bad actions become bad habits quickly and habits die hard.

b. do it sweetly (18b) She sent a present ahead, one fit for a king, one her husband should have sent. It was designed to make David hesitate and think. The way to correct somebody is not to walk up to them and say "Hey, you have a problem! Why don't you get your act together." I don't say you have to give them a present like she did, though buying them a new car wouldn't hurt! But do it sweetly. Take them out for coffee or invite them over. Do it in a setting of friendship and caring, not animosity. That even applies to your spouse!

c. do it submissively (23-24) She didn't come off as a big spiritual know-it-all, a better-than-thou kind of person. She fell at his feet and called herself his servant. She asked for the privilege of speaking to him. Paul called himself the chief of sinners, which I doubt was true in fact, but it was his attitude toward himself. It has been said that witnessing is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Correction is just like that! Be humble. Admit your faults too. Speak the truth but speak it in genuine love that shows!

d. do it spiritually (26, 30-31) She points out the spiritual principles involved: (1) the principle of not avenging yourself, (2) the promises of God to establish David as king and (3) the effect this would have on his conscience later. Don't simply offer your opinion. If a person needs corrected, it's because of the Word and you ought to use the Word to do it. **2 Tim. 3:16-17**. That's what the Word is useful for! Don't neglect to use it; it is the Word that the Spirit will use to bring about change! But the greatest thing we can see here is not how to give correction to others but:

2. how to receive correction It's a tough thing to do. Your natural reaction is to flare up with a "Who do you think you are!" But swallow that and apply these four things:

a. recognize it as being from God (32) Now I'm not talking about the unjust criticism of enemies but about what you know is the loving correction of godly friends. Look at it as being from God. It is God keeping you from sinning, sparing you from misery and problems. It is not the nosiness of a fellow believer butting in, but the hand of God so:

b. praise Him for sending it (32) When you look honestly at your life and see that what the person is saying is right and you are convicted, then you must praise God for sending the person. David saw it in an instant and broke out in praise. I thank God for a person who spoke to me in college about pride, telling me that I seemed to think I was "the only Christian on campus". I had no idea I was acting like that and I have tried to remember it to this day!

c. bless the person for speaking it (33-34) Thank the person for correcting you. Reward the risk that they took. Let them know God used them in your life. What an encouragement it will be to them to be open to letting God use them in the future!

d. enact it in your life (35) Change! David did. You can. Seek God's forgiveness and ask His help; He'll give it. But don't let Godly advice and correction go ignored. Act on it!

My friend, is your heart a correctable one? God didn't want a man on the throne of Israel who would persist in his own way and always think he was right. God doesn't want it in His servants today either. You know non-correctable is spelled p-r-o-u-d! And pride is the deadliest thing I can think of in the Christian life. It leads to sin and keeps God from using you. Prov. 29:1 warns, *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy.* I read this in *Our Daily Bread*: "I remember my 9 yr. old cousin who refused to heed his mother's warnings about hitching rides behind cars in his wagon. He would grab the rear bumper as a car pulled out and be towed for a block and then coast a long distance at high speed. One day he was late for dinner and grabbed the back of a huge dump truck which he thought was going his way. The driver couldn't see him and shifted into reverse. It happened so quickly that he had no chance to move and the double wheels of the heavily-loaded truck rolled over him, killing him instantly. He had been told of the terrible danger of this practice but failed to heed his mother's warnings." Correction is never pleasant but always profitable. In God's economy of disciplining His children, it is His way of speaking before spanking, but it only profits those who listen. Do you?

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Listening Heart: 1 Sam. 30

I was about ready to skip over the rest of David's wilderness experiences, but something in chapter 30 caught my eye; look at verses 7-8. David inquired of the Lord, asked Him what to do on this occasion. That sounded familiar to me so I got out a concordance and found that he did it time and again in his life, from the time he first ran from Saul to the very end of his life as King. Over and over, before doing anything, David stopped to ask God what to do, to listen for God's instructions. He was like the Israelites in the wilderness. When the cloud was taken up from the Tabernacle they set out and followed but if it was not taken up, they did not set out until it was! They made no moves except God's moves. And that's the kind of heart that God wants in us, a heart that is tuned and listening to Him, asking Him what to do in every situation. In short, God wants a person who knows that his life is not his own but that Christ wants to live out His own life through Him! So, we must train ourselves to listen to God at all times. However, there are some times when we had better be listening especially carefully and we can see some of them in David's life:

I. Times to be Carefully Listening to God Now David had a way to listen to God that you don't. Compare 23:9. Abiathar the priest had fled to David for refuge from Saul and brought with him the High Priest's ephod or vest and on its front was a pouch and in that the sacred lots, the Urim and the Thummim. No one knows exactly what they were, whether stones with two colored sides, or whatever. But to inquire of God one would ask a yes or no type question and cast the lots and God would cause them to fall in a certain way to make His will known. And to them it was just the same as if God were speaking audibly. Sometimes you might wish you could just draw straws like that but you have something better today. You have the written Word by which God can place His thoughts in your mind and the indwelling Holy Spirit whose very purpose according to 1 Cor. 2 is to take the things of God and make them known to you, that is, to plant God's thoughts in your mind. But you need to be listening like David was and sometimes you need to listen extra hard:

1. listen in fear - 1 Sam. 23:1-5 David's men were afraid. They had been avoiding Saul in Judah and were afraid doing that. Now the Philistines attacked Keilah and David wanted to go save the city with his 600 men and they were really afraid! But they did the right thing; they inquired of the Lord. They asked God what to do. So many times when we're afraid, the voice of fear tells us what to do and we listen without asking God! Suppose David had done that here; hundreds of lives would have been lost. When you're afraid, don't just react; ask God what to do!

2. listen in distress - 1 Sam. 30:1-8 At this point David and his men and families had been living at Ziklag in Philistine territory. He and his men returned home on this occasion to find Ziklag burned to the ground and all their families missing. What distress it caused them! What anguish of heart this tragedy brought! But in this distress David took time to listen to God and ask Him what to do. Do you? When tragedy strikes or sorrow or grief do you ask God or do you do what your feelings tell you?

3. listen in indecision - 2 Sam. 2:1 Now Saul is dead and David could consider returning to Judah openly once again. But he didn't know whether he should and where he should go when he did. So, he asked God. He had a feeling that this was the time but there was a bit of indecision there between alternatives. You know the feeling, don't you? There are two or three possibilities before you. It might be houses to buy or cars; it might be a career to choose or whether or not to marry a certain person. That's the very time to be sure to ask God, to be sure that you get his best for you.

4. listen in danger - 2 Sam. 5:17-25 David is no sooner anointed king over the entirety of Israel when the Philistines decide to attack him. They want his head for betraying them because he had been among them for about a year. They're out in full force. He's in danger and what does he do? He asks God. Then after he beats them once they come back. Does he assume he knows what to do? No, he asks God again. Oh, when there is danger, only God knows the right thing to do. You must ask Him!

5. listen in perplexity - 2 Sam. 21:1 Now we're much later in David's life, years into his reign and after Absalom's rebellion. There was a famine in the land, a dry spell. The crops wouldn't grow and food became scarce. David couldn't figure out what was going on, why God was allowing this. He was perplexed but, rather than jump to conclusions, He asked God and God revealed it to him. Oh when you're confused and perplexed and don't understand, when your life is a puzzle and you can't see how the pieces fit, that's the very time to go to God and ask Him! We need to listen all the time but we need to make a special effort when tough times come. Probably there was no harder time for David to listen than his experience in chapter 30 and if we examine it, we can see clearly some of the:

II. Factors That Hinder Listening to God - Ch. 30

1. weariness (1a) David and his men had been marching for three days. They were so weary that later in pursuing the Amalekites they came to a ravine and 200 of his men couldn't make it across. Being tired does funny things to you. It changes your disposition; it makes you avoid putting forth any further effort. All you want is rest and relief. Your kids know they can get away with more when you're tired because you won't bother to discipline them. And Satan knows that if you're weary enough, you won't take time to listen to God, to ask Him what to do, or perhaps even to do what He says. So, when you are weary, be careful!

2. sorrow (4) Their families were gone, taken captive. Their homes were burned. Their hearts were filled with anguish and sorrow and they cried till they couldn't cry any more. The story might have ended right there if they hadn't listened to God. For a lot of people, it does. Sorrow comes into their life and they grieve and they hurt so bad and they stop listening, stop looking for God's direction, and wallow in their own sorrow. So, when you are sorrowful, be careful to listen!

3. love for others (3, 5) Their wives and children were in trouble. David's own wives were taken. If there's ever a time when we react on pure emotions instead of listening to God, it's when a loved one is in trouble. And sometimes our acting and reacting is not in accord with the way God would want us to act. So, when your loved ones are in trouble, whether it's your child at school or whatever, be sure to listen first!

4. anger (6) The men were bitter in spirit, they were angry and when you're angry, you don't listen to God; you listen to your anger, your flesh. You say and do things you wouldn't normally do. So when you're angry, be careful to listen to God like David did. However, it is not enough simply to stop and pray and ask God what to do in every situation. If we look at a few of the times David listened, we'll see three:

III. Things to Remember About Listening to God

1. listen for certainty - 1 Sam. 23:1, 4 On this occasion David asked twice. He kept asking until he was sure of what God wanted him to do. He wanted to make no mistakes. Be sure when you pray for God's direction that you pursue the answer from all avenues. Search the scriptures, ask the advice of other godly people you trust, listen clearly to the thoughts God places in your mind. Don't play the old Bible flip and point game, just opening the Bible randomly, choosing a verse and trying to see in it a sign.

2. listen in detail - 2 Sam. 5:22-24 For this second battle God had a detailed plan and it was not a straightforward attack like the first time. He was careful to listen and follow the small points and set an ambush. Pray about the little things, the fine points. Don't worry about bothering God with small matters; He loves it!

3. listen to obey - 2 Sam. 5:25 Listen, but listen with the intent to do what you hear! Listening is not so much for information as for action. Have ears that really hear, that stand ready to act on what God says.

That was David's secret. That's what made his heart so pleasing to God. He listened to God. Do you know why Saul was rejected by God? Compare **1 Chron. 10:13-14**. He didn't listen to God and it led to sin. Jeremiah knew the secret. Jer. 10:23, *I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps*. Do you know that secret? Do you pray and ask God constantly what to do? Or are your decisions your own? Do you really listen to God? *A young man went into a church and started praying. He was so anxious to find God's will for his life that he took a piece of paper and wrote down all the things that he was going to do for God. Then he started to pray that God might reveal to him whether these promises were acceptable to Him. Suddenly he heard a voice speak to him saying, "This is not the way I want you to find My will. All I want of you is to sign your name and leave the paper for me to fill."*

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Righteous Heart: 2 Sam. 1-4

The first four chapters of 2 Samuel move David along into another period of his life. The first period, of course, was at home as a shepherd, then a period of life in Saul's court, then ten years of life in the wilderness as a fugitive. Now with Saul's death David comes back to Judah and is anointed King over that tribe for 7 1/2 years before at last becoming King of all Israel. And just as God had lessons for David among the sheep and in the wilderness, there were some for him to learn while beginning to exercise kingly power. Now the key thing God wants in any person who has authority (whether king, senator, or parent) is righteousness, a recognition of and a love for that which is just and fair and pure. And that is what God wants in us too, compare **1 Jn. 3:6-9**. If we are truly born of God, then there will be a righteousness in us; we will do and love what is right. And that righteousness will grow and grow throughout our lives. But just like in David's life, there will be some:

I. The Times in Which Righteousness is Tested For example:

1. a time of grieving (1:11-12) The news of Saul's death brought a time of real sadness and mourning to David. He was grief-stricken. Yet he was faced with what to do with the man who claimed to have put Saul out of his misery. Should he reward him or execute him! It was a test! Sorrow tends to fog and cloud your thinking; it tends to make you overlook doing what is right for doing what feels good. To do right in times like this requires more than a head knowledge of right and wrong; it takes a heart that loves righteousness.

2. a time of waiting (2:8-11) You remember that David was promised the throne by the Lord more than ten years earlier and now he has to wait another seven years because Saul's general Abner had managed to set up Saul's son Ishbosheth as King over the northern portion of Israel, even though he himself seems to be the chief power. Having Abner out of the way would surely have helped David's cause along and it so happened that Joab conveniently found a legitimate way to murder him. Again David was tested. I tell you, when you have to wait a long time, you're sorely tempted to help God along by cheating a bit, by breaking the rules. Only a righteous heart will sustain you.

3. a time of conflict (3:1) These years were a time of war between Israel and Judah, between Ishbosheth and David. Getting Ishbosheth out of the way would settle it, which two men did and again David is faced with doing right. But when there is conflict with someone, when someone doesn't like you or is after you, there is surely a great temptation to forsake righteousness. You see, it's the pressure points where you are tested and where your heart shows through, times of sorrow or waiting or conflict. Surface actions and thinking won't cut it in those times. Jesus said actions flow from within, out of the heart. And pressure wipes away the veneer and surface and lets the heart show. So, let's look at:

II. The Tests in Which Righteousness is Displayed During this time God allowed the righteousness of David's heart to be tested by three deaths, and in each one of them David shows a different aspect of true righteousness from the heart.

1. David recognized evil (Ch. 1) David was still at Ziklag after rescuing his family from captivity when a man arrived to report to him on the great battle between King Saul and the Philistines.

a. the Amalekite's alleged deed (6-10) Here is a biblical case of euthanasia. This man claimed to have happened to be on Mt. Gilboa when Saul was wounded and dying and to have put him out of his misery. Now David, who was three days journey away, couldn't have known what we know because we have God's account of what really happened in 1 Sam. 31. Saul fell on his own sword and committed suicide. This Amalekite had evidently seized an opportunity to strip the dead Saul of his crown and armband before the Philistines came to do it and had made off to find David, fabricating his story on the way and thinking it would get him great reward from the "new King". But David didn't know that and had to take him at his word, that he had slain Saul, albeit as a favor to him. What would you do?

b. David's righteous response (13-15) David kills him! Why? Because wounded and dying or not, killing is killing. On the surface it seems like he was doing Saul a favor and sparing him from eventual torture, yet at the bottom line David's righteous heart recognized that it was a sinful act and that is:

c. the test: to see evil though it seems good Our society is riddled with cases like this. We want to put old people or diseased people to sleep like we do animals. Many think abortion is OK if the mother was raped, but it's still killing the child. God wants our hearts to be so saturated with His Word that we learn to recognize evil, even when it comes in the guise of seeming good or benevolent! But David did more than recognize evil:

2. David rejoiced not in evil (chs. 2-3) Now David comes back to Judah and is anointed king over Judah. Ishbosheth, Saul's son, becomes king over the rest of the tribes of Israel, yet as I said, it is largely Abner, Saul's general, who is the real power figure in Israel. War ensues between the two kingdoms and Joab, David's chief general, and Abner are the real root of it. Joab particularly hates Abner because in chapter 2 we read how Abner kills Joab's brother

Asahel in battle. Yet after some time, Ish-bosheth the king and Abner his general have a falling out over a woman and Abner is so incensed that he vows to help David rule over the whole of Israel. And that becomes the opportunity for:

a. Joab's tenuous deed (3:19-27) Joab killed Abner to avenge his brother's blood. Joab could do that and get away with it because he could claim he was the avenger of blood, the nearest of kin seeing that justice was done when a relative was killed. Abner was not in a city of refuge and technically under the letter of the law Joab was still within legality. However, Abner had killed Asahel in time of battle and largely in self-defense after trying to dissuade and warn him to turn away. But look at:

b. David's righteous response (3:28, 31-37) He made sure everyone knew he didn't approve of this killing. It may have been legal but it wasn't right. Compare **1 Kings 2:5-6**. David remembered this to his dying day and told Solomon to be careful and watch for an opportunity to enforce true justice upon him before God. He might have had to leave it go unpunished but it still wasn't right. And that is:

c. the test: to disdain evil though it is lawful There are a lot of things like that that come our way, well within the letter of the law but still wrong. Criminals who commit serious crimes walk free on technicalities. There are business practices which are entirely legal but morally wrong. There are a lot of divorces and remarriages today that are socially legal but biblically wrong. It actually would have been advantageous to David to have Abner out of the way but his righteous heart would not let him rejoice. God not only wants us to recognize evil but to actually to abhor and hate it with our hearts. But David went one step further:

3. David remedied evil (Ch. 4) The weak reign of Ish-bosheth did not last long after Abner due to:

a. Recab and Baanah's terrible deed (5-8) They assassinated Ish-bosheth on his bed, killed him outright, for no other reason than to please and to help David, so they thought, but they weren't ready for:

b. David's righteous response (9-12) David had them both killed immediately; he administered true justice. Now Ish-bosheth's death meant that the time had finally come when David could be King over all. It really did help him and was the final thing that brought this long period of waiting to an end, even though it was evil in character. The end does not justify the means and that is:

c. the test: to punish evil even though it helps you, to do something about it and not be content to let it slide by unnoticed because it was to your advantage. You might see another person cheat at school and let it go by because it helps maintain your friendship; you might see a fellow-worker cheat a customer and say nothing because it helps you keep your job. You see, God not only wants you to recognize evil and hate evil but to do something about it!

I wanted to think of an exciting example to leave with you to fix this message on a righteous heart in your minds. And the best one I could think of may prove to be unexciting simply because it is so familiar. But did you notice the uncanny relationship between David's three tests and the ones with which Satan tempted our Lord Jesus in the wilderness? The first was the temptation to turn stones into bread, but Jesus recognized the evil in it, even though seemed good to eat after 40 days! The second was the temptation to jump off the Temple, but Jesus disdained the evil though it was legal for Him, He could have jumped and been caught by angels and proved His identity, but it was testing God and that was wrong! He could not rejoice in showing off for Satan's benefit. The third was the temptation to gain all the kingdoms of the world by worshipping Satan. Jesus took action against Satan even though all those kingdoms were rightfully His and it would have helped shorten His wait and avoid the cross. Jesus had a truly and perfectly righteous heart. Do you? Well, certainly not like His, but is it growing in righteousness. Do you really love good and hate evil, no matter how innocent or enticing or beneficial the evil may be to you? You can be like that. Just pray with David, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Worshipful Heart: 1 Chron. 13-17

As you know, Chronicles and Samuel are parallel accounts of the life of David. The events in our text are also covered in 2 Sam. 6-7 but I chose Chronicles because it seems to have been written from the point of view of the priests in Israel and records many more details about the worship life of David. You see, David had a worshipful heart, a heart that was full of adoration and worship and praise to God. And that's the kind of heart God wants in us also. Let me try to illustrate what I'm talking about. There are marriages and then there are marriages. To outward appearances they may be the same. Some have all the motions. The husband is a good provider, they're Christians who go to church, the wife is exemplary in caring and meeting needs, and so on. But there are other marriages that look exactly the same yet there is a joy in the heart, there is still the excitement in their eyes, still the sweet little nothings whispered in the ear. You know what I mean. There is not just love in terms of commitment but love in terms of feeling. And there are believers and believers. Some go through all the right motions, reading the Bible and praying and serving and teaching. But then there are those who do all the same things and yet there is more; they seem to be really in love with God. They worship Him with all the excitement of a teenager in love. David was one of those! Look at:

I. David's Great Desire to Worship God (13:1-6) Now David is finally king over the whole nation of Israel. The first thing he does is to get himself a secure and defensible capital city so he takes Jerusalem, an almost impenetrable city, and makes it his new home. Then after having to fight off the Philistines in a few initial battles, David finally has a moment to rest in relative peace and as soon as he does, the first thing on his mind is the worship of God; he wants to bring the ark up to Jerusalem. He had a:

1. desire to worship God centrally Where has the ark been? Well, if you remember it was captured 20 years earlier by the Philistines in the time of Samuel and then returned because it caused them so much trouble. All this time it remained in Baalah or Kiriath Jearim, 10 miles west of Jerusalem in a priest's house. The rest of the tabernacle with the altar of burnt offering, was in Gibeon, 5 miles north of Jerusalem. But David couldn't run to Kiriath Jearim or to Gibeon to worship God every day. He wanted the ark and the center of worship in Jerusalem with him where he could worship every day, where it would be central to his life! Do you see the connection? Worshipping God is not something you go off to church to do, something out on the periphery of your life that you do once a week or less! Worship is something you need to do every day in your devotional time and while you're driving and whenever you can, to talk to God and praise and thank Him and sing to Him and read His Word. That is worship! But he also had a:

2. desire to worship God corporately He wanted all of Israel to worship with him. He didn't just want to do it alone. So he gathered representatives from the whole land, hundreds of them, to worship with him as he brought the ark up. You see, it was more than personal. During the whole of Saul's reign there was no listening to God, no coming before the ark to find God's will, no established corporate worship. David wanted it started up again. And one of the things God does in growing believers is to plant in them a desire to worship with other believers. Coming to church should not be a chore nor even just a habit. It should be the desire of your heart to be with others and worship God, not just once a week but as often as possible. Yet a desire to worship is not the whole story. See:

II. David's Great Mistake in Worshipping God (13:7-9) You know the story of Uzzah's touching the ark from Sunday School. But are you able to identify:

1. the mistake: It is really two-fold:

a. putting zeal before the Word David was so zealous to worship God that he forgot to consult the Word of God. And so, his worship was unacceptable. But he did figure out the problem, compare **15:1-2**. The ark was only to be transported by the Levites, carried on their shoulders, not on an ox-cart. The Word of God must be central to worship. In 1 Cor. 14 Paul lays down some rules for corporate worship. He says it must be done in an orderly fashion; its participants must take turns; it must not have confusing elements like the uninterpreted tongues of that day. And it would be quite possible to become wrapped up in zeal and overlook what the Word says like many of our brethren do. On the other hand, Paul also wrote in Eph. 5 that we should be controlled by the Holy Spirit and that our worship should be full of songs and hymns and spiritual songs and that it should come from the heart to the Lord. In our zeal to worship God in a perfect way, it would also be easy to fall into a dead lifeless ritual as so many churches have done and ignore the Word of God in the opposite way! We must test all of our acts of worship by the Word of God.

b. copying pagan practices Why did they put the ark on an ox-cart anyway? Compare **1 Sam. 6:1-2, 10-11**. It was a Philistine idea, a pagan idea. And David and the others just adopted it wholesale without question. If we're not careful, we can do the same thing. For example, where do you find anyone in the Bible chanting repeated prayers over and over. It is not Elijah but the prophets of Baal who chant for hours, "O Baal, hear us!" It is a pagan concept and found in pagan religions across the world. And Jesus warned us against praying in vain repetition as the heathen do! We've got to be careful that our worship is truly the worship of God.

2. the lesson: You see, there is a real lesson here:

a. worship cannot replace obedience Saul found that out, didn't he? On two occasions. In the first he had gathered his army and was waiting for Samuel to come and offer sacrifice but Samuel was delayed and he got worried. He knew worship was important and he set aside the Word of God and intruded into the priest's office and offered the sacrifice himself and God reprimanded him for it. The second time he was sent to kill the Amalekites and told to destroy all the plunder. But he knew worship was important so he saved the best of the animals and other things to be offered to God. Hear Samuel's words, *Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams.* Worship and prayer and praise and singing is no substitute for obedience! We've all known people who worship like crazy but their lives are not in order. That won't work because actually:

b. true worship is obedience You wouldn't believe your child if he constantly said "I love you," but never did anything you said! Obedience is the first step in demonstrating love! And it is the first step in worship. Come with Paul's attitude "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

III. David's Great Zeal in Worshipping God Well, David finally did get to bring the ark up to Jerusalem and having pointed out the cautions about worship, I just want to point out the great zeal David had for worshipping God which should be ours also.

1. he displayed unashamedness (2 Sam. 6:14-16, 20-22) David put his whole heart into worshipping God and he didn't care who knew it. He danced and sang with all his might, laid aside his kingly dignity and dress and acted like a commoner. His wife didn't like it too much but he didn't care. He was unashamed to worship God. Are you? Are you afraid to sing too loud because someone might notice? Do you think that if you really prayed hard sometime and started to cry that you'd be embarrassed? And if you yelled "Amen" out loud once in a while when something moved your heart, would you feel self-conscious? Don't ever be ashamed to worship God. Raise your hands!

2. he displayed unselfishness (1 Chron. 17:1-2) David had put the ark in a tent, just as it was from the days of Moses. But David went home and began to feel bad. Here he was in a fine palace paneled with costly cedar wood and all God has is a tent. Now God, for His own reasons, didn't let David build the Temple, yet He was pleased that the thought was in his heart, that David would want to see God worshipped in a place that would bring honor to His Name and would be willing to foot the cost! See, David's first thought was not amassing wealth and material things for himself, it was worship. That was more important. How many times do we put other things, selfish things, ahead of worship? It might be working to make extra money, watching a TV show, or just plain tiredness and sleeping in that keeps us out of worship. I'm not talking about going on vacation or being sick, but when we consistently choose other things over worship, over being together to give God honor and glory, there is selfishness involved.

3. he changed the nature of worship (16:4-8, 37-42) What did the Levites originally do under the Law? Their primary duty was to transport the Tabernacle from place to place. Now, of course, that wouldn't be necessary. It would stay put. But David took it a step further. He instituted the organized function of praise and the singing of Psalms as part of the daily routine both at Gibeon and in Jerusalem. He wanted to see that praise and worship were not occasional but perpetual. Are they in your life? Are you in love with God and excited about it? Is worship something you love and do every day or is it just an activity you endure each week? The heart God wants is full of worship.

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Penitent Heart: 2 Sam. 11-12

If I had you name one incident from David's life that you remember more vividly than any other, most folks would say either the Goliath incident or this one, David's great sin. I don't think that I need to spend much time detailing the sin for you; you know the story. Rather, I think this story displays the thing about David's heart that sets him head and shoulders above almost anyone else that God used in the Old Testament. David knew what to do when he sinned as a believer; he had a penitent heart, a heart that God could touch when he sinned and he would repent sincerely and genuinely. Do you have a penitent heart? Well, if not, by the time we are done with this study, I hope you will. First let's see:

I. The Need For Repentance (Ch. 11) Repentance is not something only for unbelievers. The word *repent* in the original language means to turn about, to be going in one direction and to turn and go the other. And we as believers need that just as much as unbelievers do because:

1. we are all subject to sin (4) Now this is David, the sweet singer of Israel, the man after God's own heart, the one who was righteous and would not lay a hand on Saul. This great David committed adultery with his neighbor's wife, an offense punishable by death under the Law! David, for all the good qualities of his heart, was still subject to sin. He was not some super-human spiritual giant. He did not wrestle not with ethereal type temptations but with the gutter stuff like lust. And if David had flesh that tempted him and could fall, so can we. Don't ever look down on someone else involved in sin with the attitude that you could never do that. You could. The best of us is entirely capable of the worst of it, because we all have sin dwelling in us. So, it is a foregone conclusion that sooner or later you and I will sin in some way.

2. we are all prone to cover sin This is our natural reaction when we do something wrong. Now we can cover it in two ways:

a. by hiding it (8) Bathsheba turned up pregnant. David figured Uriah might be a little upset at the news because he'd been away fighting at Rabbah for a good long time. So David tried to get Uriah to come home and sleep with his wife so Uriah would not find out later they'd been messing around. He tried in the simplest way he could to hide it. Isn't that what we do? We don't tell anybody. We put on a smiley face and try to look as though nothing ever happened, because we wouldn't want anyone to know we'd sinned; they might tell God! And then if things get bad, we try to cover:

b. by compounding it (14) David murdered to cover his adultery. So often we'll lie to cover our cheating or commit some other sin just as bad or worse just to keep from having to admit the first one. We all do this by nature. There is something in us that absolutely hates to admit that we are wrong, that we have sinned. That's one of the things that makes it tough for people to get saved. Human nature doesn't like to say, "I'm wicked and vile and deserve

hell"! And that is how oftentimes believers react to their own sins. We're too proud to admit them on their own but we see here another thing:

3. God will point out our sin When you sin, you know you would never have done it if God was standing there watching. But you forgot He is invisible! He WAS watching. You can't hide it from Him. And in fact, because you're His child, God will go to great lengths to point it out to you in two ways:

a. inwardly - Ps. 32:3-5 It was more than nine months that David covered his sins. And Ps. 32 is the record of what went on inside him during that time. He was miserable! It's called conviction and it's one of the functions of the Holy Spirit living in us. He does not allow us to enjoy sin, but makes us live with the gnawing knowledge of it. Whether it's murder or not, sin will still come back to haunt you! Every time you pray or read God's Word, it'll be there. That's God! But if that doesn't work God can do it:

b. outwardly (12:1, 7) God sent Nathan and he stuck his finger in David's face and said, "You are the man!" God can let us get caught. God can send a friend or even an enemy or even a pastor or elder. But inwardly or outwardly God will let us know that He knows that we've sinned. Now from David in chapter 12 we see:

II. The Way Of Repentance (Ch. 12) Instead of following our nature and covering our sin, God wants us to repent, to turn away from the sin and that means:

1. swiftly admitting the fact of sin (13) See how quick he was to own up! That's how we need to be with God. But it's not in our nature. When you argue with your spouse and know you have to apologize, how long does it take you? Don't you sometimes drag it on for hours or days instead of doing it immediately? When you sin don't wait admit it to God. Don't try to cover and hide it. Own up immediately.

2. humbly accepting the consequences of sin (21-23) David judged himself right out of his own mouth in verse 6. He said four-fold. And for one life he paid four-fold in the deaths of Bathsheba's son, Amnon, Absalom, and in the end Adonijah, his own 4 sons. Here is the first of those. David prayed for the child to live. But when he didn't, he got up and worshiped and said, "God be praised anyway". He humbly accepted the consequences of his sin. He acknowledged God's right to discipline him and left himself at God's mercy. True repentance is not just, "I'm sorry", but "I'm willing to take the punishment I deserve!"

III. The Steps In Repentance - Psalm 51 Our study of David's repentance would be incomplete unless we looked at David's heart during the process. And fortunately, we have David's inner thoughts and his prayer to God on this occasion recorded for us in Ps. 51. Repentance really involves three distinct parts:

1. confession (2-6) To confess means to admit, to agree with God about the sinfulness of your action and to tell Him so. "Lord, I've sinned!" It is not making excuses and saying, "Well, I really didn't plan to." or "It was all someone else's fault." or "It was only a little thing." God wants us to face our sin squarely and take responsibility for it. Compare 2 Cor. 7:10. The source of repentance is a Godly kind of sorrow. That is, you must know in your heart that you have wronged God and be truly sorry for it and that will condition your heart for true confession.

2. petition (7-12) Having admitted your sin to God, there are some things you need to ask God for:

a. for forgiveness (7, 9) That's the most obvious thing. You want to ask Him to "send away" that sin, to not let it come between you any longer, to cover it with the blood of Christ.

b. for change (10) There should be in you a holy dread of doing it again. David is praying for an inner change, for God to work in his heart to change and purify it, to keep him from being prone to the lust into which he fell. It is not only, "Lord, forgive me", but "Lord change and cleanse me and help me so that it will not happen again."

c. for restored fellowship (12) As you know, believers are not lost when they sin; we are not cast out of God's family. But we do experience a hindrance in our fellowship. Our prayers go unanswered; Bible reading becomes difficult. It is tough to communicate and walk with God. We do not pray to be saved all over again but we do need to pray for a restored fellowship, a return to close communion with God.

3. commitment (13-19) Now David made some promises to God, some commitments for the future. He has already asked God for the help to not repeat his sin in the future. But now he promises God some other things. He commits himself:

a. to singing (14-15) He will praise God. He promises to show true appreciation for his forgiveness. So many times, once our sin is forgiven and forgotten, we continue on but we forget that we've been forgiven. How many times do you hear somebody get up and testify, "God forgave me for a sin this week!" And it's not only that we don't like to admit we sin, it's that there is no real joy in being forgiven. It's matter of fact, a given that we take for granted. David promises to sing!

b. to service (13) He will testify of His mercy to others. Now he doesn't say he's going to go around spreading all the gory details of his sin. But he's going to use God's forgiveness as an opportunity to testify to others of God's grace and mercy and to teach them what God requires. He's going to turn this thing into an opportunity to serve God.

Well, friend, do you have a penitent heart, a heart that repents easily when you sin. As I said at the beginning, I believe this is the single most important quality David displayed above any other Old Testament person I can think of. You don't have to be perfect to be used by God. You don't have to preach like Peter or pray like Paul. You don't have to reach some level of sinless perfection before God will say "Now I can use you." Here is what God really wants, **Ps. 51:17**.

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

An Enduring Heart: 2 Sam. 15-17

If I could characterize the remainder of David's life after his great sin with Bathsheba in one word it would be: trouble. Nathan had told him in 12:10-11 that the sword would never depart from his house and that calamity would come upon him from his own household. And it did. Bathsheba was David's midlife crisis. He was probably somewhere in his late forties at that time and during the last 20 years or so of his life David faced one trouble after another. Chapters 13-20 of 2 Samuel give us the record. In chapter 13 his daughter Tamar was raped by her half-brother Amnon and Amnon was murdered by Tamar's brother Absalom. In chapter 14 Absalom, who has fled to his grandfather, returns. In chapters 15-17 Absalom begins to plot David's overthrow and leads a rebellion but is killed in the end. In chapter 20 David has no sooner returned to Jerusalem than another rebellion is led by Sheba. One trouble after another and yet somehow David did not become bitter, did not turn against the Lord. He endured. He made it through all his troubles with his faith intact. He had an enduring heart. That's something most of us could use, couldn't we? We need to know how to have an enduring heart. Well, fortunately we have David's secret. You see, Abraham chronicled his life with altars. On the special occasions in his life, he built an altar to God and those altars called the events to mind. David chronicled his life with Psalms. Every time something happened in his life, David wrote a Psalm about it. We have the 23rd Psalm from his life as a shepherd. When David was in the wilderness, he wrote Psalms about it. When he sinned, he wrote Psalms about his repentance. When Absalom rebelled and he had to flee, he wrote Psalms about it. And in those Psalms, we can find the secret of how he endured the various aspects of this difficult time of trouble in his life. The first thing we note in chapters 15-17 is that:

I. He Endured the Defection of Friends - Ps. 55

1. what happened Part of the pain of Absalom's rebellion was that many important people who had previously been loyal to David now switched and followed Absalom. But there was one that stood out:

a. the betrayal of Ahithophel - 2 Sam. 15:30-31 David and the men with him are leaving the city of Jerusalem going up the Mount of Olives. David is weeping and crying and one of the things that made him sad was that he had been told that his close friend and advisor, Ahithophel, had now joined Absalom. Ahithophel was a wise man. He gave Absalom a plan that would have killed David right away if Absalom had followed it. David knew that Ahithophel would be giving Absalom good advice and prayed that God would thwart it.

b. the end of Ahithophel - 2 Sam. 17:14, 23 I'm going to tell you the end of the story before the middle. Ahithophel knew his plan was Absalom's only hope and when it wasn't followed, he knew his goose was cooked so he cooked it himself by committing suicide. God answered David's prayer in the end. But for now, go back to sad David trudging up the Mount of Olives and turn to Ps. 55 to see:

2. how he felt (12-14, 20-21) He was crushed! Ahithophel was his close friend, his companion, the KJV says his guide, one who had given him advice, one who had fellowshiped with him before the Tent of Meeting. Can you imagine how you would feel? Imagine someone you are very close to now suddenly revealed to be a traitor who is trying to hurt and harm you! It would crush you too! God does not guarantee that you will have no trouble and that that trouble won't hurt. But David endured and here's:

3. how he endured He did two key things:

a. he brought his burden to the Lord (22) He cast his burden on the Lord and he advises us to do the same, compare 16-17. Pray! Morning, night, and noon, Pray! The Lord will sustain you. He knows what it is like to be betrayed and hurt by your own close friend! And then:

b. he trusted the Lord (23) He let it in God's hands and trusted God to take care of it, which He did! David not only prayed; he trusted God to care for him and to work out the problem.

II. He Endured the Opposition of Enemies - Ps. 3 Now in the inscription you see David was in flight here. You see, he did not have a large army with him in Jerusalem. Most were not professional soldiers but common people who would leave home and serve in battle. He had to get away from Absalom's troops so he could have time to muster an army. So he headed out over the Mt. of Olives and down to Jericho by the Jordan River, some 20 miles away. And verse 1 and especially verse 2 tell us what's going through his mind as he travels! See:

1. what happened - 2 Sam. 16:5-8, 13-14 All the way down the long dusty road there was this Shimei character, shouting and taunting and throwing stones, telling him God wouldn't do him any good, would never deliver him. And Shimei was just the visible reminder of Absalom and all his troops coming behind. Maybe you've been there too, when people have opposed you and fought against you and mocked you for your faith. Yet David endured and here's:

2. how he endured See if these two steps sound familiar:

a. he brought his burden to the Lord (4) He prayed; he cried aloud to the Lord. He told the Lord of all his fear and all those against him. And then:

b. he trusted the Lord (3, 5-6) What did he do when he got to the Jordan? In Samuel it says he refreshed himself. Here it tells us how. He lay down and slept! How could he sleep when Absalom might be hot on his heels with all his troops? The answer is in verse 3; he knew the Lord was his shield! He trusted the Lord to protect and care for Him. Now are you beginning to catch David's pattern for dealing with trouble? Let's look at it just one more time and see that in this time also:

III. He Endured the Oppression of Circumstances - Ps. 61 Look at:

1. what happened - 2 Sam. 17:22, 24-26 David crossed the Jordan during the night and continued on northeast 30 miles to the town of Mahanaim where he waited and gathered an army, just as Absalom was gathering his army. Look at his feelings in verse 2. He is at the end of the (not earth but) land, almost shoved out of his kingdom. His heart is overwhelmed, literally shrouded with darkness. He is just oppressed by his circumstances. Here he sits in a tent in the wilderness with his army of the faithful few gathered round. He is totally insecure and does not know what the future holds. Yet he endured and here's:

2. how he endured Our familiar two steps:

a. he brought his burden to the Lord (2) He cries out there in trouble at the end of the land as his heart grows faint. He prays to God, casts his burden on the Lord, carries it to God in prayer and secondly:

b. he trusted the Lord There are three very beautiful descriptive phrases which he uses in declaring his trust here. First, he trusted the Lord:

(1) as his Strength (2) He is the Rock higher than I, and when I am weary of swimming and the waves are too strong and my strength is all gone, then I see the high rock sticking out. But I am too weak to climb up so I cry out and God does for me what I cannot do; He sets me on the high rock of Himself where I am secure from the effects of my overwhelming circumstances, where they can't reach me. He said, "God I have no strength; be my strength; I trust You!"

(2) as his Shield (3) A tower is a fortress built for defense on the corner of a city wall. It was a strong secure place where the enemy could not reach you, where you were protected. David says, "Lord, I have no defense, no shield; be my shield; I trust You!"

(3) as his Security (4) The picture here is of a mother bird gathering her chicks and covering them with her wings and once they are covered they feel safe and secure. God has big wings! David prays, "Lord, I have no security here; be my security; I trust you!"

And that, my friends is the secret of how David endured all his troubles, from first to last. He would carry them to God in prayer and then trust Him to take care of it. The hymn writer Charles A. Tindley put it this way:

If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold. And you have to get along with meager fare. Just remember in His Word that He feeds the little bird; Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there!

If your body suffers pain and your health you can't regain, and your soul is almost sinking in despair. Jesus knows the pain you feel, He can save and he can heal; Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there!

When your enemies assail and your heart begins to fail, don't forget that God in heaven answers prayer. He will make a way for you and will lead you safely thro' Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

When your youthful days are done and old age is stealing on, and your body bends beneath the weight of care. He will never leave you then, He'll go with you to the end; Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there!

Leave it there; leave it there. Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there! If you'll trust and never doubt, He will surely bring you out. Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there!

That, my friends, is the only way you'll endure the storms of life. Your heart must learn the pattern: take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. There's a beautiful statement about Moses in Heb. 11:27. Like David he left Egypt with the chariots of Pharaoh's army pursuing hot on his tail. But he did not fear old Pharaoh's wrath. It says, "He persevered (KJV endured) because he saw Him who is invisible". Though he couldn't see God with his eyes, he saw God in his problem. How? By faith, by trusting Him. I don't know what your problems are in life, but I do know that it worked for David and it worked for Moses and it's worked for me. So, take your burden to the Lord and leave it there!

THE HEART THAT PLEASES GOD - The Life of David

A Thankful Heart: Psalm 18 (2 Sam. 22)

The remaining events of David's life are few. We've been attempting to follow the books of 1 and 2 Samuel as our outline for his life. 2 Sam. 22-23 are really the end of the story. Chapter 23 even contains David's last words. But then the writer goes back to pick up an event that actually occurred earlier in David's life, an event that set the stage for the building of the Temple by Solomon, so he tells it last. And, of course, 1 Kings goes on to detail David's dying days and the anointing of Solomon. But 2 Sam. 22-23 are really the end, the capstone. Chapter 22 is a Psalm that David wrote. It was preserved and used in public worship and so we have it as Psalm 18 with only a few minor changes, if you'll turn there. The inscription says David sang it when the Lord had delivered him from all his enemies and from Saul. 2 Samuel places it at the end of his life. Spurgeon calls it a Psalm of Retrospect, a Psalm of looking back over his life and remembering all that God had done for him. No doubt he had first composed it earlier in his life after the Lord spared him from Saul. He probably sang it often, perhaps after every victorious battle with the Philistines. But in the end of his life, he could look back and sing it again. And what this Psalm tells us about David is that he had a thankful heart. Now think about his life: 10 years hiding in the wilderness like a hunted animal, 7 years of reigning only over Judah with constant strife from Israel. Then years of having to fight off Philistines, Ammonites, and others. Then 20 years of troubles, his own children killed, two insurrections against him, even several years of famines and plague which we didn't study. Most of us would consider that a rough life! Yet David looks back on it all and sings a Psalm of Thanksgiving. How can that be? David had a thankful heart. He didn't look back at a situation and see the pain. He looked back and saw the Lord. That's the kind of heart God wants. Some of us here today have had pretty rough lives. There are some difficult things we've come through, some tough times. How can I have a thankful heart? Let's look at Ps. 18 and see.

I. I Must Remember What God Has Been To Me (1-2) There are eight things that David called God here, things that God had been and still was to him. If my heart is going to be thankful, I must remember, not my problems, but what God has been to me in my problems:

1. my strength O how many times have you not had the strength to hold up in the face of some problem. You thought you could never make it. You lost your husband or wife. You faced a serious illness or operation. You cared for a loved one who was sick or the weight of caring for your family just got to be too much. Yet somehow you found strength to go on; you prayed and somehow the strength was there to do more than the natural. And that was God! He was there by the Holy Spirit infusing Divine strength into your weary bones. He literally has been my strength.

2. my rock A rock is something that doesn't move, something solid, something you can step or lean on without fear, something you can depend on. David couldn't always count on Saul; one moment he loved him and another tried to kill him. He couldn't count on his own family or close friends; they rose up against him. But he could count on God. God was his security, his never-changing, never-failing friend. And you've found the same. Others have let you down but when you turned to Him, He's always been there for you. He is your Rock, your security.

3. my fortress The Hebrew word here is the same as the root of the word *Masada*. You remember the story of Masada, don't you? It was that walled fortress built on a high steep-sided plateau down by the Dead Sea where in later history a band of zealous Jews held off an entire Roman legion for something like three years. David was familiar with Masada (when he went down to "the stronghold", in Hebrew it *masada*) It means a fort, an impenetrable defense. But God was David's real defense. Look how many times his life was in danger, in battle, from Saul, from Absalom, and more. Yet no matter, it was just as though he were in Masada. God was an impenetrable defense all about and nothing could touch him. God has been the same to you. Despite near-accidents on the highway, service in battle, major surgeries and illnesses, you are here! God is your fortress.

4. my deliverer Here it means a rescuer, one who reaches down into your trouble and lifts you out of it. When David first fled from Saul, he thought of going down to the Philistines but when he got to Gath and presented himself before the King, he heard the servants whispering and suddenly realized the great danger he was in. Here he is surrounded with no way out, yet God is there and plants an idea in his mind, to act like a madman! How many times has God gotten you out of things, out of situations where you just needed supernatural intervention and He delivered you? It may have been physical, financial or whatever the crisis; God has been your deliverer.

5. my refuge Rocks are good not only for leaning on but for hiding in. David knew that. He had hidden for years in the rocky places in the wilderness. A large rock was a place of retreat, a place you could go to get away and find an hour of peace and clear your thinking and be free from worry. How many times was that place your prayer closet, that refuge the arms of the Lord Himself. How many times did you take your burden to the Lord and just leave it there? He has been your refuge!

6. my shield The Hebrew word means the warrior's small shield or buckler which he held in his hand to ward off sword blows or spear thrusts. It was mobile and turned this way and that to meet the next attack from whichever direction it came. How many times has God been your small shield, helped you in the little things of life, like finding a missing ob-

ject or finding the right words to say or getting a ride or making the money come just before the payment is due. God has been your shield.

7. my horn A horn in the Bible is usually a metaphor for power, coming from the concept of the ram's horn, the strongest ram having the biggest horns for pushing. In this case the power is for salvation. The Hebrew is *yesha*, from which comes Yeshua or Jesus, who was so named because He would save his people from their sins! David may have been thinking of God's power to save him physically but we can relate it spiritually. God is the power of our salvation. If you have nothing else to be thankful for, this is enough. He is our salvation.

8. my stronghold The Hebrew here means a cliff or inaccessible place where nothing can touch you. It is another amplification of the thought that God surrounds and protects you so that nobody can touch you. We thought of it before in the physical sense but this reminds me of Jn. 10:27-30. God has big hands and nobody is big enough to take you away from Him. He holds you secure. He is your stronghold!

Well, now that we've covered the first two verses, let's quickly look at the rest. If I am to have a thankful heart:

II. I Must Remember What God Has Done For Me (3-29) Now David tells the story of a time when he was in trouble and God rescued him. He tells it in very symbolic, poetic terms rather than literal ones. And I suspect that rather than having a specific battle in mind, David may have in mind all the many times God had delivered him. What has God done for me?

1. He answered my prayer (6) Think of all the times and places in your life when you cried to God and He answered prayer. Can you even begin to remember them all?

2. He rescued from danger (16-17) Think of all the times and places in your life where He's rescued you and gotten you out of serious trouble.

3. He rewarded my righteousness (24) Here's a neat thought. Think of all the times and places in your life when God rewarded and blessed you for doing right. You did the right thing and were blessed for it. You gave and God blessed in return. You helped and God returned it somehow!

4. He helped me in difficulty (28-29) Think of all the times and places in your life when you've been in a tight spot, when your lamp was about out, when there was a troop too tough or a wall too high but God helped you and you advanced and you scaled the problem.

To be thankful just remember all God has done. You might keep a diary! Then finally if I am to have a thankful heart:

III. I Must Remember What God Has Given Me (30-36) Let me just list the things David mentions; God has given them to you also. They are precious gifts:

1. strength (32a) We talked about that earlier; you could never have done what you've done and accomplished what you have without the gift of strength.

2. guidance (32b) He's kept me off the wrong paths and on His right path. Think of those you know who are out in sin. The fact that you're not with them is purely God's gift.

3. ability (33-34) He gives me ability to use my feet and hands and arms to serve His purposes. If I can run like a deer or shoot like Robin Hood, it is His gift. The same goes for thinking, writing, playing an instrument, or you name it. All our abilities are His gift.

4. protection (35) The protection you've had is His gift.

5. prevention (36) So many times God has gone before and smoothed out the path of your life before you had to walk it. You've been exempted from so many troubles you might have had. That's God's gift.

Oh, if you're a Christian today, how can you not have a thankful heart like David had. He sang this song on the mountain-top, in a day when things had gone well. Some of you can sing it with him there today. Your life is crowned with blessing and happiness. But I think there were times David sang this in the valley, in difficulties and problems. Maybe that's where you are today. You say, "How can I?" Paul has a word for you in Phil. 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice!" You don't have to love your problem, but you can rejoice in your Lord, in the fact that He is your Rock and your Fortress and your Strength. *John Gray, a Methodist preacher of the early days, never failed to thank God for something, no matter how bad the times or how severe the trial. One day he had to battle through wind and sleet to his preaching appointment at a distant village chapel, and the small congregation wondered what he could be thankful for in such weather. When it came time for prayer, John prayed, "This is a wretched day, dear Lord, no doubt about it; but we thank Thee Lord that every day isn't as bad as this one!"* Someone has said, "It's not what's in your pocket that makes you thankful, but what's in your heart." What's in yours?

KINGS and CHRONICLES

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Judah: Rehoboam, Abijam(h), Asa ***1 Kings 14:21 - 15:24***

I. The Reign Of Rehoboam - 14:21-31

- 1. statistics: age 41, 17 year reign, mother an Ammonite (21)
- 2. spiritual character: pagan idolatrous worship laced with sexual immorality (22-24) - 2 Chr. 11:17, 12:1
- 3. Judah was invaded by Egypt as punishment from God (25-28) - 1 Chron. 12:2
- 4. his death and continual conflict with Israel (29-31)

II. The Reign Of Abijam (called Abijah in Chronicles) - 15:1-8

- 1. statistics: 3 year reign, mother the granddaughter of Absalom but an idolater (1-2) compare vs. 13
- 2. he initially continued in all the sins of his father Rehoboam (3) - not *wholly devoted* = *shalom*
- 3. God tolerated him because of His promise to David concerning his line and his city (4-5)

4. he got involved in an all out war with Jeroboam of Israel (6) - 2 Chronicles 13:2b-20
 - a. he turned to the Lord and claimed His covenant when he was in deep trouble
 - b. God rescued Judah when it seemed impossible
5. he died after only a 3 year reign (7-8)

III. The Reign Of Asa - 15:9-24

1. statistics: 41 year reign, grandmother Maacah (9-10)
2. spiritual character: walked in the ways of David (11)
 - a. he removed the idols and cult prostitution from the land (12)
 - b. he even deposed his own grandmother for her idolatry (13)
 - c. he took away the shrines dedicated to idols but not those to the Lord (14a) - 2 Chron. 14:3
 - d. he was wholly devoted to the Lord all his life (14b)
 - e. he devoted the spoils of war with Ethiopia to the Lord in His temple (15) - 2 Chron. 14:12-13
3. in his 36th year he was attacked by Baasha of Israel and his faith failed (16)
 - a. he took the gold of the Temple to buy Syria's loyalty and get out of trouble (17-22)
 - b. this was an act of faithlessness and God rebuked him - 2 Chron. 16:7-10
4. in his 39th year he became diseased in his feet, acted faithlessly and eventually died (23-24) - 2 Chr. 16:12

Israel: Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab ***1 Kings 15:25 - 16:34***

I. Nadab Reigned Two Years - 15:25-28

1. he followed Jeroboam's evil ways
2. he was murdered by Baasha during battle

II. Baasha Reigned Twenty Four Years - 15:29-16:7

1. he completely wiped out all the descendants of Jeroboam (29-30)
2. he invaded Judah but was distracted by Syria (31-32) - 2 Chron. 16:16-22
3. he also followed Jeroboam's evil ways (33-34)
4. God proclaimed through the prophet Jehu that all HIS descendants would be wiped out (16:1-7)

III. Elah Reigned Two Years - 16:8-10

1. he was murdered by Zimri an army commander while he was drunk at Tirzah

IV. Zimri Reigned Seven DAYS - 16:11-20

1. he immediately wiped out all the descendants of Baasha (11-14)
2. the army made Omri their commander King and besieged Zimri at Tirzah (15-17)
3. Zimri committed suicide (18-20)

V. Tibni Wrestled For The Throne For Four Years - 16:21-22

1. there was a four year long civil war to establish who would be King - compare 15 with 21

VI. Omri Reigned Twelve Years - 16:23-28

1. he shifted the capital of Israel from Tirzah to Samaria in the middle of his reign (23-24)
2. he also followed Jeroboam's evil ways and did even worse! (25-28)

VII. Ahab Reigned Twenty Two Years - 16:29-34

1. he made an alliance with Sidon by marrying Jezebel
2. he instituted the worship of Baal in Israel through her influence
3. twice God says he did more evil than all who were before him
4. the city of Jericho was rebuilt during his reign and God's prophecy was fulfilled - Josh. 6:26

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1 Kings 17- 2 Kings 2 - ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

The Power of Prayer

Elijah lived in a very dark time. Ahab was the king of Israel and his wife Jezebel had led Israel into the worship of Baal and Ashtaroht. There were only 7000 worshippers of the Lord left in the whole country; prophets of the Lord were being sought out and put to death and then the land was plunged into a 3 ½ year long drought. How those dear believers must have felt, isolated, afraid, discouraged, perhaps ready to give up. And those are the same feelings that many of us may have in this dark time we're going through right now. But onto that scene God sends Elijah and in his very name there is encouragement for us because it means, "My God is Jehovah!". Even in the darkest of times our God is still here and still in control of all that is happening!

But the first encouragement I'd like to share with you begins in 1 Kings 17:1, *Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!"* Of course, Elijah didn't just say that on his own; he was told by God to declare it, but what I want you to notice is how that was accomplished. We're told in James 5:7 that, *Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!* Imagine that: Elijah's prayer was so powerful and so effective that it stopped raining in all Israel for 3 ½ years. Dark times like this are a time to pray! And the most encouraging thing is that you don't have to be some specially anointed, super spiritual giant for your prayers to be effective! James assures us that Elijah was a normal human being like we are with all our fears and failures, yet his prayer rocked a nation. So, your prayers can have a huge impact! As you pray for our nation and for the other nations of the world during this current pandemic, if you're praying earnestly, God hears and your prayer can impact our state, our nation and the whole world.

But notice one more thing. Elijah's very words to the king are a challenge to point out God's power. He is saying, "The God of Israel lives and He is going to stop the rain!" Now Baal was an agricultural god, the god of who supposedly controlled the crops and the weather. And here is Elijah praying in a 3-year drought. For 3 years many of the people of Israel prayed, "O Baal, send rain!" as their crops didn't grow and their animals starved. But no rain came. The real purpose of Elijah's prayer was that the Lord would show Israel that He is the true God and draw them to worship Him once again. And that should be the major focus of our praying too, not just to protect ourselves and our loved ones, but that Jesus will use this time of danger and uncertainty and frustration to show the people in our lives as well as people all over the world that He is the true God and their only hope to have eternal life. Ask that through the peace you have and the help you give and the words you say, that those who are outside of Christ might be drawn to Him. And ask for that to happen for other believers all over the world.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

God's Amazing Provision (Part 1)

When God led Elijah to pray that it wouldn't rain for 3 ½ years, it created a real problem for him. First, King Ahab was angry at him and wanted to kill him, so he had to hide for a long time. But the drought would also create a famine, a shortage

of food and water that would affect Elijah himself; he would need a way to survive. I'm sure you know the story of how God provided for him in two amazing ways and I'd like to look at the first of them today. Let's read 1 Kings 17:2-6. *Then the LORD said to Elijah, "Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food." So Elijah did as the LORD told him and camped beside Kerith Brook, east of the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook.* God sent Elijah across the Jordan river to hide in a remote gorge or ravine with a stream flowing through it and there, ravens actually brought him food twice every day, in the morning and again in the evening.

Now our current situation is much like a drought in economic terms. Many of us may be wondering how God is going to provide for us during this time. Maybe we've lost our job or been laid off or our company has folded and our income has ceased. Maybe our hours have been reduced or we're living on unemployment which is less than we need to pay our bills. Maybe we're on a fixed income that depends on our retirement savings and we've watched the value of our IRA drop severely. And we don't know how long this will be. And I think there are some encouragements for us as we look at Elijah's experience

First, notice in verse 4 God says, *I have commanded them to bring you food.* The ravens may have brought it, but God was the source. Don't ever lose sight of that. God has a plan for you and in that plan is providing for your needs in the drought times of your life. God knows just how and when He's going to meet your needs even when you don't!

Second, notice in verse 6 the ravens brought it ...*each morning and evening.* God provided food as it was needed. He didn't send a stockpile so Elijah could store it up and ration it out but just enough for each meal, one meal at a time. Now God may sometimes send you a lot of provision at once, but He doesn't have to do it that way. Much of the time He meets our immediate need just when we need it and that keeps us dependent on Him.

Third, notice that God often uses natural means. In one sense ravens picking up scraps of bread and meat is a pretty natural thing. So is having them feed morning and evening, and even having them fly to water daily is natural. But having them drop their food there for Elijah and to be so regular and dependable with it isn't! God used natural means and arranged them to suit His purpose and He often does this with us. He provides overtime or a side job just when a bill is due or sends a birthday gift just at a time of need. Or if you look at it another way, God often sends us provision in unexpected ways. Elijah would never have imagined that ravens would bring him food! And sometimes God just gives you an unexpected gift. A check shows up, maybe like the stimulus check that many of us received this week or an envelope with money left at our door or bags of food left on the porch.

In any event if you're following Jesus and trusting in Him, be assured that God is going to provide for you! He knows what you need before you ask Him and He will not forget!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

God's Amazing Provision (Part 2)

Because of Elijah's prayer, it didn't rain for 3 ½ years in Israel and that drought created a serious famine in the land. Last time we looked at how God provided for him miraculously by having ravens bring him bread and meat twice each day as he hid by the brook Kerith. So now let's pick up the story in 1 Kings 17:7-16. *But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land. Then the LORD said to Elijah, "Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you." So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?" As she was going to get it, he called to her, "Bring me a bite of bread, too." But she said, "I swear by the LORD your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die." But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!" So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days. There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.*

For many of us right now, our brook is drying up or has already dried up. Maybe our job is gone, our income is gone, or what we now have coming in is not enough to sustain us. Well, when Elijah's water source dried up God sent him completely out of Israel to the north, to the village of Zarephath near Sidon. And, of all people least likely to be able to help him, God sent him to a poor widow and her son, about to make their last meager meal. And the lesson we learn here is that, not only can God provide for you by miraculously sending you what you need, God can also provide for you by stretching what you already have. God can take what little you may have and by His power stretch it and multiply it to meet your needs like He did with the widow's oil and flour. He did both things with Israel in the wilderness; He provided

daily manna from heaven supernaturally, but they wore the clothes they already had and they lasted for 40 years! Jesus took a boy's lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fishes and stretched it to feed a crowd of 5,000 and more. He can do the same in your life in any number of ways.

Sometimes He chooses to shrink the need so that the current supply is adequate. Have you noticed that right now all of us are spending WAY less on gasoline and it costs way less! One friend joked, "I'm getting 3 weeks to the gallon of gas!" We're spending way less on things like eating out or shopping and buying things that aren't essential at the moment. It's suddenly costing us less to live and that is one way God can stretch what we have. Or He can stretch what we have to meet our needs in ways we can't quite understand!

When I graduated from seminary in July of 1979, we didn't have two nickels to rub together and didn't know what our next step was. The dear folks of the church I served there in Ohio raised a love offering of \$1200, which was a lot of money in that day. Our only recourse was to move home to Pennsylvania and stay with my own widowed mother, who wasn't super well off herself. But that \$1200 paid for our U-Haul move and all our remaining bills through July, through all of August while we were driving down to Philadelphia each week to preach here and to the day the good folks from this church drove up to get us with their U-Haul truck and move us into our new home here. God stretched what He gave us to meet our needs. But even as we were carrying furniture into our new home, I didn't have enough money to buy groceries and just at that moment the church treasurer showed up and said, "I thought you could use your first paycheck in advance!" Our brook dried up but we had enough until God sent rain on the land! It was a miracle! God has taught us this same lesson over and over again these 40 years. All five of our kids went to Christian school and between us working extra jobs and special gifts that appeared and scholarships being increased, God stretched what we had for 27 years so they could go.

What I'm telling you is that if you're following Jesus and trusting in Him, be assured that God is going to provide for you one way or the other! He is Jehovah Jireh, God your Provider and He will not fail to provide for you.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

Problems Are Inevitable Yet Purposeful!

We tend to think of Elijah as sort of a spiritual superhero. His prayer stopped rain for 3 ½ years. God sent ravens to feed him and multiplied oil and flour endlessly for him. It would seem like everything always worked out for him and we long to be like that, but one of the first things you notice in his story is in 1 Kings 17:7, after a while the brook dried up! Right in the midst of God miraculously providing, there was a problem! But an even bigger problem occurred while Elijah was staying with the widow and her son at Zarephath, if you'll look at 1 Kings 17:17-24, *Some time later the woman's son became sick. He grew worse and worse, and finally he died. Then she said to Elijah, "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to point out my sins and kill my son?" But Elijah replied, "Give me your son." And he took the child's body from her arms, carried him up the stairs to the room where he was staying, and laid the body on his bed. Then Elijah cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, why have you brought tragedy to this widow who has opened her home to me, causing her son to die?" And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, please let this child's life return to him." The LORD heard Elijah's prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he revived! Then Elijah brought him down from the upper room and gave him to his mother. "Look!" he said. "Your son is alive!" Then the woman told Elijah, "Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the LORD truly speaks through you."* Even while God was providing food miraculously every day, the boy died!

If anything, that shows us that problems and troubles are inevitable. If Elijah had them, you and I will too! If a man with the power to call down fire from heaven had problems, so will we. James says that Elijah was a man just like us, in every way the same. He probably felt the same way that you and I do when problems came up. Think how badly he must have felt as the boy got sicker and sicker and then died and the woman blamed him for her son's death. He probably felt like a failure and maybe wondered why God would let such a thing happen! Problems are going to come and when they do, with them will come the corresponding emotions of sadness, fear, anger, and so on. God gives us no promise of a problem-free life; in fact, Jesus said, *In this world you will have trouble...* We should expect it.

But the more important thing is what you do about the problems when they come up. Elijah did two very important things when the boy died. First, in verse 20 he cried out to the Lord, *O Lord, why have you let this tragedy come upon this poor lady who is helping me?* He poured out the agony he was feeling to the Lord. When problems come, that is the first thing to do, pray! Don't complain and mope or run to friends for sympathy. Pray first. Phil. 4 says we are not to be anxious but in everything we are to pray, to present our requests to God! So, the second thing Elijah did is in verse 21; he asked God to solve the problem. He took his request to God and realized that from that point on it was up to God to deal with the need. Now I don't suggest that you go to funerals and try to raise the dead like he did, but I do suggest that we learn to trust God, to look at how big He is and not at how big our problem is! God has chosen to allow that problem to enter your life, and because you are His child, He has made himself responsible to carry you through that problem. He already knows how He's going to do it!

And look at the end result in verse 24; God got all the glory. In the end the problem brought honor to Elijah as God's servant and ultimately, glory to God. That's why God sends problems into your life; they serve a purpose. God uses them to mold and to shape you. He uses you as you go through them to be a witness of His reality to others. And ultimately, he uses them to get glory for Himself because nobody can solve problems like He can. Jesus said, *I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.* - Luke 4:25-26. God planned to bless that particular widow and feed her through Elijah. There were many widows in Israel that God could have sent Elijah to and multiplied food for, but He had a plan for this particular widow's life and sent Elijah to her. He knew that this widow would believe in Him. Furthermore, He knew that she would be a perfect example to illustrate the teaching of Jesus hundreds of years in the future! Instead of bemoaning problems when they come, look to God and expect Him to use them!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

God Can Protect You!

Here's another encouraging lesson we can learn from Elijah's life. When Elijah told King Ahab that the Lord said that it wasn't going to rain, I'm sure the king scoffed at that at first, but you can imagine his reaction later. As the drought began and got worse and worse, Ahab got madder and madder and, of course that anger was directed at Elijah. Elijah's very life was in great danger, but God protected Elijah. And the two ways God protected him are the same two ways in which God can and does protect us when we face danger.

First, God protected Elijah FROM danger. Let's read 1 Kings 18:1-15, *Later on, in the third year of the drought, the LORD said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!" So, Elijah went to appear before Ahab. Meanwhile, the famine had become very severe in Samaria. So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Obadiah was a devoted follower of the LORD. Once when Jezebel had tried to kill all the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had hidden 100 of them in two caves. He put fifty prophets in each cave and supplied them with food and water.) Ahab said to Obadiah, "We must check every spring and valley in the land to see if we can find enough grass to save at least some of my horses and mules." So they divided the land between them. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. As Obadiah was walking along, he suddenly saw Elijah coming toward him. Obadiah recognized him at once and bowed low to the ground before him. "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" he asked. "Yes, it is," Elijah replied. "Now go and tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'" "Oh, sir," Obadiah protested, "what harm have I done to you that you are sending me to my death at the hands of Ahab? For I swear by the LORD your God that the king has searched every nation and kingdom on earth from end to end to find you. And each time he was told, 'Elijah isn't here,' King Ahab forced the king of that nation to swear to the truth of his claim. And now you say, 'Go and tell your master, "Elijah is here."'" But as soon as I leave you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you away to who knows where. When Ahab comes and cannot find you, he will kill me. Yet I have been a true servant of the LORD all my life. Has no one told you, my lord, about the time when Jezebel was trying to kill the LORD's prophets? I hid 100 of them in two caves and supplied them with food and water. And now you say, 'Go and tell your master, "Elijah is here.'" Sir, if I do that, Ahab will certainly kill me." But Elijah said, "I swear by the LORD Almighty, in whose presence I stand, that I will present myself to Ahab this very day."*

Now what I want you to notice is how well Elijah was protected for this three year period. God kept him FROM danger, that is, He kept the danger away from him. And God can certainly do that for us. God hid Elijah so well in that little ravine by the brook that all the army of Ahab couldn't find him! Then He hid him in a widow's house in a town far away. Yet in 3 ½ years nobody stumbled upon him and got his name and turned him in. Why? God's hand was protecting him! Sometimes God uses ways to protect us that are known only to Himself. He can use unseen angels to shield us or arrange amazing circumstances. How many times have I narrowly escaped an accident on the highway, thanking God that I was not a few seconds earlier or later? Surely, He was protecting me. Other times God will use people to protect us. God used Ahab's believing general Obadiah to protect His prophets. And sometimes God will have other people help you and protect you from the danger that would otherwise befall you. I think of how our ministry partners in India and Kyrgyzstan are protecting people from the danger of starvation right now by giving out food to the hungry. God can keep you away from the danger and the danger away from you if He chooses, but He does not always do it that way.

God also protected Elijah IN THE MIDST OF Danger. Read verses 16-19, *So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?" "I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead. Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel."* As angry as he was, you would think Ahab would have had him instantly seized and slapped in irons, maybe taken back to the city and thrown in a dungeon or publicly executed. Yet he does none of those things. Instead, Elijah gives orders to Ahab and Ahab obeys him! Why? Obviously, God's hand is at work and Elijah is danger-proofed. Sometimes God

supernaturally protects you as you go right through the midst of the danger, just as He took Noah safely through the flood or the three young men safely through the fiery furnace or Daniel safely through the lions' den. I vividly remember looking at a picture of a thoroughly demolished SUV in which our ministry partners in India were riding and marveling at how anybody could have survived, yet the whole family did, with only minor injuries. God protected them. He's protecting so many of our health care workers who walk right in the midst of danger from the coronavirus every day.

But you know, often we expect God to protect us by keeping danger away from us. Yet I think that God most often delights in protecting us right through the midst of danger because He gets more glory to himself by it! Either way, He is well able to protect us and we praise Him!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

God Calls You To Trust Him!

In our little survey of Elijah's life, we now arrive at the famous contest on Mt. Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. I'm sure you know the story, but what I want you to see is how vulnerable a position Elijah was willing to put himself in for God. He really went out on a limb, so to speak, and a really shaky one at that.

Not only does he stand before King Ahab who is his enemy and has been trying to find him and kill him for the last 3 years, but now he stands alone against 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who are gathered on the mountain against him. If nothing else, they could have mobbed him! But look at the incredible challenge he makes to them in verses 20-24, *So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent. Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!" And all the people agreed.* What a challenge! To call down fire from heaven by prayer, to call on God for an immediate impossible miracle! And Elijah makes it even more difficult by soaking his sacrifice with gallons and gallons of water!

But suppose God doesn't answer by fire! Suppose He chooses for His omniscient reasons not to! Elijah would lose the contest and his life! The Lord's Name would be disgraced before all Israel and they would worship Baal. Why would Elijah risk dishonoring the Lord and endangering himself like this? Well, the answer is found in his prayer in verse 36. As he calls on God he says, *...Prove that I have done all this at your command.* He did it because God told him to; he was simply obeying God and trusting Him even though it looked like a crazy thing to do from a human perspective.

Listen, God calls you and I to trust Him and do what He tells us, even when it seems totally irrational or even dangerous. Are you willing to trust God and obey when He calls you to do something really difficult? For instance, there may be times when God tells you to give a large financial gift to His cause. Are you willing to trust Him and do it, even if you don't see how you can pay the rest of your bills? What if God calls you to talk to somebody about Him? Will you only do it if you think the person might be willing to listen? If God calls you to serve Him by taking on a task that seems too big for you, will you refuse? I guess the bottom line is this: Is safety and security most important to you or is trusting God and obeying Him most important?

Two more thoughts. Maybe God has already got you out on a limb in a precarious position today because you've obeyed Him. Don't worry; you are in the safest position there is! And finally, please don't think it is more spiritual to be out on a limb and be looking for limbs to jump out on! Only put yourself in a place like this when you are sure God has called you to do it.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

Our God Is All-Powerful!

Let's go back today to that familiar story of the contest on Mt. Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The text is found in 1 Kings 18:20-40, but I'll just summarize the contest. Elijah says, "You prepare an altar and put wood and a sacrifice on it, then call on Baal to send the fire to burn it up. I'll do the same and call on the Lord and the god who answers by fire must be the true God." That's the central issue, not just which god is greater but which is the one true living God, Baal or Jehovah. The test Elijah set up is simple and also fair. Baal is proclaimed to be the god of the fertility of the land and the crops and the god who controls the weather. He is said to control nature and rain and storms. It is already an embarrassment to Baal worshippers that he has not been able to make it rain for 3 ½ years, but Baal should easily be able to send a lightning bolt. Plus, those praying to him outnumber Elijah 450 to 1, yet after 6 hours of chanting and even cutting themselves, when the test is done, Baal can produce no fire. Then Elijah, after pouring many gallons of water on the altar

and the wood to make sure everyone knows there is no trick, prays a simple prayer and God sends fire from heaven! It consumes everything, even the stones of the altar, all the water and even the dust underneath!

Listen, we have a God of power! The Lord can do the impossible, even when the wood is soaked! Sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in the truths that we must learn to endure problems and persevere in them, that we forget that the God who hung the worlds in space, who parted the Red Sea, who fed the Israelites in the wilderness, and on and on *ad infinitum* is our God! Ps. 48 says, "This God is our God!" Let's never forget that we have an all-powerful omnipotent God who can do anything He chooses to do so we can ask Him for difficult things!

In fact, God often proves His reality by displaying His power. Think about it. How can a spiritual Being prove to humans that He exists? Either by taking a visible form that they can see (which He did in Jesus) or by doing something that only a supernatural being could do. God often does this. It is the one evidence that cannot be disputed or argued away. As the Jewish leaders said about Peter and John healing the lame man, *...Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.* When God heals someone miraculously or answers a prayer so clearly or transforms the life of someone who comes to Christ, people can't deny that God has done it.

So, God uses His power to vindicate the message of His servants. When Elijah prayed in vs. 36, he said, *...prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command.* When God answered Elijah's prayer, the people knew his message was from the Lord. The last verse of Mark's Gospel says, *...the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked through them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs.* When God healed that lame man, the crowd was ready to listen to Peter and John. This is still one of the ways that God proves Himself real and your message to be true. Our partners in India report that often God will heal a sick person in a village when believers pray and the people will see that Jesus is God and their idols are nothing and soon many believe and a church is started.

Now don't promise miracles to your friends and neighbors, but DO offer to pray for their problems, even extremely difficult ones. Often God will answer and by answering will give you the opportunity share your faith with someone who is now ready to listen because they've seen Him at work. He delights in doing this, in working with you by His power to confirm His own message! But you need the courage to speak up to people and pray boldly!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

We Must Be Persistent In Prayer!

As we continue to follow Elijah's life, today we pick up the story immediately after his contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Now it is time to bring rain on the land again after the 3 ½ year drought, so Elijah prays powerfully once more. Listen to 1 Kings 18:41-46 NLT, *Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go get something to eat and drink, for I hear a mighty rain-storm coming!" So Ahab went to eat and drink. But Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees. Then he said to his servant, "Go and look out toward the sea." The servant went and looked, then returned to Elijah and said, "I didn't see anything." Seven times Elijah told him to go and look. Finally the seventh time, his servant told him, "I saw a little cloud about the size of a man's hand rising from the sea." Then Elijah shouted, "Hurry to Ahab and tell him, 'Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don't hurry, the rain will stop you!'" And soon the sky was black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm, and Ahab left quickly for Jezreel. Then the LORD gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.* It's interesting how he says to Ahab, *I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!* Nobody else heard it; it was the hearing of faith. Nobody saw it; the first sign of it was a cloud the size of a man's hand in the distance some while later. What Elijah is really saying is, "I believe God who said it will rain, so now I am going to pray for rain". And Elijah persisted in prayer; he kept on praying until God answered.

But wasn't he being presumptive? No, Elijah's persistence was based on a promise. Back in vs. 1, *...the LORD said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!"* Persistence is not you nagging God to do what He doesn't want to do until you change His mind, like some child trying to get his own way. Nor is it simply about volume, that we must pray enough times for something before it will happen. Persistence has to have a root, a certainty that we are praying for something that is in line with God's will. In Luke 18 Jesus told His disciples a story to teach them to always pray and not give up or lose heart. It was about a widow who kept on coming to this uncaring, unjust judge who ignored her, yet she kept on coming to him and coming to him until he finally gave her justice. And the lesson He drew was that if an uncaring human being would be moved by persistence, how much more would our loving Father be moved by the repeated heartfelt coming of His own chosen children who cry to Him for justice. But he finishes the story in verse 8 by saying that the justice He's referring to occurs at the coming of the Son of Man. In other words, we're to keep on praying and praying for Jesus' coming to set the world straight and do away with evil and never give up until He comes. Why? Because we KNOW it's His will. He promised it. We are to persist in praying for things that we are absolutely certain are His will. John wrote, *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he*

hears us. That's why we keep on praying, because we know He hears us! Our persisting is not trying to nag God or persuade Him, rather it is a sign that we really believe Him.

Lastly, I want you to notice that Elijah was not merely persistent; he was earnest. You can tell by his posture. He knelt down and put his face between his knees. Of course, there is no certain prescribed posture for prayer; you don't have to fold your hands or kneel down. But you will find in Scripture that when people were really serious before God they often fell on their faces before Him. I am not saying that posture matters, rather that posture often indicates the nature of prayer. Elijah was praying intently because the honor of God was at stake once again. There is a big difference between persistence and empty repetition. Elijah prayed 7 times for rain and each time he probably asked the same thing, yet it was not empty repetition because it was the deep heart-cry of a child of God to his Father. Just like Jesus prayed the same thing 3 times earnestly in Gethsemane. When you determine to be persistent in prayer about some matter that you are sure is God's will, set about it with all your heart, not mechanically! And rest assured that He hears you!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

We Must Be Prepared For Persecution!

The incident we look at today in 1 Kings 19:1-5 is totally uncharacteristic of anything we have seen of Elijah to this point. When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah, "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them." Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died." Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree.... Something happens to Elijah here, something inside him snaps. The apparent cause is persecution by Jezebel. Now mark it down: anytime you take a stand for God you will experience persecution from someone. Jesus said that if we live godly, we WILL experience it. It may take various forms but to expect it not to come is like thinking Elijah could wipe out all the prophets of Baal and not incur Jezebel's wrath. But I want you to notice three things about persecution. First:

1. Persecution is not a cause for fear. Verse 3 says Elijah was afraid! Imagine that! The man who stalked boldly up to Ahab and called down fire from heaven is afraid. This is exactly what Jezebel wanted. In the first place when you're going to assassinate someone, you don't give them 24 hours notice! She wanted him to run, to leave her and Ahab and their kingdom alone. SHE was evidently a bit scared since all her prophets were dead and her husband had been impressed in such a way as to let Elijah go! But Elijah had been hunted for 3 ½ years and still did not fear to confront Ahab. Yet suddenly he had forgotten how God had worked miracles at Kerith and Zarephath and Mt. Carmel. When we fear, we stop trusting in God. So, you need not be afraid if you trust Him. Second:

2. Persecution does not demand fleeing. Elijah ran for his life; He ran all the way to southern tip of Judah (i.e., Beersheba) and then a day further and laid down to rest under a broom tree. Did God want Elijah to flee? No, He was using Him to turn Israel back to Himself! Sure, sometimes God may want us to run and hide but not always and perhaps not even most of the time. Our human instinct is to run, but usually God wants us to stand the test, to stay and stand firm and through it demonstrate His glory. Lastly:

3. Persecution does not mean failure. Under the broom tree we get a glimpse of Elijah's reasoning, "I am no better than my ancestors." That is, "I have not succeeded in the task given me, eradicating Baal worship from Israel." Elijah took the persecution as a sign that he had failed in his task and that all Israel was standing with Jezebel against him. It seemed to him that in spite of all that God had done by sending fire on Mt. Carmel and by sending rain on the land, it had no effect. So he says, "I've had enough, I can't take it any more, I quit, take my life away, I'm a failure!" What a wrong assumption! Next time we'll find out that he hadn't failed at all. There were at least 7000 in Israel who still believed in the true God. Just because you get persecuted doesn't mean you've failed in the task God gave you and that you are worthless. In fact, it often means the exact opposite, that you've succeeded and Satan is fighting back! So, when people stand against you or give you a hard time because of your faith, stand firm!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

God Is Very Patient With Us!

If you remember from our last study together, Elijah ran away when his life was threatened by Queen Jezebel. He ran all the way out of Israel and Judah into the desert of Sinai. He was out of God's will and not following His direction, but today I want you to see how patient God was with him. 1 Kings 19:5-9, *Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!" He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again. Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."*

So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. But the LORD said to him.... Now there are times when God has to treat us with sternness. Jonah directly refused to obey God and go to Nineveh and God had him swallowed and brought back by a great fish to teach him a powerful lesson. But Elijah's case is born out of discouragement. We saw his thoughts in verse 4 and they are more like, "I can't go on, I've failed, it's no use to try." Often we become weary and when we do, we can see through His treatment of Elijah that God has great patience with us.

First, notice that God refreshes our weariness. Elijah was a battle-weary soldier, tired and worn out from all he had been through. And look how good God was to him there in the desert. First, He left Elijah sleep and get rest, and then sent an angel to bring him needed bread and water. And not stale bread either, but bread freshly baked over hot coals, still warm! When God brought his weary people out of Egypt through the desert, He led them to a place called Elim where there were 12 wells of water and 70 palm trees for shade. Oh, He knows just when and how to send us times of refreshing in our lives and He does it repeatedly! The angel feeds him a second time to make sure he is refreshed enough. Then after God refreshed him, notice how:

God waits while we wander about. It doesn't take anywhere near 40 days to get from the region of Beersheba to Mt. Sinai. It's probably about 150 miles which means if he went directly there, he only walked about 4 miles a day, so either Elijah rested an awful lot or, more likely, he really wandered around a lot, like Israel did in the desert! But God waited patiently while he wandered! Oh, how God patiently waits for us when we get sidetracked out of His will and wander about trying to figure out what to do. Then notice that sooner or later:

God meets with us personally. At Sinai he found a cave and spent the night and in that cave God met Him and spoke to him. He hadn't heard God's voice since back before Mt. Carmel, yet God was there, even hundreds of miles out of His will. And why? To give him a personal revelation of Himself that would meet his need and restore him! Listen, God arranges to meet us in the spiritual deserts of our lives! He patiently waits until just the right moment and then reveals Himself to us in unique ways that turn us around and get us back on the right path and put us back into service for Him!

If we're honest, I think all of us could testify how patient God has been with us to get us to where we are today. So, let's praise Him today for His great patience and while we're at it, maybe we should think about being a little more patient with each other too, especially those who are worn out and weary and wandering. God isn't finished with any of us yet!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

We Must Learn To See From God's Perspective!

If you remember, when Jezebel threatened his life, Elijah fled all the way out of the Israel and Judah and after making his way 40 days through the desert he arrived at Mt. Horeb, that is, Mt. Sinai the mountain of God and went into a cave there. I would assume that he went there intending to meet God. Now we need to understand that what caused Elijah to flee like this in the first place was his perspective. So, there in the cave God meets him and graciously tries to give him a new perspective. Let's read 1 Kings 19:9-10, *There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. But the LORD said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"* Elijah replied, *"I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."* Notice God's question, "What are you doing here? Why are you not back in Jezreel where I had sent you?" And how does he answer? He blamed Israel for sinning against God, listed all their sins before God, claimed to be the only one left who loved and obeyed God and then accused them of trying to kill him on top of everything else. Now those things actually weren't completely true. We know that because there were at least 100 prophets of the Lord left that Obadiah had hidden from Jezebel. In the contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel not long before, the people of Israel had fallen on their faces and acknowledged the Lord as the true God. Only Queen Jezebel was after his life.

Of course, God knew all that; in fact, according to vs. 18 He knew that there were 7000 Israelites who loved Him and had never worshipped Baal. But He didn't point out to Elijah the true facts right away; instead, God told him to go out of the cave and watch because He wanted to give him a lesson that would change his perspective. Verses 11-13, *"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"* God showed him three great acts of nature: a mighty windstorm, a violent earthquake and a raging fire but as each passed by, God was not in them! God was trying to show him two things. The first was His great power, which Elijah had seen many times before. But this was a reminder. God is saying "Who is Jezebel anyway! Look at my power! Why are you scared?" But secondly, he recognized that these things were only signs from the Lord; Elijah recognized His actual presence clearly in the still small voice. Perhaps God is saying to Elijah that it is going to take more than displays of

power like Mt. Carmel or the 3-year drought to bring Israel back to God. It will take the voice of the Holy Spirit working in hearts! And perhaps that still small voice will be Elijah and through his message the Holy Spirit would work among the people. Perhaps God was not going to use the grandiose displays of His power to win Israel; maybe He was going to use a gentle whisper, the voice of Elijah.

You know, it is so easy to get our thinking out of perspective when we are serving God. It is so easy to quit and give up doing what God tells us because we feel we are the only one that cares and everyone is against us. It's easy to feel that what God asks is too hard, that God expects too much of us. But when you're feeling overwhelmed like this, remember God is an omnipotent God! He has all power and can do even that which is impossible. There is no need to be discouraged or to be afraid! And maybe God is not planning to accomplish the result the way you expect it! Maybe it will not be some grandiose, all-at-once change but a change that will come through your faithfulness little by little over time! So, keep on! Because if you don't...Well, we'll save that for next time!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

Don't Make God Pass You By!

We pick up the story with God meeting Elijah in a cave on Mt. Sinai. I'm sure you remember from last time how God tried to change Elijah's perspective by showing him His mighty power by letting a great wind, a mighty earthquake and a raging fire pass by. I'm sure God hoped that these things would remind Elijah of His greatness and remove his fear and self-pity. But it doesn't seem to have worked. Look with me at 1 Kings 19:13-14, *When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied again, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."*

God asked Elijah the exact same question in verse 9 before God's great display of power, *What are you doing here, Elijah?* And Elijah's answer is exactly the same as it was in verse 10, *I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.* Nothing has changed; his answer is word for word identical; it actually sounds like a speech he had memorized, like Elijah knew just what he was going to say to God when he met Him! Neither God's patient care for him nor the powerful lesson of the moment before has had any effect on him! Fortunately, we get some extra help as to the meaning of Elijah's words from Rom. 11:2-3, *...Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me?* He was appealing to God against Israel. He was pleading with God in prayer against the very people that he was sent to reach, asking God to judge them. He actually got to where he could no longer pray FOR the people but only against them. Now we might think, "How could this happen?" but if we were in the shoes of some of the Old Testament prophets whose message was rejected over and over again and who were persecuted, we might understand. I'm thinking of believers in China or in the Muslim world who suffer so much at the hands of communist party members or zealous Muslims. I think it would be very easy to let yourself hate the very people God has called you to reach when you have suffered a lot!

But look what God says in verses 15-17, *Then the LORD told him, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha!"* He assigned Elijah a three-fold task. He never did do the first two things and they were later reassigned to Elisha. But the key phrase is *"anoint Elisha to replace you"*. The same word is used in Gen. 22 where Abraham offers up a ram in the place of his son Isaac; it indicates a substitute or replacement. Elisha was not simply a successor to Elijah; he was a replacement! Essentially Elijah was fired! God said "If you will not change your perspective so that I can use you, then I will replace you; I will pass your position on to someone who will do what I want." What a sad thing, for such a valiant soldier to lose his usefulness to God after such a powerful ministry!

But why would God do that. Look at vs. 18, *Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!* God wasn't finished with Israel yet and if Elijah wasn't going to change perspective and get on with ministering to the people God planned to save, then He would use someone else. God's work will go on! He will not forget the ministry to the 7,000 for the sake of the one. He will build His Kingdom! But He will change builders if He has to!

Oh, don't ever let your heart get so hardened that God has to pass you by! Don't ever get so intractable and so angry at others and feeling so sorry for yourself, that God has to replace you and use someone else to do what He planned to do with you, and maybe even take you home early like he did Elijah. The fiery chariots and the whirlwind that took him up to heaven may have looked like a glorious ending to his career but they were essentially a recall to from the field to headquarters! God doesn't need you to get His work done, but He'd sure like to use you! When your heart is bitter and stubborn, don't resist Him; open it to God's Spirit and let Him heal you so He can use you.

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

God Prepares Those He Calls!

When we left off in our study last time, God had told Elijah that He was going to replace him with Elisha, yet it was several years before he was taken home. If we ask why, the answer that makes most sense to me is that Elisha was not yet ready to take his place! It seems to me that God did not take Elijah home until He had sufficiently prepared Elisha to take up his mantle and continue the ministry. So, this was God's primary task for Elijah before his homegoing and we should all think along these lines, preparing someone to take over for us when our time of service is done, no matter what our place of service is. But how did Elijah prepare him?

First, he made Elisha aware of God's call. Look at 1 Kings 19:19-21 NLT, *So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away. Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!" Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you." So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.* Elisha evidently came from a wealthy agricultural family. When Elijah threw his cloak over him, he immediately knew what it meant, that he was called to be a prophet with Elijah. He responded enthusiastically, but notice that Elijah told him go back and think about it first! "Ponder what it means. Think about the cost, what you'll be giving up. Be sure you want to do this!" When God calls someone to serve, He wants them to think it through and do it freely, knowing what it means. And Elisha chose to give up everything to follow Elijah and his God.

Second, Elijah taught Elisha. How? According to 2 Kings 3:11 he was known as Elijah's personal assistant. He was by his side every moment, every day, watching and listening and learning and that's the best way to learn, life on life. Now what did he learn in the time they had together? Two things, primarily. First, he learned the certainty of God's Word. When God declares something, it always happens. No doubt he was there when Elijah pronounced King Ahab's doom in 1 Kings 21 after he murdered Naboth and then later heard how the dogs licked up Ahab's blood in chapter 22, exactly as Elijah had declared. He learned that God's word is sure and certain! And second, Elisha certainly learned the greatness of God's power. No doubt he was there when Elijah called down fire from heaven on King Ahaziah's soldiers who were sent to arrest him in 2 Kings 1, or at least he was very aware of it. He watched Elijah strike the river with his cloak and dry it up so they could cross and he understood that that power was to be his as God's prophet too.

Then, at last, Elisha was proved ready. When Elijah's final day came, he tried 3 times to get Elisha to leave his side, but he would not be dissuaded from following. He knew by the Spirit it was Elijah's last day and more than anything he wanted to fill Elijah's shoes and carry on his ministry. Nothing could keep him from it. He was ready to take Elijah's place. So, then God took Elijah home.

You see, God cares about His work! He cares about His ministry. He will see that it continues and raise up and prepare others to continue it when your time is finished. And just as surely, God always prepares those whom He calls to serve Him! To speak personally, I'm almost 66. I'm somewhere in the winding down phase after 46 years of pastoral ministry. What a comfort it is to know that God cares about his ministry right here and that He prepares other, younger people to carry it on when we're done. I love how God seems to be preparing and using Rob Lyons in the preaching ministry here and how He's using all of the next generation of younger adults in our music ministry and in fact in all of our ministries now. Many of our younger people have stepped up to serve in various capacities. That gives me hope for our future as a church! And if you're part of that rising generation, these thoughts should give you assurance also that God is preparing you so that He will use you effectively for years to come. Know that His Word is sure and know that His power is great! Once you know that, follow Him with all your heart and let Him use you!

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELIJAH

We Will Live Even Though We Die!

The last lesson we'll look at in Elijah's life is his translation to heaven. You know, perhaps our most basic fear is the fear of dying. It's pretty well programmed into us as a basic instinct. When we're young, we don't think about it much, but as we grow older and particularly when we hear that we might catch a virus and die quickly or we face the news that we have cancer or some other dread disease, that fear often kicks into high gear. Well, maybe Elijah can help us with that. Look with me at 2 Kings 2:11-14, *As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!" And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his clothes in distress. Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak, which had fallen when he was taken up. Then Elisha returned to the bank of the Jordan River. He struck the water with Elijah's cloak and cried out, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" Then the river divided, and Elisha went across.* Elijah never died. In Genesis we read that Enoch walked with

God and then simply *was not because God took him*. That's what happened to Elijah. God took Elijah to heaven without passing through death, though He did it a little more slowly and visibly than He did with Enoch. But remember, Jesus Himself said that we won't die either! He said, *...I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this?* We who believe don't die! We simply depart as Elijah did! Paul wrote to the Philippians, *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*. Like Elijah, we depart this earth for a better place and, if we look at Elijah's translation closely, it seems to me to hold several lessons about what happens to us as we depart from this life.

First, a separation occurs. In Elijah's case a chariot and horses of fire appeared and passed between Elijah and Elisha. It did not pick Elijah up but simply served as a barrier to separate him from his friend who would remain on earth. These are angelic beings; in fact, they appear again in 6:17 where they surround the city of Dothan to protect Elisha from enemy soldiers. They are described as "the chariots of Israel" and are evidently a class of angels assigned to protect and display the mighty power of God on Israel's behalf. At any rate when we die God separates us from those who remain behind; death separates us from our loved ones and our surroundings on this earth. It does not annihilate us; it does not make us cease to exist. It merely takes us where others cannot yet go.

Second, notice that Elijah is transported; He is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, literally in a storm wind, a mighty storm. The storm was God's vehicle, the means of Elijah's departure, of his going from one place to another. The Apostle Paul spoke of the time of his departure being at hand, literally his *exodos*, his going out of this world. And death is our vehicle, the storm that transports us between two realms of reality just as literally as Elijah was transported, only much faster.

And, of course, Elijah's departure had a destination. The whirlwind took him up to an actual place, a real place, to heaven itself to be in the presence of God. Jesus Himself said that heaven is a place, a place that He has prepared for us. It's a destination that He will come and take us to! Oh, what comfort that should give us. We shall not die, but live! We will simply leave this body and this world and be taken to heaven to be with Jesus forever. That is what lies ahead for us, but Jesus' question is the key, *Do you believe this?* I mean, do you REALLY believe this. We all give assent to it, but when death draws near in some form, that question becomes real. "Do I really believe what I have said I believe all these years?" And you have to make up your mind to cast yourself on Jesus in faith and say with Mary, "Yes Lord, I DO believe!" That is what will calm our fears.

Then lastly notice that Elijah's ministry continued. His mantle was left behind and Elisha picked it up and after some sorrow he used it and went on to continue the ministry Elijah had begun. So, there are those who will come after us and our God is their God and His power is unchanged so they will take up our mantle and continue His work. Thank God that He always sees to that.

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2 Chronicles - The Flesh (*Patterns*) Of Kings

Solomon: Compromising Flesh - Chs. 1-9

One of the main reasons God gave us the Old Testament with its record of so many people's lives is that we can learn and profit from them and their experiences. The lessons from the life experiences of an Abraham or a Joseph are obvious to anyone. But there are dozens of other characters who also have valuable lessons for us. For about 400 years, from the time of David to the captivity of the nation, Judah was ruled by a single dynasty of 20 kings and the Book of 2 Chronicles is God's record of these men and His editorial on their lives. Less than half were good kings, but it is to these that God devotes the majority of the record, glossing quickly over the rest. And if you read the accounts of the 9 men that we'll study together, you'll quickly discover that even though they were kings they had some of the same basic problems in themselves that you and I do. In fact, let's look at this by way of an:

I. Introduction To The Series - 1 Pet. 2:9-12 Let me point out three truths here:

1. our identity: we are kings destined to reign eternally with Christ We are a royal priesthood, a priesthood of kings, chosen just as clearly as those earthly kings and entitled to the Divine Right of reigning with Him. *Rev. 5:10* says literally that Christ (YLT) *...didst make us to our God kings and priests, and we shall reign upon the earth*. We are destined for the Throne; the royal nature of the Spirit of Christ flows in our spiritual veins. That's who we are as we pass through this world. We may look like plumbers and carpenters and housewives and businessmen, but we're heirs with Christ to the throne of the world. Yet here's:

2. our problem: the desires of our flesh war against our spirit Verse 11 says literally *the desires of our flesh*. There's a constant battle going on inside us. We may be kings but we all have flesh. We have human self-centered desires inside us that are powerful and they are driven by the force of sin that dwells in our bodies. Some of those desires are just natural lusts, cravings to meet our physical needs and our emotional needs apart from God and His plan for us. Others are habit patterns that we've learned from the world around us, ways that we've learned or been taught

to get our needs met in a sinful fashion that God never intended. And these desires make a constant assault upon our identity, who we really are at the deepest level. The flesh constantly desires things that are contrary to the spirit and the spirit, things contrary to the flesh. It's a continual battle. And different people come with different patterns they have developed, different sets of desires that bother them. So, we really are kings with flesh patterns, just as each of these kings in the Old Testament had a particular variety of temptation or disobedience that he was prone to. Now in verse 12 we see:

3. our purpose: we are to glorify God before a watching world, by choosing to abstain from indulging the patterns of our flesh, by walking according to the Spirit so that we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh, by His grace living lives that are good in front of a world of unbelievers so that they will give Him the credit and be drawn into relationship with Him!

Now Solomon is the first king we encounter in 2 Chronicles and the record of his life takes up nine chapters. He was the greatest King Israel or Judah ever had, though he was not the most godly. He loved God but he had an obvious flesh pattern that many of us also have:

II. Solomon's Pattern: The Tendency To Compromise Now what does that mean? Well, in some contexts, the word compromise is a good thing. For example, we get along in relationships by compromise, by each giving up some things that we would prefer for the sake of the other. But the kind of **compromise** I'm talking about is **a concession that exposes to danger or disrepute**. When you choose to drive under the influence of alcohol, you compromise the safety of everyone in the vehicle. You give in a little bit on an important principle and it exposes you and others to serious danger. When you lie to get out of trouble, you compromise your integrity. You give in and it exposes you to disrepute, to a reputation for wrong-doing. Compromise is giving in to the desires of your flesh in what you think are small ways here and there, giving in to the desire to disobey the principles God has laid down, because at the moment you think it's to your advantage or even to God's advantage for you to do it, but it puts you and others in real danger. Three weeks ago you all saw on the news how that pier collapsed on the Delaware River. It held a dance club and all the guests ended up in the water and some drowned. Some of those who worked there reported seeing cracks in the floor several inches wide days ahead of time and being told to cover them over with something. I could be wrong, but it sounds like the owner was willing to compromise the standard of public safety in what seemed like a small thing to him for the sake of profit and sooner or later the consequences caught up with him and others. Now there is no question that:

1. Solomon had a sincere dedication to the Lord He was not a phony playing games. He genuinely loved God. From the very beginning of his reign as a young man:

a. his heart desired to be a good ruler for Israel (1:7-12) What would you say to that offer from God? "Ask what you want and I'll give it to you!" A long life or a million bucks might be a tempting answer. But all Solomon could say was, "I want the wisdom to rule your people. I'm not able to do it and I need help." He wanted to be a good king like his father David; he wanted to rule well and wisely. His heart was humble and sincere. God even acknowledged that that was his true heart's desire in verse 11 and rewarded him for it. The greatest accomplishment of his life was that:

b. he built a magnificent temple to display God's glory (2:1, 5-6) What an attitude! The temple had to be great because God was great; it was to glorify His Name. He wouldn't live in it like the pagan gods were thought to, because all of creation can't contain God. It was simply a place to burn sacrifices before Him, a place where people could come to pray and to worship Him. And what we're reading in 5-6 is not a sermon; it's a business contract for the materials given to a neighboring pagan king! He really meant it! His heart wanted to glorify God. And we read later when it was completed that:

c. he humbly sought God in prayer and was heard (6:12-21; 7:1, 12) God did hear. God sent down fire to light the sacrifice! His glory cloud filled the Temple. God later said, "I have heard you." He wasn't repeating some ritual prayer written for the occasion; he was baring his heart to Almighty God, admitting his own smallness and that of the Temple, admitting the constant need for forgiveness, admitting that Israel would go astray and asking God to honor His name by hearing prayer. He was for real. In fact:

d. he desired God to be known by all the peoples of earth (6:32-33) He wanted all the peoples of earth to know and worship the true and living God, the God of Israel. His heart was not satisfied that only his own people would worship; he wanted to see the earth filled with God's glory! And God's response to that dedication was obvious in the typical Old Testament pattern:

e. he was blessed by God both spiritually and materially (9:22-24) He was elevated to a high and lofty position. The kings of the world came to hear him and seek his God-given wisdom. The Queen of Sheba came and went home in awe saying, "The half was not told me!" And everyone that came brought gifts. God brought vast riches and had them dumped in his lap plus all the business enterprises he was involved in. At that moment in history he was the greatest of the kings of the earth.

But the truth of the matter is that at many points along the way:

2. Solomon compromised several of God's key principles He gave in on things he knew weren't right, things that seemed like small things to him at the moment. He never stole another man's wife or murdered anyone like his father. He gave in a little here or there because it seemed like a good idea at the moment, because it seemed like the logical and best way to do something, because doing what God said just didn't seem to make sense. But this pattern of compromise increased in intensity the way the desires of the flesh always do when you give in to them and the end result of it all proved to be disastrous both to him and to the nation of Israel. It all began when:

a. he compromised in business dealings (1:14-17) Solomon used that God-given wisdom in the business realm. He found lots of ways to make money and one of his most lucrative business ventures was that he became, in modern parlance, an arms dealer. Instead of buying missiles and selling them to the PLO, he bought the most powerful weapons of his day, horses and chariots. He bought them from Asia Minor and from Egypt on the north and south and once he had accumulated all he needed, he sold them to Syria on the East. You say, what's so bad about that? It seems like a small thing, except that God had expressly warned against it in **Deut. 17:14-17**. Wow! You see, God already knew the spiritual dangers of a king being undefeatable and of having a vast fortune. He would forget God and his people and serve himself. He warned kings specifically NOT to accumulate horses and chariots and riches and especially not to go back to Egypt to get them. So, He wrote down the warning through Moses 500 years in advance. But Solomon either had never read it, or more likely, chose to compromise and give in to the desires of his flesh on this one because it was so lucrative. The sad thing is that as a result he **ended up arming Israel's enemies**. Within a few short years of Solomon's death Syria became the dominant power in that region and Israel's chief enemy. Solomon equipped his own enemies to fight his people for the love of money.

Listen, Kings! Our business dealings are where most of us live every day. And many times, they hold out to us the alluring promise of self-sufficiency, of having the means to protect and care for myself, of having all the things I want, if I'll just give in on some of God's principles here and there. It might be dishonesty in reporting our income or taxes; it might be offering an inferior quality product or service or cheating our employer by leaving early or taking things home; it might be giving ourself to our work so much that it takes us away from our family. It doesn't have to be much, but the more you do it the more it grows and in the end your enemy is the one who benefits; it is the glory of God that gets robbed when your behavior backfires and eventually becomes known. Secondly, Solomon:

b. he compromised in separation He set out to build the Temple but look at the method he chose to do it. **(2:2, 8:7-8)** Instead of the loving hands of faithful Israelites building a temple for God out of their hearts' devotion, Solomon simply found all the aliens who were living in Israel, those who were left from the original conquest of the land and had never been destroyed and he turned them into a slave labor force for his project. Just like Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites to build his projects! Sounds kind of like a good idea, doesn't it? The temple gets built and the Israelites don't have to do it; they're free for the good positions and to care for their families. What's wrong with that? Well, look with me at the warning God had given Israel when they first went into the land: **Jud. 1:28, 2:1-3**. God warned them, "You didn't drive these Canaanites out as I told you to; They were idolaters involved in the grossest of idolatry and immorality, but you left them here among you; now you're going to have problems because of their presence and the biggest problem is that you are continually going to be tempted to go after their gods!" Well now Solomon ended up finding and ferreting out all these families and instead of worrying about their spiritual effect on Israel and doing something to prevent it, he involved them in the most strategic project of the heart of Israel, the very building of the Temple itself **...and ended up preparing Israel for idolatry**. What is the repeated problem in the land with all the kings who follow Solomon? Baal-worship. And how were the people so quickly influenced to worship Baal? Did they all one day just wake up and say, "We're tired of worshipping Jehovah; let's worship Baal today?" I don't think so. 150,000 Baal-worshipping Canaanite families lived among them, invited them over for dinner, talked with them in the marketplace every day, had kids playing with theirs every day, and even helped them build their Temple all the while telling them about the orgies and the drinking and feasting and the other "fun" they had worshipping Baal. Their influence paved the way.

Listen my dear kings, Paul gave us a similar warning: *1Cor. 15:33, Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."* We need to build our relationships with the non-believers around us while in our mind understanding the spiritual difference between us and the spiritual danger that occurs as their influence is exerted on us. Peter says: *1 Pet. 4:3-4 (NIV) For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans [non-believers] choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation...* They think you're weird because you won't join in with them and they will certainly pressure you to do it and you will definitely face the temptation to compromise, to give in this little area here or there, whether it's to stop with the boys at the bar for a beer after work or to spend Sunday mornings on the golf course with them pursuing recreation, or even to try the new eastern chanting and meditation technique they've learned about that relaxes them so much. It may seem innocent at first, like it's no big deal, but it paves the way for giving your life and your worship to the wrong gods. Thirdly:

c. he compromised in romance and marriage He began with this: **(8:11)** He did what kings normally do: he made a marriage alliance for the defense of Israel. He married Pharaoh's daughter, even though he knew that she did not believe and as an idolater could not go into either the Temple or his own palace where the Ark had been. Now God

had clearly warned His people about intermarrying with unbelievers in **Deut. 7:3-6**, and in **17:17** He clearly warned that a king must be especially careful because in that part of the world, the idea of a harem was a common thing and that there was grave spiritual danger in it. His heart could be led astray. Yet Solomon compromised again. Surely the security of Israel is more important! But he: **...ended up worshipping other gods - 1 Kin. 11:1-4**. It was only one at first and then another and then many (700!), and over time their influence took his heart away from God and the one who had built the temple for the only true God actually stooped to idolatry himself.

My dear kings, how many of God's people have failed to listen to His directions for marriage, have allowed themselves to be so smitten with emotional attachment or become so desperate to have a relationship that they deliberately choose to tie themselves to someone who either doesn't know the Lord or says they're a Christian but doesn't love and follow Him with all their heart the way they do. They have convinced themselves that it's not such a big thing, that after all they will have a tremendous influence on the other and yet in the end it is they who end up changed, whose heart is pulled away from God instead of pulling the other's toward Him. Or they pay the price of living a divided life and having a divided home all through the years, a continual heart-breaking struggle. Young people, single people, please listen to me. Of all the areas of your life, this is perhaps the most dangerous, the place you can least afford to compromise and let down your principles. Don't give in! And finally:

d. he compromised in serving his people Solomon's heart started out wanting to serve His people. But after he died and his son Rehoboam was taking over, listen to what the people said about him (**10:4**). Solomon eventually burdened his people, oppressing them with taxes, pressing them into laboring on his massive building projects, and making them serve in his army and palace. Instead of sharing his massive wealth with them, he got rich on their backs and kept it all, something God warned clearly about: **Deut. 17:17-20**. He started humble but something changed. He began to accumulate and soon he considered himself better than his people. You know if he'd have just done what it said and kept a copy of the law by him and read it regularly, none of these things might have occurred! But he didn't and ultimately **...ended up alienating and dividing Israel**. The nation split in two when his son told them he was going to rule the way his father did.

You know, kings, the love of money is still the root of every kind of evil. Affluence will steal your heart from God if you begin to give in to it here and there and to feel that you deserve this or that and why should you give this or that away and why should you not have this and that and pretty soon you're no longer a servant. You're self-centered and self-serving.

I hate to say it, but we'd better not point the finger at Solomon too hard, because there's a little bit of his flesh in us. All of us are prone in some area to compromise, to give in on little things that expose us to grave danger. And for some of us it's a major pattern of life. Our heart loves Him and wants to serve Him but we give in all the time. *Greg Laurie writes in his book The Great Compromise: "A giant 400-year-old redwood came crashing down one day and no one could figure out why. The tree had survived four centuries of storms, lightning, and earthquakes --what had felled it? On closer inspection, investigators found that tiny beetles had found their way inside its trunk and had begun eating away its life-giving fibers, weakening its mighty bulk from the inside out. In much the same way, the devil tries to bring Christians down through a steady drone of small, seemingly insignificant temptations [to compromise]. While we are fighting and resisting him in one area, he may be setting up house in another area of our lives. Satan will find ways to creep into our lives for the purpose of eroding our foundations until our fibers have become undone and we come crashing down to the ground. Show me a person who has fallen away from their walk with the Lord, and I will show you a person who started making compromises in his or her life long ago."* [New Man, Jan/Feb 1995. Page 13.] My dear Kings and Queens and especially those who have compromising flesh, I have good news for you. You have a power Solomon never had because the Holy Spirit lives in you. And I have a promise for you from God. If you learn to walk in the Spirit, to live in the habit of calling on and leaning on His power instead of your own in each situation, the Bible says you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. You have the power NOT to compromise available to you every moment, no matter how much pressure you may be under. All you need to do is to call upon Him.

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (Patterns) Of Kings

Rehoboam: Slow-Learning Flesh - Chs. 10-12

Solomon reigned 40 years over Israel and then he died and his son Rehoboam took over the Kingdom. Now Rehoboam is an enigma of a king. The book of 1 Kings doesn't have anything good to say about him but Chronicles shows us that, like most of us, he wasn't all bad. He actually seems to have been a king who worshipped the Lord. He even appears to have been a king who could learn and change (unlike some others). But his flesh pattern was this: he was a slow learner i.e.; he did learn but it was always too late and he always learned the hard way. He learned mostly from the pain of experience rather than from the wisdom available to him. And he paid dearly for it. The word stubborn comes to mind. Now it strikes me that Solomon is not the only one to have a son like that. *Billy Graham's son Franklin was something of a rebel when he was growing up. [You might want to read his autobiography "Rebel With A Cause"; it's worth it.] When he was small, his dad was away a lot, and Franklin often gave his mother trouble. Her description of him was "stubborn but never villainous." Franklin began smoking as a child by picking up discarded cigarette butts, and it became a potent symbol of rebellion. His mother at one point attempted aversion therapy by making him smoke a whole pack, but she hadn't reckoned on his strength of will: 'By the time I finished all 20,' he writes, 'I must have vomited five or six times...but it gave me great*

satisfaction not to give in.'" [Time, May 13, 1996. Pages 68-69.] Franklin eventually came around and today is the leader of a great ministry called Samaritan's purse but for almost the first 30 years of his life, he just had to learn by experience; advice, warning, or wisdom were never enough. But you know, the trouble with being a slow learner is that by the time you learn, it's often too late; great damage is done. And if we were totally honest, some of us would have to admit that spiritual slow learning is one of the flesh patterns that wars against our kingly character too, wouldn't we? We are prone to resist wisdom and learn the hard way. So, this morning let's see what we can learn from Rehoboam's example instead of learning by his method. There are two major occasions of this slow-learning pattern laid out for us here. First, we read that:

I. Rehoboam Learned Too Late To Listen To People As you start in **Chapter 10**, you'll notice that Rehoboam was a pretty smart man in some ways. He seems to have known there was trouble brewing in the kingdom already. Oddly, verse 1 says he decided to hold his own coronation, not in Jerusalem, the capital city, but in Shechem in the north. Evidently there were already complaints from the northern tribes and rumors of secession and Rehoboam went to Shechem to affirm that he was going to be king over all Israel from Dan to Beersheba. And during the ceremonies there, the people had their popular spokesman Jeroboam ask Rehoboam in verse 4 for some relief from the harsh service which Solomon had laid on them. Now to his credit:

1. Rehoboam did exercise some very wise practices You'll notice:

a. he did not give an instant reply (5) He took three days to consider the issue. That's pretty wise. Most of the time when we're in a pressure situation, we shoot from the hip. When somebody puts us on the spot, we let our emotions fly or let out the first thought that comes to mind. We could learn from this, to wait before replying to important matters. What's more:

b. he sought the advice of others (6-7) He had enough sense to ask somebody else for input. He didn't want to be wrong. So, he asked a number of people for their advice on this issue. He remembered what his father Solomon taught: *in the multitude of counselors there is wisdom*. Not a bad idea. We're in a "I've got to make my own decisions" society and that's dangerous. Plus, notice that:

c. he sought advice from experienced sources He had enough sense to consult the advisors his father Solomon had. They were experienced people who had helped to run a successful kingdom. They knew how far you could push the people before trouble would occur. They recognized that Solomon had been pressing too hard and overstepping his bounds. So, they advised him to "lighten up". It's always best to ask somebody who's experienced, who's been through it, someone who knows. But at the same time:

2. Rehoboam chose not to learn from the practices he used For instance:

a. he rejected advice that he didn't like (8) Note the order of things. He rejected their advice before he heard what anybody else had to say. He rejected it purely because he didn't like it. It wasn't what he wanted to hear. He wanted to prove he was tough, that he was as good a man as his father. And so, he went looking for someone he knew would tell him what he wanted to hear, the buddies he'd grown up with, who thought like he thought! He sought good advice but wasn't really ready to learn from it. So, he ignored the value of experience, took the advice of his inexperienced friends and told the people he was tougher than his dad, that Solomon used whips on them but he'd use scorpions (i.e., a whip with bits of metal, the Roman cat-of-9 tails). But his real mistake was:

b. he did not listen to the people (15) He didn't HEAR them. He listened to their words but he didn't listen to them. They were tired; they were hurting; they had carried a burden. They were crying out for relief, compassion, and understanding. But he didn't hear that; all he heard was his own need to be king, to prove his power.

And that is the lesson: that we are often slow to learn in our relationships with people. They talk to us; they speak to us, but we don't hear them. We don't value their wisdom and experience. We don't stop to think from their point of view, to look at their needs, to feel their hurts and disappointments. We only hear ourselves and our needs so we go off and do what we want, without regard to them. But it has consequences:

3. Rehoboam's stubbornness split the kingdom (16-19) The north seceded and formed its own nation. At first, he thought they didn't mean it but ended up fleeing for his own life back to Jerusalem. And when we don't learn to listen to others, our relationship with them breaks too. But the really sad thing is:

4. Rehoboam eventually learned to listen but it was too late (11:1-4) He went home and got ready to make war but God sent a prophet to say, "Don't fight your brothers, this is My doing." And this time he listened. This time he took the advice God gave but it was too late; the damage was done; the kingdom was split.

I wonder how many marriages have broken up because the husband or the wife never learned to listen to the other, to hear their crying needs and now it's too late. The damage is done and the relationship is broken. I wonder how many children are alienated from their parents because the parents never learned to hear them but now it's too late; the damage is done; the relationship is broken. I wonder how many of us have had to learn the hard way to listen to the advice of others. *One evening a few years ago, several tornadoes tore through the town of Andover, Kansas, and 13 people lost their lives.*

A newspaper account of the tragedy said, "When police and fire officials, TV forecasters, and the weather service began telling people to take cover, some waited too long to respond. Others apparently ignored the warnings. At the Golden Spur Mobile Home Park, where more than 225 trailers were destroyed, many people never even left their homes. Only about 200 of the park's 700 residents headed into its storm shelter. All 13 victims were killed at the trailer park. For 40 years, Andover has warned its residents of tornadoes by sending police and fire vehicles into the streets, lights flashing and sirens wailing. This time the vehicles were out even before the weather service told people to take cover (about 20 minutes before the twister hit). Despite the warnings, many people were still casually walking along the street. The man in charge of the National Weather Service office in Wichita commented, "Researchers and sociologists have told us people don't do a thing when they hear a warning. They don't do anything until they perceive they are at risk." [Parables, Etc., Mar 1996. Page 6.] In other words, the pattern a lot of people have is that they assume they know best and don't really listen and learn unless their false sense of security is jarred pretty hard. But it truly pays to really listen to others, to really hear what they're saying, to value their experience. And you know, of course, it works the same way with God, but:

II. Rehoboam Learned Too Late To Listen To God (Ch. 11) Now as I said earlier, Rehoboam did not start out being ungodly. In fact, the text directly says that:

1. Rehoboam continued to worship the Lord (13-14,16-17) For three years Rehoboam walked like David and Solomon had before him. While Jeroboam up north was leading his people to bow down before golden calves, Rehoboam loved the Lord. He worshipped the Lord. He obeyed the Lord. All the Levites and priests from the Northern tribes came to Jerusalem to stay and support him because he honored the Lord. And he did act wisely in some things. For instance, **(22-23)** he prevented rivalry among his sons by choosing one but giving the others important positions and provisions. In many things he was a smart man but after 3 years he did a dumb thing:

2. Rehoboam abandoned God's Word (12:1) If you want to see how bad things got **compare 1 Kings 14:22-24**. They went whole hog after idols. Now, why? Why did Rehoboam who knew better fail to learn the lesson from God's earlier warning and go into idolatry like this. Well, I see a couple reasons. First, his father did the same thing later in life, then **vs. 13** says his mother was an Ammonite, a foreigner, a worshipper of idols. And then look at the woman he married, **11:20-21**. Now we're told in **15:16** that this Maacah was such an idolater that her own grandson Asa had her deposed from her position as queen mother! It's tough to keep on walking with God when your parents and your wife push you the other way. But the real reason he abandoned God's Word is **12:14**. He didn't set his heart on seeking the Lord. Again, he listened but he didn't hear. He knew what God had said about idolatry, but he didn't learn from the warning. His heart wasn't worried about what God said, but about what he felt like doing. And as a result:

3. Rehoboam was attacked by Egypt (12:2-4) A new king came to power in Egypt. Shishak was of a new dynasty. It didn't matter to him that Solomon had been married to the old Pharaoh's daughter. He saw Judah as a plum ripe for the picking, the kingdom divided, the army greatly reduced. So up he came and took all the cities of Judah which Rehoboam had fortified and then marched on Jerusalem itself. When you abandon God's Word, God has to teach you another way. If instruction doesn't work, then correction will have to. If the warning doesn't sink in, then discipline will. And the real tragedy is that, once again:

4. Rehoboam learned to obey but too late (12:5-12) Now that Shishak is at his gates, he realizes what a jerk he's been. He humbles himself and says, "the Lord is just". But it's too late. Now he becomes a vassal or servant of Pharaoh and loses all his treasures in the process. If only he'd learned sooner! There was some good in Judah but there could have been lots of good, if only Rehoboam had been able to defeat that flesh pattern he had of listening and learning the hard way!

I wonder how many times you and I have learned to listen to God's Word but too late. This is how the relationship of a child of God with his heavenly Father works: *whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every son he receives*. In your relationship with God, you can't just ignore His Word and get by with it. God won't let that kind of relationship continue. He'll discipline and correct and chasten. And you can get back into a proper relationship. But it's too late to prevent the hurt and pain and damage that is done in the meantime. *One night in 1986 there were two electrical engineers in the control room of the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Russia. The best thing that could be said for what they were doing is they were 'playing around' with the machine. They were performing what the Soviets later described as an unauthorized experiment. They were trying to see how long a turbine would 'free wheel' when they took the power off it. Now, taking the power off that kind of a nuclear reactor is a difficult, dangerous thing to do because these reactors are very unstable in their lower ranges. In order to get the reactor down to that kind of power, where they could perform the test they were interested in performing, they had to override manually six separate computer-driven alarm systems. One by one the computers would come up and say, 'Stop! Dangerous! Go no further!' And one by one, rather than shutting off the experiment, they shut off the alarms and kept going. You know the results: nuclear fallout that was recorded all around the world, from the largest industrial accident ever to occur in the world. God gives us warnings and instructions that are every bit as clear. Ignoring them endangers not only us, but other innocent people as well. [University of Pacific Review, Winter 1991.]* One year ago, I sat in the courtyard of a school in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to talk with a lady named Alexandra. She had five children but her husband was a Chernobyl survivor and is seriously ill from radiation exposure. She had been caring for him and now she herself had developed serious effects in her kidneys. She knew one day she too would die and she

asked me to please pray for her and I promised. Why? Because somebody had slow-learning flesh. They thought they knew best and wouldn't listen and persisted until it was too late. And she was paying the price. But the price of not learning to listen to God is even higher.

My friend, you are a King. You are a child of God, a royal priest, one of His chosen who will reign with Him forever and ever. But if inside you there is this pattern you've learned, this obstinate stubbornness that thinks you know best and refuses to learn to listen even to God unless you're really in a bind, then do something about it. If you're persisting in life choices you know are wrong, that you've been warned about by others, that you know God doesn't want for you, but you're making them anyway, then do something about it! Call out to God for grace. Ask Him to make you a humble learner and a quick learner. Ask Him to help you to learn to walk in the Spirit so you will have strength to abstain from that fleshly stubbornness that has a hold on you. Cry out to Him to make you humble, to make a listener out of you. Set your heart, firmly fix it, on listening to God and depend on the Spirit of God to produce that in you. But by all means, don't be a Rehoboam. Don't wait until it's too late to really listen to God and learn the hard way. It just hurts too much. Learn now.

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (*Patterns*) Of Kings

Abijah: Two-Faced Flesh - Ch. 13

Rehoboam reigned over Judah 17 years and died. His son Abijah then came to the throne to reign only 3 years. If you turn to 2 Chron. 13 and read about Abijah, you'll think he was a great king. It doesn't have one nasty thing to say about him. But then if you turn over and compare the account of his reign in 1 Kings 15, you'll discover that the writer of Kings didn't have one positive thing to say about him! One paints him good, the other paints him bad. How can that be? Is the scripture in error? No, Abijah was a man with two faces. Now I think we know what it means to be two-faced. It means you appear to be one way one moment and another way on another occasion. *There is a story about a man who came down out of the Carolina mountains one day. He was all dressed up and carrying his Bible. A friend saw him and asked, "Elias, what's happening? Where are you going all dressed up like that?" Elias said, "I'm heading for New Orleans. I've been hearing that there's a lot of free-runnin' liquor and a lot of gamblin' and a lot of real good naughty shows." The friend looked him over and said, "But Elias, why are you carrying your Bible under your arm?" Elias answered, "Well, if it's as good as they say it is, I might just stay over until Sunday."* [1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking by Michael Hodgin. Zondervan, 1994. Page 188.] Now that's funny and obviously overdone for humor, but haven't you known people somewhat like that, people who had a stated and declared belief in God, were active in the church, but at other times appeared to be engaged in all the same things as the world around them? Not all of them are simply hypocrites pretending and playing a religious game. Even the Apostle Paul confessed in Rom. 7 that there was a time in his life when the good that he wanted to do, he didn't do but he ended up doing the very things he hated. And if we're honest, there are moments when each of us, even though we love God and want to please Him, finds ourselves doing the very things we know in our hearts we don't want to be doing, whether it's in the way that we relate to our spouse or our children or losing our temper or whatever. But for some, that two-facedness is more than just a momentary thing, it has become a sustained pattern of life, a pattern of being controlled by the flesh instead of by the Spirit. And that's what we hope to examine in the life of Abijah this morning. What's going on is that 2 Chronicles gives us the record of a moment, a distinct and special occasion of crisis. Kings gives us the general overview of his reign and life. But let's not play down that wonderful moment. We need to clearly understand that:

I. Abijah Trusted In God - 2 Chron. 13 Ever since the dividing of the Kingdom 17 years earlier there was continual hostility between Israel and Judah and continual dispute over their border. On this occasion it has come to the eve of a massive battle. The text is not clear as to who was attacking whom. But after carefully looking at all the clues, it seems that Israel and their king Jeroboam was attacking Abijah and his kingdom. And as the battle lines were drawn up just north of the territory of Benjamin, King Abijah climbed up a hill and gave a testimony and a warning to the army of Israel.

1. the testimony of his trust in God (4-12) He told them exactly how he and all Judah were trusting in God. In fact, I think we could learn something from him about what trusting in God really means:

a. he believed the Word of God (5) In my estimation Jeroboam was seeking to be king over the whole nation, to remove Abijah and rule Judah as well as Israel. But Abijah says, "No, God made a promise to David, an irrevocable promise, an eternal promise, that only his descendants would sit on the throne. I am the rightful king according to the Word of God; you are a usurper and cannot succeed because God's Word can't fail!" Trusting God is believing that what God says will come to pass, no matter what! Check the battle odds in verse 3. That would be 2-1, wouldn't it? If you were a betting person, which side would you lay your money on? But you see, circumstances don't matter to trust. Trust says, "I know God's Word is true and it will happen, no matter what the circumstances look like!" Trust is the ability to look at the horde of difficulties that overwhelm you and to say, "I know Rom. 8:28 is true; God is going to work all these together for good." It is to say with Job, "when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold". He trusted God's word. And he did so because:

b. he believed the Lord was the true God (9-10) Jeroboam had set up golden calves to worship in Israel so the people wouldn't go back to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Abijah says to them, "Your gods are no gods! They have no power. Jeroboam made them! We worship the Lord, the true God." Abijah believed the Lord was the ONLY God,

the only one who made a difference. It didn't matter what name or power anyone came against him in; his God was the only true God, the One who had true control over the situation. And these are not just words alone:

c. he obeyed the requirements of God (11) He made sure that the Temple worship was being carried out according to the Law, that the morning and evening sacrifices were made and the bread was put on the table and the lamps on the lampstand were lit. He knew his trust involved a responsibility. He had to carry out what God said and was doing that, at least in this area of the actual Temple worship. Trusting God means obeying Him; it means doing what He says to do even though it may be difficult or you may not feel like it or even understand it. And Abijah:

d. he was convinced of the presence of God (12a) Abijah said, "God is with us. He is our leader, our Captain, our General; we march to His orders". He was convinced that since Judah was trusting in God and following God's commands, that God was with them; His presence was there. As you looked around, it didn't look much like it. And it looked even less like it an hour or two later when in verss 13-14 Judah discovered that crafty old Jeroboam had sent troops around behind them and they were being attacked from the rear too. But they cried out to God. They were convinced He was there, that He was with them. Trusting God is being convinced of Heb. 13:5, "I will never leave you..." But it's even more than that:

e. he saw his identification with God (12a) This is a deep truth. He saw that Israel was not fighting against him but against God! In fighting God's people, they fought God. Here is real trust: "I belong to God, I'm obeying God and doing what He wants me to do; if anyone or anything opposes that, it is not me they are opposing, but Almighty God Himself!" He knew the truth of the meaning of his own name, "My Father is Jehovah"! And so should you: your Father is Jehovah! You're a child of God, a king in His eyes! What a wonderful thing for us to realize when we witness to somebody and they resist us or when we show love to somebody and they repudiate us or when we try to be honest and upright with other people at work or even in church and they get angry with us and accuse us and turn against us; it is not us but God! And nobody can fight Him and win in the end! Anyway, it appears to me that Abijah had a deep and abiding trust in God. You might wonder if he was sincere or if this was just a speech to try and frighten his enemies. I would say, look at:

2. the result of his trust in God (13-18) They cried to the Lord and the Lord routed Israel. He inflicted 500,000 casualties on their 800,000 man army, making sure it would be many years before they could raise a large army again. I don't think the Lord would have honored that speech if it was insincere, but the bottom line is verse 18 which says clearly they were all relying on God. But I would point out one thing to you:

3. the timing of his trust in God (2-3) Remember that:

a. it was a time of crisis and in times of crisis lots of our other props are stripped away and we are often driven back to trusting God. Also:

b. it was a time of incapability They had no choice. They were outnumbered 2-1 and outflanked in 2 directions. There was no way they could help themselves. They had to trust God or die!

However, as I said earlier, Chronicles gives us the picture of one glorious moment in Abijah's reign and a glimpse of the reality of his faith. But to understand him completely, you need also to see that:

II. Abijah Tolerated Idolatry - 1 Kings 15:1-8 Wow, what a different story. This is the overall impression of the three years Abijah reigned. Verse 3 gives us two keys to understanding Abijah:

1. his walk was not fully consecrated (3a) The KJV says, *he walked in all the sins of his father*, which most obviously means:

a. he continued to allow idolatry Even though he did not trust in idols, he allowed idolatry to continue and flourish in Judah. The sins of his father are listed in 14:22-24. You see, on one hand he kept up the Temple Worship and the proper sacrifices, etc., but on the other he tolerated all sorts of idolatrous practices in the land. And unfortunately, he did not just do it once or for a short time and then repent:

b. he did it as a habit or path of life The language indicates that this walk was the norm. The bright moment in Chronicles was the exception, not the rule. Even though at the bottom line he trusted in God, his daily life was filled with disobedience and the toleration of all kinds of idolatrous practices. How could this be?

2. his heart was not fully devoted (3b) Notice how God here compares his heart to that of David. David had a heart fully devoted to God. Now that didn't mean his every action was perfect. But it meant that:

a. to David sin was the exception (5) His heart loved God and wanted to please Him and generally did. Bathsheba was the exception in his life. Sin was the exception, the rarity, the thing that crept in unnoticed and was gotten rid of when discovered. His heart wanted not to sin. But:

b. to Abijah sin was acceptable It could coexist side by side with trust in God. It didn't have to be removed. Other gods could be there; you didn't have to believe in them really but there were a lot of fun things going on in idolatry. You could have your cake and eat it too. You could trust in God and still have the enjoyment of sin as though you were serving other gods. His heart was not fully devoted to God.

You say then, "Was he a phony?" No, he was two-faced. He was what you might call today a "crisis Christian". He sincerely trusted God when the chips were down but when the chips were up, he let other gods into his life and never saw a discrepancy between the two. It was the pattern of the way he lived. And I suppose it would not take much for us to look around and find some Christians we know who are genuinely saved and who go to church and who really call on God in a crisis but who normally live for money, or their job, or pleasure, or power, and think nothing of it. But it would probably do us more good to look inside ourselves and recognize that little pattern of two-facedness in us. Oh, it's probably not as flagrant as Abijah. But we might have to admit that sometimes it takes a crisis in our lives to really drive us back to just leaning on God. When somebody's sick or when the job is lost or when there's a death or a difficulty, then we lean on God, then we pray like crazy, claim the promises of the Word, and trust that God will get us through. But when the crisis passes the devotions get lax, obedience slacks off, and our lives get occupied with some other things like work or school or family and God is kind of left home in the closet and nodded to at meal times. Until the next crisis, that is!

The smooth, shiny lizard known as a skink doesn't ordinarily draw crowds at the zoo, but the little critter discovered by a homeowner in Jacksonville, Florida, created quite a stir because it had two heads, one at each end of its body. What an unusual spectacle! It was literally a two-headed skink. And what an illustration of absolute frustration! When it tried to run, its legs actually moved in opposite directions. Not unlike Abijah. James says a double minded man is unstable in all he does. You see, really trusting God means more than trusting Him to carry you through a crisis; it means having a heart that is completely devoted to Him all the time. It means coming to that place where everything else is nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Him. It means falling on your face and asking Him to make that stuff that you seem to believe in the crisis true each and every day in your life by His power and not by yours. It means learning what Paul discovered, to walk not according to or out of the power of the flesh, your own self-effort, but according to the Spirit, out of His power.

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (*Patterns*) Of Kings

Asa: Forgetful Flesh - Chs. 14-16

Though Abijah only reigned over Judah for three years, his son Asa reigned a whopping 41 years. He lasted through the reigns of eight kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. There is no question that Asa was a good king, really the best one since David. He loved the Lord and never once do we read that he had anything to do with idols like his father and grandfather and great-grandfather did. Asa probably took the throne as a boy of 10 or 11 and right from the start he was committed to the Lord. Until the time he was 46 or 47 he walked with the Lord and seems to have grown spiritually. But somehow out there toward the end of his life (he died at 51 or 52), he became forgetful. Now I don't mean forgetful in the sense that some of us develop a pattern of forgetfulness i.e., we can't remember where we put things, what we had for lunch, or what our wife sent us to the store for once we get there. When Asa got older, he developed a pattern of spiritual forgetfulness. He seemed to forget Who it was that had gotten him through all those early years. He seemed to forget that it was his reliance on the Lord that had prospered him. And he died, not as an idolater, but out of fellowship with the Lord instead of walking with Him all the way. As you read, you can clearly see:

I. Asa's Early Growth Process (chs. 14-15) I don't know where he learned to love the Lord so young. He sure didn't get much of it from his dad! Maybe from being under the care of the high priest. But anyway, he started with faith and the Lord grew it.

1. his initial commitment to the Lord

a. he was obedient to the Lord (14:2-3) He illegalized idolatry. He got rid of all the adult bookstores and shut down the pornographic websites in the kingdom. He closed the red light districts. He was only a kid but he knew how to act right! He ordered his life and his kingdom in such a way as to be pleasing to the Lord. And:

b. he influenced others to seek the Lord (4) He commanded that all his subjects should worship and obey the Lord. Of course, you can't legislate people into loving God, but he began to use his royal position to influence others as much as he could. On top of that, he was wise because:

c. he prepared for the future (6-7) His early reign was characterized by peace and he recognized that as an opportunity from the Lord to prepare for the future. They were depending on God but he knew they also needed to use the time and materials God had given them to do something to prepare for future emergencies. So, they built up the walls and fortifications in some of the towns of Judah that had been wrecked during Rehoboam's invasion by Egypt. He was wise young man: trusting in God, serving God, and wisely looking to the future. This went on for 10 years. And the young king became a man and God knew it was time for:

2. his testing experience (14:9-12) An Egyptian general named Zerah gathered a huge army and marched against Judah. (He was from the southern part of the Egyptian kingdom; that's why they called him a Cushite or an Ethiopian!) They drew up the battle line at Mareshah about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Now notice:

a. he was overmatched The Hebrew says the Egyptians had literally thousands of thousands. You see, they ran out of numbers at 999,999 so instead of a million they would say a thousand thousand. So, we're talking about an army of at least a million men or more complete with chariots compared to Judah's 580,000 (verse 8). Now maybe this is one good thing Asa learned from his dad but at any rate:

b. he relied completely on God, verse 11. Look at him pray. "Lord, we rely on You; You help the powerless against the mighty." He knew he couldn't save himself but that God could, so he trusted God and God routed the Egyptians and they fled with great losses. Now all of this did not happen by chance. In it was:

c. his lesson (15:1-4) He didn't have the Holy Spirit living inside like we do so the Lord sent a prophet to play the role of the Holy Spirit in his life. And the message was, "Let this be a living lesson: the Lord is with you when you are with Him." When you rely on Him, He makes your life work! When you don't, you can expect that He will let you fall on your face. Learn it well. And sure enough, young Asa grew through this experience. Look at:

3. his strengthened commitment (Ch. 15) Now he's really on fire for the Lord. He's seen what the Lord can do. He's seen God answer prayer and do a mighty miracle. And it results in:

a. a strengthened consecration (8) Wait a minute, I thought he did that already! He already cleaned out the idols. Well, think of idolatry in Israel like illegal drug use here. You can make it illegal, jail all the promoters and suppliers, teach the kids to just say "no", and people are still going to do drugs! The war on drugs is a war, not a simple cleanup. In Israel idolatry was like that. Asa declared a war on idols and then went back and redoubled his efforts. He strengthened his commitment to obey God and made:

b. a strengthened covenant (12-14) Now it was not simply a command, but the people made a covenant to seek Lord under the penalty of death! A pretty strong motivation! I guess they had a lot of seekers for a while, however genuine! But notice the point: he had a strengthened sense of the importance of commitment to the Lord and it led to:

c. a strengthened application (16-17) He applied it closer to home. He deposed his own grandmother from her position of honor for being an idolater! His application became more personal. And his heart became fully committed to the Lord.

And this process is exactly what God wants to do in our lives. When we walk with Him, we grow in learning to trust Him. And then sooner or later God brings into our lives a test! And as we trust God to take us through that hard time, whatever it is, we're strengthened and we grow stronger and more committed and find new areas in our life where we need to commit to the Lord. And then another test comes, and we grow more and so on. That's how we grow when our hearts are fully committed to the Lord. You can see this in the lives of a number of God's people in the Bible, but I think of Joseph in particular. He was carted down to Egypt as a slave but He was committed to the Lord and he got to be in charge of Potiphar's house. He was faithful and obedient. But then came the test, Potiphar's wife who began to try to seduce him and at last threw herself at him one day. But he stood the test and wound up in prison. However, he had learned you can trust the Lord in bad situations so he trusted Him in prison and things went well and he learned to trust while being patient; more lessons. Finally, the test came again as Pharaoh called him to interpret his dream and he gave the credit to God and relied on Him and ended up on the throne of Egypt. Then came the test of the arrival of his brothers and he learned true forgiveness. He just kept on growing in his trust, in his reliance on God through each testing. That's how God wants to do it in our lives. He wants us to continually remember those times we've relied on Him and to keep on in that process. But it didn't keep on that way with Asa. As the years went by something happened to him. I don't know what. Maybe such a long time passed by until his next crisis came that he forgot the lesson. And what we see in chapter 16 is:

II. Asa's Later Forgetfulness (Ch. 16) 25 years went by in peace; we don't really know what happened during that time. But eventually along came:

1. his second testing (1-10) Baasha, the king of Israel, was getting tired of his people defecting to Judah. And he went down and started to invade Judah and captured Ramah, north of Jerusalem, thus gaining control of the two major roads into Jerusalem from the north and east. Of course, that was mighty close to home and Asa was pretty worried, but this time we're told that:

a. he didn't rely on God (7) He sent all his gold, and God's gold too, to Syria and made an alliance to pinch Israel in between. And when Syria attacked, Israel withdrew and Asa retook Ramah. All this he did instead of praying, instead of relying on God, instead of trusting that God was with him. You see, somehow:

b. he forgot his past experience (8) God sent a prophet to remind him of it. Somehow it didn't click that he'd been there before when the Cushites invaded and God had pulled him through. Why? perhaps too much time had passed in between tests. Perhaps Asa had lost his sense of neediness because everything went so well. Perhaps

his success and prosperity lulled him into a false sense of security and he wasn't driven to God very much so that when the test came again after all that time, he'd forgotten Who his strength really was because he'd been relying on himself all that time! Aren't we like that sometimes in our lives? We learn to rely on God but then things go well for a long time and we slip back to relying on ourselves. And then God puts us back through the same test the second time and by then we're so out of practice that we forget to trust Him and try to go about solving the problem ourselves! Now God is a God of grace and He will find a way to point out our failure to us and draw us back to relying on him. But Asa's real problem was that:

c. his failure hardened his heart (9-10) Here is the difference between Asa and David. When the prophet pointed his finger at David, David said "I've sinned!" When a prophet pointed his finger at Asa, Asa said, "Put him in the stocks!" in Hebrew. Lock him up and see that he's uncomfortable. This was the turning point in his life, the most important moment. This was the moment that growth stopped. When he failed, he became proud and resistant instead of repentant and humble! And, of course, three years later came:

2. his third testing (11-14) It came in his health. He became diseased in his feet. It was a severe disease, one that eventually led to his death. But the thing to notice is the very direct comment the writer makes that:

a. he didn't even seek the Lord (12) Now there's nothing wrong with physicians or with seeking physicians. And I don't think you should wait and pray until you're half-dead before you do it. But the point is that you should be seeking the Lord and depending on Him the whole time. Doctors don't heal. They aid God in the healing process. God brings healing. And God brings death too. But Asa's heart was hardened. He didn't want to admit he'd been wrong. He didn't want to square things with God. And so, as he had lived those last years,

b. he died (13), after two years of suffering. It was an unhappy end to what could have been a glorious reign. You know, I think we're all a little bit forgetful like Asa. When tests come along in life it's so easy for us to forget the previous occasions that we've trusted God and He's brought us through. Instead of having grown enough that we can easily meet the test and keep on trusting and relying on God, enough time has gone by and we've forgotten enough that we have to learn to trust all over again or else we fail to trust the Lord and start to live out of our own resources. Whether it's in regard to our health or our finances or our relationships or whatever. But I want to leave you with this: it's one thing to be forgetful and to have to relearn lessons; we all do that and God is patient with us and teaches us to rely on Him over and over, but Asa's forgetfulness turned into spiritual Alzheimer's disease, if you know what I mean. It turned into a pattern that became permanent. When he refused to trust after being reminded and hardened his heart, there was no more remembering to trust God, no going back. Don't ever let yourself get there! Sure, you'll fail. You'll forget to trust God. But do the smart thing. Run back to your loving forgiving Father and confess your lack of trust. Don't persist in your mistake and harden yourself until you end up like Asa.

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (*Patterns*) Of Kings

Jehoshaphat: Joiner Flesh - Chs. 17-20

It seems as though the kings of Judah keep getting better and better. Solomon became an idolater in old age. Rehoboam tolerated idolatry and learned too late to obey God. Abijah at least trusted God in the crises of life. Asa loved God until 5 years before he died and then got out of fellowship. Jehoshaphat loved God all the days of his life and at a level deeper than any of the kings since David. He ruled Judah 25 years and all the way through we can see that:

I. Jehoshaphat Had An Unequivocal Love For God It is so clear. He is such an example to us in many ways:

1. he obeyed the commands of God (17:3-4) Asa had done his job well; he raised a son who loved his God. Jehoshaphat didn't want anything to do with the idolatrous practices of Israel. He was very careful from his early life on to obey God's Word.

2. he devoted his heart to the ways of God (17:6) It was not a front. It was not put on, just an act, just something he did to get ahead and rule successfully. His heart was in it. He loved God and he loved following God. He delighted in God's ways!

3. he taught the people the Word of God (17:7,9) He knew the Word of God was important for the people too. So he did something we don't read of any other king doing, he sent a teaching mission throughout Judah, officials and Levites taking the Scroll of the Law from the Temple and teaching it in every town! He had a round-robin Bible Conference!

4. he dispensed the justice of God (19:5-7) Later in his reign he made important judicial reforms. He realized what his name meant, "Jehovah is my Judge," and appointed judges in the land who would dispense justice from God's viewpoint and not take bribes.

5. he trusted the power of God (20:1-6,12) After a number of years of peace, testing came and he did the right thing. He trusted God. The invading army is at his southern heel; it is already at En-Gedi by the Dead Sea. And the first thing he does is to turn to God and rely on him. Look at that prayer. He knows who's in control here. He knows who gives victory. And God did honor that trust and give victory. They didn't even have to fight. The factions of the invading army turned against themselves and annihilated one another. All Jehoshaphat had to do was go get the spoils!

6. he rejoiced in the blessing of God (20:26-27) He was not ungrateful. He and the whole army went to the valley of blessing to thank and praise God. They gave the credit where it was due.
It would be tough to find a king who loved the Lord more than Jehoshaphat did. But even Jehoshaphat had his flesh patterns, just like all of us do. He had a way that he was prone to get his needs met and live out of his resources instead of trusting God in an area of his life and it was simply this:

II. Jehoshaphat Joined Himself Repeatedly To Unbelievers He was a joiner. The old saying says, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." and there was a measure of that tendency deep down inside Jehoshaphat. Time and again we find him, in spite of all his love of God, joining himself to people who did not, not for the purpose of being a witness to them, but to partner with them in some enterprise or other. Now the principle is set forth more clearly for us in **2 Cor. 6:14-18**. The verb yoked in Greek is *heterozugeo*. *Hetero* means *different*; *zugo* means *to couple together*. The Hebrews were not to yoke an ox and a donkey together. They were two different kinds of beasts and didn't belong in the yoke together. So, believers and unbelievers are two very different species with different goals and values and purposes in life. And we can't serve God and plow His furrow straight when we choose to chain our life in a binding way to an unbeliever that keeps wanting to do things his way or go in his own direction. And this is the mistake that Jehoshaphat made over and over again. He wanted to plow God's furrow straight and true, but he kept on tying himself to some stubborn mules that didn't want to go God's way. It happened in three areas of his life. First in:

1. the area of marriage (18:1) Jehoshaphat made a marriage alliance with Ahab, the king of Israel. Now he didn't do it by marrying himself. Instead, he married his son to Ahab's daughter:

a. the story: Jehoram marries Athaliah (21:5-6) Now let me jog your memory. Do you remember who Ahab was? He was an idolater and hated Elijah's guts! His wife's name was Jezebel. She was a Phoenician idolater and she made it law in Israel to worship Baal and Ashtaroath. Their daughter's name was Athaliah and if you remember she was just like her mother. Some years later after her husband died, she murdered all her own grandchildren and seized the throne of Judah for herself! But at the moment this young fair lady is the princess of the realm of Israel and Jehoshaphat sets it up for his crown prince son Jehoram (whom I'm sure he wanted to follow the Lord) to marry her. Why?

b. the motive: to keep peace (17:10) Remember, through Rehoboam's and Abijah's and Asa's reigns there was war with Israel. Now Jehoshaphat had made Judah strong and had a large army of over a million men, the largest ever. So, everybody including Israel was leaving him alone. But he knew that that would only last until someone could put together a bigger army. He wanted permanent peace with Israel and thought, "what better way than if Ahab has my son for a son-in-law"! But it didn't work! Instead, he got:

c. the result: a corrupted son and kingdom We already read it. Instead of loving and serving God, Jehoram became an idolater because he married an idolater and he encouraged the nation to practice idolatry and from that point Judah had three idolatrous rulers in a row! What a sad lesson! Marriage to an unbeliever is an unequal yoke and once you're in it, you're in it for life. Listen to me, young people, single people. If you invest your life in building a romantic relationship with a person who's outside of Christ and you marry them, you are in dangerous spiritual waters. It doesn't matter how physically attractive they are; it doesn't matter how attracted and drawn you feel to them. If they don't love Jesus, they're missing the most important thing in your life! And there is a much higher likelihood that they will drag you away from an active walk with Christ than that you will win them to Him. I know it feels good to have somebody say they love you and to have somebody want you. But they're headed in an opposite direction from you. You're out to please God and they can't be there because they don't know Him. And sooner or later the two directions will conflict and if you're married there will be a heavy price to pay. And we have folks right in this room who would stand up and tell you that! Parents, don't be like Jehoshaphat was with his son; teach your kids how important it is to date and to marry someone who loves Jesus with all their heart. Don't encourage their relationship with some young man or woman from school just because it makes you happy to see them getting married or because they seem so happy and you want to keep peace. Cry out to God for grace to resist being a "joiner" and take a stand. If you want to plow God's furrow, it's really tough to do when you're tied to an unbeliever and you can't do it as straight as you could if you were yoked to a believer. Now the second area where Jehoshaphat joined up with a nonbeliever is in:

2. the area of cooperation

a. the story: Jehoshaphat joins Ahab (18:2-4) Now this is years later. Ahab has been having trouble with the army of Syria all along. Some of his border cities have been taken. He needs help. So, he calls on his in-law Jehoshaphat and says, "Will you help me?" and Jehoshaphat says, "Sure, count me in!" And you know the story of how

they bring Micaiah the prophet who warns them but they go to battle anyway. So, here's Jehoshaphat risking the lives of the men in his army, killing his own people to aid an idolatrous king in taking back a city for himself. Why?

b. the motive: to maintain relationships Did you ever do anything wrong just to be accepted by your so-called friends or peers? It's the old ruse "if you want to be my friend, you have to help me..." That line comes in many variations. And when we get to where we are helping people to go on in their sin instead of helping them come to Christ, we are yoked!

c. the result: God dishonored and angry (19:1-3) Ahab died in battle. Jehoshaphat was divinely protected but almost killed. And God was angry. It was not just that His servant had ended up serving another master instead of doing His will. But Jehoshaphat had dishonored God's name. The forces of Judah had been defeated. In those days that meant the God of Judah had been defeated by the God of Syria. You see when you get tied into something you shouldn't, helping an unbelieving friend because you love them and can't bear to say no to them or don't want to offend them, it's God that is dishonored. When you tie yourself up in something, you tie God up in it in the eyes of others and, if it's the wrong thing, God's reputation suffers! Don't get yoked into helping unbelievers in their sinful pursuits. The third area where Jehoshaphat joined up with unbelievers is:

3. the area of business (20:35-37) Here's a little side note tucked in at the close of the record about Jehoshaphat. I think it's here because it again points out his flaw.

a. the story: Jehoshaphat joins Ahaziah Ahaziah is Ahab's son. Somehow Jehoshaphat and he got involved in a business enterprise together. They were going to build a fleet of Tarshish ships, big merchant ships, at Ezion Geber on the tip of the Gulf of Aquaba on the Red Sea south of Judah. They were going to sail down the Red Sea to Ophir in southern Arabia and bring back gold like Solomon had done and maybe on to India! Why?

b. the motive: to make money Maybe Jehoshaphat didn't have enough skilled people to build and sail the ships; I don't know. But the bottom line is money. He wanted to profit by this alliance in business. Now obviously, we're all involved with unbelievers in the marketplace somehow. We work with them, maybe work for them. But sometimes we give our allegiance deeply, we yoke ourselves in the area of business with unbelievers in such a way that we are bound and dragged in their direction. We want to serve and honor God in our business life, to plow His furrow, but they are always pulling in their own direction, pursuing their own goals and motives and ethics. We want to serve God; they want to make money and are willing to be dishonest or cheat in whatever way they have to. And we end up being dragged away after them. So it doesn't work too well:

c. the result: failure God sent a prophet to reiterate the lesson, "You've allied yourself with an unbeliever again; it won't work!" The ships were wrecked, probably in a violent storm before they ever set sail. And it won't work for you either and if it does, you'll probably wind up far from God.

Now Jehoshaphat seems to have learned his lesson. Compare **1 Kings 22:48-49**. After the ships were wrecked, evidently he was going to rebuild and this time when Ahaziah proposed an alliance he said, "NO!" And we think, "Yay, he learned!" but compare **2 Kings 3:5-7**. And God had to teach him the lesson over again. He nearly lost the battle and but for God's mercy he and all his army might have died. You see, he just couldn't keep from unequally yoking himself to unbelievers and running off with them in the things they were after. It was a pattern in his life. But all of us wrestle with that choice. It may become a pattern in yours as well. You may be a joiner. "Please the crowd, please the feelings, get your needs met! Just join up!" But my friend, God wants to be in the driver's seat of your life. And if you tie yourself to unbelievers whether it's in marriage or in helping them pursue their wrong goals or in business, God can't fully drive the yoked pair. Only one responds to the reins. And God's work and His will are hindered. You can't please two masters. You can't do what God wants and what your unsaved ally wants too. So you have to choose who your master is. The story is told of a *ragged boy with a violin under his arm who roamed the streets of a great European city. Because he had no home or family, he wandered around for food and shelter. He had a strange gift for music and had somehow gotten hold of a violin, and would stand on the corners and play for the crowd. When finished they would toss some coins and this is how he lived. In the same city was a famous musician. One day he happened to hear the boy playing and was impressed by the quality of music. "Son, to whom do you belong?" he said, "I don't belong to anybody," the boy answered. "Well, where do you live?" was the next question. "I don't have any place to live. I just sleep on the streets or wherever I can." The man thought for a moment and then asked, "How would you like to be my boy and come to live with me? I'll teach you all I know about how to play the violin." The boy's eyes sparkled, and he said, "Mister, I'd love it." So the great musician took him to his own home, had him cleaned and dressed up, and the man became like a father to him. For several years he poured into the eager young mind and heart all he knew about the violin. Finally, the boy was ready to appear on the concert stage for his first public recital. The house was filled to capacity. At last, the boy came out, put the violin beneath his chin and began his concert. He played beautifully and there was much applause. The boy though, paid no attention. He kept his eyes turned upward and continued to play. The audience was mystified by his behavior until someone said, "I don't understand why he is so insensible to all this thunderous applause. He keeps looking up all the time. I'm going to find out what is attracting his attention!" Moving about in the concert hall, the observer found the answer. There in the topmost balcony was*

the old music master, peering over the banister toward his young pupil. He was nodding his head and smiling, as if to say, "You are doing well, my boy; play on! And the boy did play on, not seeming to care whether the audience laughed or applauded. He kept his gaze upward. You see, He was playing to please the master only. You can play the tune of life to please the crowd, to keep friendships or maintain relationships or to keep peace or to make money or a hundred other things. But God is seeking for those who will play it a different way, those who will play for only one purpose and reason, to please their Master only. What area in your life is God speaking to you about? Who will you please? Joiner flesh tries to please others and self, but God is patient and He'll painstakingly teach you the lesson over and over again like He did Jehoshaphat. Learn it by grace; learn it now. Live to please the Master only!

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (Patterns) Of Kings

Joash: Follower Flesh - Ch. 23-24

Fifteen years have passed, fifteen years of idolatry in Judah. Godly King Jehoshaphat was succeeded by his son Jehoram. His epitaph is in 21:20, "He passed away to no one's regret"! And his son Ahaziah only lasted a year before he was assassinated. But when that happened, Ahaziah's mother Athaliah saw a golden opportunity for herself. She destroyed all of her own grandchildren and seized the throne for herself. For 6 years Athaliah led Judah deep into idolatry and Baal worship. But she made one small miscalculation. When she had her grandchildren destroyed, she didn't count heads! There was one little baby grandson that she missed in her slaughter and his name was Joash. His aunt was married to Jehoiada the chief priest and when all the children were being killed, she rescued him and hid him in the Temple of the Lord. (Of course, that's the one place Athaliah never went!) So, all the while she was ruling the land, the rightful king Joash was growing up. And finally, when he was 7, Jehoiada and the captains of the army staged a coup. They placed young Joash on the throne and executed Athaliah. God's comment is **23:21**. Now Joash was a good king; he loved the Lord and served him for at least 25-30 years of his long 40 year reign. But Joash had one glaring pattern of behavior that seemed to characterize his life; he was the kind of a person who built his life around the influence of other people. He was a follower. So, for those first 25-30 years, he naturally built his life around the godly influence of his priest uncle Jehoiada who had raised him from infancy. But eventually Jehoiada died and the sad fact is that he was just as easily influenced by people who didn't love the Lord and followed them. So, we're going to use Joash this morning as an opportunity to talk about the influence of other people and the effect it has on our lives and the danger of developing that pattern of being a follower. First let's look at:

I. The Influence of Jehoiada the Priest (24:1-14) Jehoiada had a profound effect on young Joash's life. Because of him:

1. he worshipped the Lord (2) Compare **23:16**. I'm sure that for those 6 years of growing up, Jehoiada had daily devotional times with Joash. He trained him well. When he took the throne the people and the king together made a solemn agreement that they would be the Lord's people. From little on up Joash worshipped the Lord instead of Baal like his father and grandfather. And until he was over age 30, he obeyed the Lord and did all the things God approved of. As long as Jehoiada lived, his influence on Joash was so powerful that it kept him from the influence of the other officials who gave lip service to the Lord but were really idolaters at heart.

2. he cared about the Lord's honor (4-6) Verse 4 says literally, *it was in his heart*. When Joash grew to manhood he realized how badly the Temple had been left go during those 15 years prior to his reign. He must also have been studying the Law because he was aware of what the Law had to say about collecting money from the people for the Lord's house. So he set about a renovation project all on his own. He even had to chide his beloved Jehoiada (now an old man) for not getting on the stick. You see, he cared that the Lord have a proper house, that His worship be carried out properly, that He have all the honor and glory due to His name. And so:

3. he built up the Lord's work (12-13) The Temple, of course, was the chief project that God had going in Judah in those days. He restored the Temple to the glory it had under Solomon. He had a personal involvement in it and stuck it out until the job was done. He was involved in advancing the work of God. But then the inevitable happened; Jehoiada died and with him all of his godly influence on Joash, and a new influence began to pervade his life:

II. The Influence of the Officials of Judah (24:15-27) These were the leading men in his kingdom and with the very powerful force of Jehoiada out of the way, they were free to begin to put forth their own ideas to the king. And they must have been very strong, because look what happened to Joash:

1. he worshipped idols (17-18) Imagine that! The king who made a covenant with the Lord in his youth and served him for 25 years now worships the gods of his officials, Baal and Ashtaroah. He doesn't go to the House of the Lord to worship any longer but he goes to a shrine with an Asherah pole! Not only that, but what he cared about has changed. He used to care about the Lord's honor but now:

2. he cared about his own honor (20-22) Jehoiada's son (or rather probably his grandson) Zechariah was a prophet and God sent him to warn the people that they must stop worshipping idols. But the people were incensed and they stoned him to death right in the courtyard of the Temple itself. But note that they did it "at the king's command". Joash was incensed that anyone would oppose him. What had impressed him in the first place with the officials back in verse

17 was that they bowed down to him! And so now he murders the grandson of the man who had saved his own life as a baby! Why? Because now all he cared about was himself! And so tragically:

3. he destroyed the Lord's work (23-25) God sent the army of Syria against Joash. Judah lost against them and Joash himself was seriously wounded. Yet the Syrians withdrew without completely annihilating Jerusalem but Chronicles doesn't say why. Compare **2 Kings 12:18**, *But Joash king of Judah took all the sacred objects dedicated by his fathers- Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah, the kings of Judah--and the gifts he himself had dedicated and all the gold found in the treasuries of the temple of the LORD and of the royal palace, and he sent them to Hazael king of Aram, who then withdrew from Jerusalem.* Joash stripped the Temple of all the gold and all the money collected in Jehoida's days and gave it to the enemy to save his hide! He tore down the very thing he had once built! All that he did for the Lord, he now undid, all because he was a follower! And ironically, he died at the hands of his own officials that he valued so highly! How sad, but the lesson will be lost on us unless we talk about the power of:

III. The Influence In Our Lives There is not a one of us that is not subject to influence in our lives. It is there constantly, at work, at school, at home. There are pressures that are put on us by those around us, some good and some bad. But we have to know how to deal with the influences in our lives or we'll wind up like Joash throwing away all we've done for the Lord and caring only about ourselves! Let's draw three lessons from the life of Joash for ourselves.

1. we must understand the power of influence It's obvious from Joash's life that influence is an extremely powerful thing, more powerful than we are usually willing to admit. For instance, the Scripture says:

a. good influence can resist evil - Prov. 13:20, *He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.* That's what happened to Joash. He spent all those years with Jehoiada, a wise man, and as a result of being with him day in and out he became wise. The wisdom that rubbed off on him was strong; it was so strong that for years and years it was able to hold him against any pressures from his officials toward idolatry. The influence of a strong Christian home, a solid Bible-teaching church, mature Christian friends, these things are powerful in our lives. They make us grow wise and they can keep us from falling into sin. But:

b. bad influence can destroy good - I Cor. 15:33, *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."* Literally, *Bad companionships will corrupt good habits.* Ungodly friendships and associations will slowly erode and destroy the good habits that you have built into your life. You might say "No they won't; I'm strong". Paul says "Don't be deceived". Bad influence is powerful. It affects us. And the sad part is that most of the time we're already beginning to follow without being aware of it! One of the most powerful examples I know of is how the influence of the Nazis impacted believers in Germany. *Martin Niemoller was a Lutheran minister in Hitler's Germany. Niemoller continued to preach against the Nazi enslavement of Jews in concentration camps, even after being warned to stop and being threatened with arrest. Many times Nazi officials sat in his church to intimidate him by taking notes. Finally, they had had enough and Niemoller was arrested. The next morning, in jail, the chaplain stopped by, who was also a Lutheran minister and expressed surprise at seeing his friend, Martin Niemoller, behind bars. The chaplain said, "Brother, what did you do? Why are you in here?" Niemoller replied, "Brother, given what's happening in our country, why are you NOT in here?"* Bad influence is a powerful thing; it can move you to comply with and do things you'd never dream of! So:

2. we must recognize the presence of influence We must own up to it; we must admit that we are subject to influence. And since that is the case, instead of sitting there and waiting for it to affect us, we should take advantage of it. How?

a. we must seek positive influence Build a whole bunch of positive influence into your life! Make sure you're actively involved in a good church family. Make friends and pursue relationships with people that you know are mature believers and will influence you to be more Christ-like. Ask those people for advice. Imitate their good points. Your life will have plenty of bad influence; load it up with as much good as possible! And at the same time:

b. we must avoid negative influence When you sense that you are being influenced in a negative way by some person or situation, do whatever you can to avoid it. If you find your job is pulling you down and you find that because of it you are more and more tempted to wrong and the good habits you have of prayer and Bible reading and church attendance are being eroded away, then look for another job! No job is worth being pulled away from God. If you find that your friendship with a certain person influences you away from God and erodes those good habits in your life, then move out of that person's life! Nothing is worth sacrificing your relationship with the Lord! If you find that the influence of your friends at work is causing you to have doubts about your marriage and to have feelings of wanting out, do something about it! Refuse to be a follower! But there is another bottom-line principle here:

3. we must mature a faith that is beyond influence Sure, we must control the influences in our lives and use them to our advantage, but that is not enough. At the root of our being we must have a faith that is mature enough that it will not be moved or shaken by influence. Compare **Eph. 4:14-16**. You see it is spiritual immaturity that causes us to be tossed about this way and that by the influences in our lives. Joash grew up physically and mentally but he never grew

up spiritually. Mature swimmers swim through the waves. Infants are tossed back and forth by them. Infants are blown by the wind; adults stand against it and go their way. And so, we must have a mature faith and if we do:

a. it will withstand negative influence You can't avoid all negative influence! There will always be some. At least you've all got a TV set! But a mature faith can stand against a great deal of negative influence and remain firm. Jehoiada's did in a land that was prone to idolatry! And a mature faith:

b. it will not depend on positive influence Joash's faith was built on the influence of Jehoiada and when Jehoiada wasn't there it crashed! You can't build your faith on mom or dad's convictions. You can't build it on that faithful friend who is always there for you. One day they won't be there. You need a mature faith of your own that does not have to have others all the time buoying it up so it doesn't sink! How do you get it?

c. it grows from walking with Christ Verse 16, "From Him the body grows". Listen, there is no substitute for a personal walk with Christ! I'm not talking about going to church. I'm talking about spending time alone with Him every day, being influenced by Him, being His follower, reading and studying His Word, talking to Him out of your heart and listening to Him with the ears of your heart. If you really learn to know Him and walk with Him, He will be the most powerful influence in your life.

Why don't you try this test: honestly ask yourself, "If I suddenly had no church to be involved in and no Christian friends or family, what would happen to my faith? Would I still love Jesus and would He be the most important thing in my life?" There may come a day when your church will fail you, when your friends will fail you. What will you do if the biggest influence in your life is not the direct influence of Jesus Christ Himself as you walk with Him? I'll tell you; you'll do exactly what Joash did, that follower flesh in you may cause you to tear down all the good you've built into your life!

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (*Patterns*) Of Kings

Uzziah: Arrogant Flesh - Ch. 26

Today we're going to talk about the factor that underlies all the other flesh patterns that kings have. It is the root of our flesh problem. It is what got Satan kicked out of heaven. It is what caused Adam and Eve to fall into sin. It is a pattern that creeps into the life of every one of us without exception. Of course, I'm talking about pride. And where do we find it? Where else but in the life of a very godly man, King Uzziah (or Azariah as he's called in other places). After Joash who was influenced to become an idolater in his later years, his son Amaziah reigned. Though he loved the Lord and trusted Him even in his finances, in the end it's like father, like son. He too became an idolater! But then came Uzziah. He reigned a long time, 52 years (though during a large portion of his early reign he was reigning along with his father). And he walked in the ways of the Lord. But what we meet with first in the record of Uzziah's life is the very thing that is so often:

I. The Precursor of Pride: Success (5) Everything Uzziah touched prospered. Nothing went wrong for him. He obeyed the Lord and the Lord blessed everything he did. Look at it.

1. he prospered in conflict (6-8) He whipped the Philistines and the Arabs and the Meunites. Nations began to bring him tribute and serve him. Nobody could beat him. Nobody could get ahead of him or take advantage of him.

2. he prospered in income (10) Livestock and crops meant income. They were money in the bank. They were food on the table. He involved himself in project after project, irrigating and digging and his garden was not like some I've planted; everything grew! It was as though everything he touched turned to gold.

3. he prospered in ability (11-14) In this case it was ability to defend himself. He had a large well-trained and well-equipped army. It was also well-organized. Nobody could touch him. He was better than everyone.

4. he prospered in knowledge (15a) He had the best technology of his day, machines or engines, catapults to throw stones and shoot arrows. He knew what Meunites and others didn't because of the knowledge among his men. And because of all this:

5. he prospered in reputation (15b) His fame spread far and wide. Everybody looked up to him. Everybody admired him. Everybody was afraid of him. Everybody respected and honored him. Now you know that's a dangerous position to be in! When you're prospering, when you always win, when you have lots of ability, when you make lots of money, when you know more than most people do. when people begin to honor and respect you, that's the most dangerous place there is to be. Why? Because if you don't handle the prosperity right, it can be the precursor or the forerunner to pride. I'll never forget the advice my own pastor gave me years ago, "Pride is the deathtrap of the ministry!" You get lots of compliments; lots of people like and respect you. You get to stand up and take 30 minutes of time to say whatever you want and people actually listen. They cry on your shoulder. .It's real easy to get proud when you make lots of money or have an important job with lots of responsibility or are placed in a leadership position. And that's what happened to Uzziah.

II. The Process of Pride (16) This little verse is chock full of information. It spells out for us the actual process of how pride worked in Uzziah and how it works in us. The first step is:

1. a discovery of success (16a) Uzziah made a discovery. He woke up one day and noticed just what was happening to him. Here's how it works:

a. I become aware of my own position (15b) I notice myself; I notice how good I am at what I do, how I always win, how much more I know than the other guy. And I think about it and it makes me feel good. I like feeling superior. But at that same moment:

b. I forget that I am greatly helped (15b) Uzziah prospered because God helped him. You prosper and succeed because God helps you and helps you greatly. You came into this world with nothing. Everything you have is a gift of God. Everything you are both physically and mentally is a creation of God. Pride begins when you forget where the credit belongs.

Let me tell you something: some of the most humble people I know are actually very accomplished people who do a great deal, who hold an important position, who have great abilities, who have a tremendous impact, who make a huge difference and yet have simply refused to allow themselves to take any of the credit for it or to be puffed up by it. I think of people like Dr. Sherrill Babb, highly respected president of Phila. College of Bible which has now blossomed under his leadership into a university, who always takes time to talk to me personally when he sees me and asks about my family and church friends here and who lovingly cares for his wife Linda with her handicap every day of his life. Why? Because he knows where it all comes from. I think of Dr. Lee Jacobs, the founder of Central Asian Partners. He's an infectious disease specialist and Medical Director for the large Kaiser Permanente chain. He's been a driving force in the whole movement to reach the Kyrgyz but from the first moment I met him he treated me as an equal, included me, and valued our participation as a small church. Why? Because he knows where it all comes from. I think of people like Dan and Barbara Lunow whose 30+ years of sacrifice and dedication have changed the whole way of life for an entire people in Irian Jaya. The impact of their lives has touched thousands but they are two of the most humble folks you'd ever meet. Why? Because they know where it all comes from. *When Harry Truman was thrust into the presidency by the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a friend took him aside: "From here on out, you're going to have lots of people around you. They'll try to put up a wall around you and cut you off from any ideas but theirs. They'll tell you what a great man you are, Harry. But you and I both know you ain't."* It's so easy for my flesh to see and then to dwell on my own position or success and begin to take credit for it but when I do, then comes:

2. a decay of the heart (16b) Literally, "his heart was lifted up to act corruptly". Pride is a matter of the heart. So here's what happens. When I discover how good I am and forget that God has done it all, then:

a. I form an elevated view of myself My heart gets lifted up. To quote scripture, I think more highly of myself than I ought to think. I credit myself with all my achievements and abilities. I see myself as being above others, better than they and smarter. And soon:

b. I form a degraded view of authority Since I am so good, I am the one who should really be determining what I do in my life. Soon it doesn't matter to me that God says something or the law says something or somebody else says something. What matters is what I say, what I think, what I feel. So a decayed heart then leads to:

3. a deceitfulness in the actions (16c) The Hebrew word *unfaithful* is literally *to cover up, to act slyly or treacherously*. That's how I begin to act toward God. I figure in my heart (though I'd never say it) that I know more or I'm more important than He is and so here's what happens:

a. I begin to do good with wrong motives (16d) Uzziah didn't go out to commit murder. He set out to do a good thing, to offer incense to God in the Temple. But why? Because he thought he was at least as good as the priests who were only his servants and because he was sure he knew how God would feel about it. So, I begin to do the good things I do to be seen, so people will notice, so I can prove how good I am. And:

b. I begin to ignore God's Word (17-18) Those priests had guts. They confronted Uzziah and told him he was wrong; he was violating God's Word. I begin to think that I can do what I want, that I can ignore what God says about certain things. And, if anybody tries to tell me:

c. I become angry at opposition (19) He was in a rage and screaming at them. When I get proud, I can't tolerate anybody telling me I'm wrong, anybody doubting me, anybody thinking I can't do the job. So, I get angry. I lash out at anybody and anything that gets in my way. Maybe even God! What a terrible thing pride is! It starts out of God being good to us and we so easily develop it to where we ignore Him and lash out at others. But the worst thing about it is:

III. The Price of Pride (19-21) God broke Uzziah's pride. He struck him with leprosy and he was a leper until the day of his death. You want to know how God feels about pride? Just look at Uzziah. Look at his flesh, deformed, decaying, unclean. To God, pride is like leprosy, a loathsome disease. And the price of pride is the same as the price of leprosy:

1. it separates you from God The rest of his life Uzziah had to live apart from the Temple. He was now unclean and was never allowed back in. The progression starts out like this:

a. God will not honor your actions (18c) God lifts his hand of blessing. He is not pleased. He stops using you. He starts sending problems. You now begin to fail to succeed. This is the time to stop and repent and confess your pride. Uzziah should have left voluntarily. But He persisted. He fumed at the priests. And when you persist in pride, since you're His child:

b. God will discipline you for your actions (20c) Literally, *God touched him*. God takes his little finger and taps you one tap where it hurts. He finds a way to show you who's really the boss here. The pity is that sometimes it's too late then to be really ever used of God again. But like leprosy, pride not only separates you from God:

2. it separates you from men (21a) Uzziah lived apart from people, in his own separate palace. He was even buried separately. Pride puts up walls and barriers between you and other people, even those you love. It keeps you from them, from building real relationships, from loving and being loved. And if you persist in it, you can be proud and separated all the way to the grave.

Old King Herod got up and made a speech one day to the people of Tyre and Sidon. And because they wanted to butter him up, they shouted that his was the voice of a god and not of a man! And: *Acts 12:23, Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.* God doesn't share His glory; He just doesn't. We think, "How terrible! I would never let people think I am a god!" Yet how many times am I like that toward God. How many times do I become proud and lifted up and take the credit in my heart for what He has done and then get to thinking I know better than He does! But He loves me and warns me and then if I don't listen and it becomes a pattern in my life, He withdraws His help and lets me flop so I learn! *When someone asked St. Francis of Assisi why and how he could accomplish so much, he replied: "This may be why. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the earth and said, 'where can I find the weakest, the littlest, the meanest man on the face of the earth?' Then He saw me and said, 'Now I've found him, and I will work through him. He won't be proud of it. He'll see that I'm only using him because of his littleness and insignificance.'*" He knew where it all came from. Peter warned us: *1Pet 5:5, All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* Where is it in your life that you're tempted to be proud, tempted to take the credit, tempted to think more of yourself than you ought to? What's God showing you in your heart?

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (Patterns) Of Kings

Hezekiah: Spiritual Flesh (Chs. 29-32)

After King Uzziah died, his son Jotham reigned 16 years and he steadfastly loved the Lord, though not much is said about him in the Scriptures. However, his son Ahaz followed him for another 16 years and he turned out to be a real jerk, an idolater who sacrificed his own sons in the fire to his false gods. He closed down the Temple and raided its furnishings. As a result of his sinfulness, the land of Judah ended up as a vassal state under the domination of the King of Assyria. It is nothing short of a miracle that Ahaz' son Hezekiah was such a godly king. In fact, Hezekiah is perhaps the godliest of all the kings of Judah we have studied thus far and after those 16 years of idolatry, we can surely see the great need for:

I. Hezekiah's Godly Reforms (chs. 29-31) The record is extensive and we don't have time to read about them all but let me mention them briefly and maybe point out a verse or two. First:

1. he refurbished the Temple building (29:3-19) Read 18-19. After 16 years of neglect the Temple was dirty and unclean. It had to be cleansed literally and ceremonially and have all the proper vessels and utensils restored for sacrifices. Then:

2. he reestablished Temple worship (29:20-36) Read 35-36. Once again the proper daily sacrifices were offered. The Levites and singers were in place. Offerings were brought by the people. Hezekiah himself commanded the worship and the sacrifices. Then:

3. he reinstituted the Passover feast (Ch. 30) Read 25-27. Even though the Temple had operated, since the time of Solomon the special feasts of Lev. 23, and especially the Passover, had not been celebrated on a national basis. But Hezekiah reinstituted it and got it going again. And look at this:

4. he reinstated the practice of tithing (Ch. 31) Read 4. For years the Levites and the priesthood had not been able to do their work effectively because they had to be out earning their own living. The tithing principle that God set up in the Law had been ignored. But Hezekiah decreed that that tithe be reinstated, that all Judah should bring in 1/10 to give to the tribe of Levi.

The summary of all the reforms Hezekiah made is in **31:20-21**. Don't you wish that was written about you? He really loved God. In fact, **2 Kin. 18:5-6** says, *Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.* By the way, we might do well to allow his example to challenge us personally.

Am I worshipping God like I ought or has that portion of my life fallen into disrepair? Does it need cleaned out and restored? Am I giving to God like I ought or am I neglecting it? Am I following God's commands or are there some I know I'm breaking? Maybe there are some things in my life as a believer that need reformed. And, in fact, there were, even in Hezekiah's. For we read now in chapter 32 about:

II. Hezekiah's Near Ruin (32:24-31) We have to look close and carefully at Hezekiah to notice that he, like all the rest of the kings of Judah and like us, was a king who had a flaw, who had sinful flesh, who displayed behavior in his life that was actually ungodly and nearly brought him to ruin. Now part of the reason for that is that out of the comparatively large chunk of scriptures given to the record of his life, only a few verses emphasize the negative. But the other reason is that the record as we have it is not put down in chronological order. Instead, the good parts of his life are told chronologically while the few little bad points are kept and mentioned separately at the end of the record. But evidently Hezekiah had the same problem that Uzziah had years before him. Notice how his success affected him:

1. the success that affected him (27-30) Because he loved God, God blessed all his undertakings. He was able to throw off the yoke of the king of Assyria for a while. He accumulated lots of money and provisions, just like Uzziah. Blessing after blessing flowed to him from the hand of God. But, like it did on Uzziah, it had a negative effect **(25)**. His heart began to become proud. The Hebrew says, "his heart had been lifted up," that is, through all his success. And we saw last week how success breeds pride in each of us. Now God saw this and so sent to him a series of:

2. the events that tested him Again, these have been put in proper chronological order from the dates in 2 Kings. And not all are explained fully in one place, but as near as I can tell, here's what came along. First came:

a. his illness and recovery (24-26) God let him get sick, sick all the way to the point of death. He complained about that to God in prayer and God granted him an additional 15 years. So, he was healed and to boot God gave him a miraculous sign. 2 Kings tells us that God made the shadow go backwards 10 steps on his stairway. But you see, the real reason for this sickness is this: it was a test to see if the proudness of his heart would break and Hezekiah would turn to the Lord. Compare **Isaiah 38:9-20** (read **9-12**). This is his first attitude. You can hear the pride that has built up in his life. But the neat thing about Hezekiah is that when God used events like this one to touch him, he repented of pride. He didn't persist like Uzziah and keep on railing against God (read **15-17**). This is the later attitude. He humbled himself. He realized God was in charge, that God had allowed this illness for his own good, for his strengthening and to help him to turn from the pride and sin in his life. You see, when Hezekiah would get proud or sin would creep into his life, God would touch him and he would repent and turn again to trust completely in God. The next event to come along was:

b. his visit from Babylon (31) God tested him again soon after his healing to know whether he had learned his lesson of trusting only in God. The story is more complete in **2 Kings 20:12-19**. Babylon sent messengers to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery and to hear of the miracle of the shadow going back. You might think, "What's so bad about that?" Well, the real reason they were coming was to seek out the possibility of an alliance between Babylon and Judah against Assyria, the dominant world power. God was testing Hezekiah to see whether he would continue to trust in God alone or whether he would turn to trust in the aid of Babylon to help against Assyria. And he failed the test. Lesson not yet learned! And Isaiah the prophet rebuked him sternly for it. But God is not finished yet. Next comes:

c. the first invasion of Assyria, which you only read about in **2 Kings 18:13-16**. Again, Hezekiah did not trust God completely this first time but tried to buy his way out with the gold and silver he could get his hands on. There's still a little touch of that pride there. "I can handle it God, I'll find a way. " It is not until God allowed Assyria to invade a second time that we really see clearly:

III. Hezekiah's Sincere Repentance (32:1-23) This time when Assyria comes marching up to the gates of the city, we see a different Hezekiah. Look at:

1. Assyria's second invasion (1, 16-19) The thing to note is that the Assyrian leaders hit the issue on the head. They made fun of Judah's God. They talked about Him like He was just another one of their idols which were not gods at all and they knew it! But this time see:

2. Hezekiah's proper reaction Hezekiah has a changed heart, a changed way of thinking. Here's what he did. First:

a. he prepared what he could (2-5) Trusting God does not mean that we sit with our hands folded, do nothing and wait for lightning to fall from the sky! We do what God has enabled us to do. Hezekiah cut off the water so the Assyrians would have none and he repaired the wall. When God allows trouble or a problem in our lives, if there's something God has already given us the resources to do, then we ought to do it! But at the bottom line:

b. he trusted in the Lord (20) Now to see just how Hezekiah has changed, look at **2 Kings 19:15-19**. He knew he couldn't fix it. He knew he couldn't solve it. The strength was not in him or in his army. He lived up to his name, Hezekiah, which means *strengthened by God*. God is in control of these things. He laid it out before God and trust-

ed Him to care for His own. Phil. 4:13 reminds us that it is only through Christ that we can endure anything. And look at:

3. God's dynamic conclusion (20-23) Kings tells us the number. 185,000 Assyrian soldiers woke up dead! They didn't wake up. Assyria's army was reduced to a handful and they fled. Years later God had Sennacherib the king assassinated by the hand of his own sons and of all places in the temple of his god whom he thought was so great.

So, what's the overall lesson here for us? Simply this: when Hezekiah did wrong and knew it, he was sorry and repented of it and got his heart right before the Lord. That was his pattern. Yes, he sinned, he fell. But when he did, he turned back to the Lord again. You see, right now God knows He will not get absolute perfection from you. He'll get that one day. But for right now He does not so much expect absolute perfection as he does this one thing that Hezekiah learned, that when you become proud, when you sin, you have a repentant heart, a heart that will come back to Him and say, "I've sinned; you really are Lord; I can't live without you; I'm going to trust in you." If you try to solve all your problems on your own, that's pride. God wants a new mindset, a new attitude. That's what the word repentance means, a changed mind. He wants you to have a mind that knows you can't live, can't survive, can't succeed, can't do anything without Him. That's the quality that I believe made David a man after God's own heart. It was not sinlessness. He sinned greatly, even horribly, and on many occasions, but when he became aware of it, his heart was humbled and he repented and sought the Lord. A pattern of humbleness, of willingness to be shown our sin and to be heartbroken over it and change, that's the pattern that was in Hezekiah. That's the pattern God wants to see in us.

2 Chronicles - The Flesh (*Patterns*) Of Kings

Josiah: Stubborn Flesh (Chs. 34-35)

Hezekiah's death brought Judah 57 of the worst years in her history. His son Manasseh and his grandson Amon were the worst idolaters the nation had ever known. They filled the land with idolatry of the most vulgar and base sort. They filled the Temple of God with altars and images and male prostitutes and sacrificed children. And of course, 57 years of it meant an entire generation grew up like them. The whole nation became idolatrous. And it was because of all their wickedness that God's wrath was aroused beyond remedy, to the point where He determined that Jerusalem would be destroyed and the nation would be carried off captive to Babylon. But God gave Judah one last chance in the form of a king named Josiah. He was the last of the godly kings and also the best. Kings tells us there was never another king like him in the matter of fully carrying out God's Word and clinging to it. So, let's look at:

I. Josiah's Godly Reforms (34:1-2) Josiah was only 8 when he took the throne. At 16 he really began to personally seek God. By 20 he began to make vast religious reforms in the land and at 26 came closer to totally eradicating idolatry from the nation than any other king had though he failed to eliminate it from the hearts of the people. During his 31 year reign you can note three major accomplishments. The first one was:

1. removing the idols of the land (34:3-7, 33) Josiah was an iconoclast, an idol-breaker! In two waves he eliminated every outward trace of idolatry that could be found and even defiled the heathen shrines by burning human bones on them so that no one would ever use them again. And he not only did it in Judah but traveled north throughout Israel and to the old high place at Bethel and destroyed all he found. In all this he was right in the center of the will of God. In fact, listen to this prediction in **1 Kings 13:1-2**, *By the word of the LORD a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD: "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.'"* 300 years earlier God had called Josiah by name in prophecy as the one who would wipe out the idolatry that Jeroboam introduced. Now his second accomplishment was:

2. rebuilding the Temple of the Lord (34:8-13) *Read 8, 11.* The Temple had fallen into disrepair but not only from neglect. If you read 2 Kings 23 you can see how every portion of it (and it was a large building) from the gate to the roof had some kind of idolatrous altar or statue or something in it. But Josiah restored the proper worship of God. And his third accomplishment was:

3. renewing the covenant of the Law (34:14-35:19) *Read 14-15.* The very scroll of the Law had been lost. Josiah had done all this without ever seeing or hearing the actual word of God but now he heard it for the first time and his reaction is in 19-28. Josiah's heart was touched. He wanted nothing more than to obey God. When he heard God's word, he recognized just how awful the idolatry of Judah really had been and the punishment that was coming. He inquired of the Lord through Huldah the prophetess to see if there was any chance of averting disaster! Afterwards he immediately set to work obeying the scroll. He called the whole nation together and made them promise to obey it (*read 31-32*). His whole heart and soul had one desire, to obey God fully. Chapter 35 goes on to tell us how he celebrated the Passover even more fully than Hezekiah had, in a way so universal that it had not been done like that since the days of Samuel! What an example to us!

Here's a man who reads the Word of God and does it! It doesn't matter whether it's popular. It doesn't matter if it's costly. When he reads it, he does it. How about us? Is that our attitude toward God's Word? When I read it, do I do it, like it or not, difficult or not? He's also a man who won't let any idol take God's place; nothing is allowed to stand. There is total and complete dedication to the Lord. How about me? Have I made myself a living sacrifice and told God that I will be and do anything He wants, that my life and my body and my lips are His to command? What a king Josiah was! How strange then that we discover:

II. Josiah's Stubborn Flesh (35:20-22) Now let me give you the picture. By 609 BC Assyria has been the dominant world power for centuries but it is on its last leg. Babylon is the new kid on the top of the heap and is about to put Assyria away for keeps. Egypt, however, is afraid of Babylon and decides to come to the aid of Assyria against Babylon at a place called Carchemish on the Euphrates River. To get there, Pharaoh Neco has to march north through Israel's coastal plain and then cut across to the east. As he does, Josiah trots his army out to waylay him in the valley of Megiddo. That's the scene. Now there are two facts we know: (1) *God didn't want Josiah to go to battle*. The writer says Neco was actually speaking for God in verse 22. God did not want Josiah to go and engage Egypt. But (2) *He went to battle anyway!* Now how can this be in a man who wanted so much to obey God. Well, let's look at:

1. the mistakes he made There are two of them. First:

a. he presumed to know the will of God What he did was to confuse a clear issue with an unclear one. You see, all the other things he did were clear cut things. He knew God's will about the idols and about the Temple and about the covenant. He had Scripture on all that, once the Book was found anyway! But here was an issue not so clear. He assumes that because Pharaoh is marching through his land that the will of God is for him to attack. There was no scripture on it. No prophet came and told him to do it. He presumed that because it seemed right to him and he loved to obey God that this must be right! Don't we do that with God sometimes? Because we love God's Word and are trying to please Him, sometimes something comes along and we assume it is the will of God. For example, a pastor may have a bigger church ask him to come and he thinks, "O yes, God would certainly want me to do this!" Or somebody offers you a better job or you find a new house you like, and because it looks good, we say yes to it. We all do it. Without any clear Scripture, without stopping to pray or asking advice, we just presume to know God's will. And his second mistake was that:

b. he provoked an unnecessary fight Pharaoh was not attacking him, just passing through. His quarrel was with Babylon. **Prov. 26:17**, *Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own*. When you grab a dog by the ears, it's hard to let go! You usually get bit! You'd better be sure you're big enough to handle the dog! So, what Josiah did was not the wisest thing, it was not the sensible thing, but he presumed it was God's will, God's opportunity to preserve his own nation's independence and glory. But the real flaw is not so much the mistake of presumption but:

2. the stubbornness he displayed You see, God tried to stop him! God worked things in a most unusual way to keep him from the mistake he was about to make! But notice what he would not do:

a. he would not ask God When the Book was found in the Temple, he immediately inquired of God through the prophetess Huldah. The prophet Jeremiah was also there for him to inquire of. But he would not ask God to begin with. And then when Pharaoh tried to refuse to fight him, he still wouldn't ask God. I think he was afraid God would say "No" and he wouldn't get to do what he wanted to do. Sometimes we're like that, aren't we? We get our minds set on something and we're just not going to pray about it. We're not going to ask God or look in the Scriptures. We refuse to ask because we have our hearts set and we're afraid He'll say "No!" But what's worse is:

b. he would not listen to God's warning God tried to warn him three different ways but he wouldn't listen. First, he wouldn't listen:

(1) through the circumstances What big bully do you know that when you the little guy steps in front of him and puts up his fists says, "I don't want to fight you, I'm busy!" Most bullies love to beat up on little guys all they can. So do most big nations and Egypt was no exception. Normally Pharaoh would have been only too glad to whip Judah and annex it under his control. But instead, God has him try to get out of it. That should have been a clear sign to Josiah. When you don't ask God about something and you start to do it and circumstances begin to fall apart, that's the time to listen. Maybe God is saying, "Wait, you didn't ask Me!" Then God tried to warn him:

(2) through the advice of others Now I know Pharaoh is not exactly who you want to get your advice from. But look at how God has this heathen king speak in verse 21, "God has told me". I'm sure he didn't mean the God of Israel specifically but he used the word! He didn't do like Assyria did to Hezekiah and ridicule and make fun of Judah's puny little God. He at least acknowledged Him. Josiah should have at least considered his words. But when you're being stubborn, it doesn't matter to you what people say, you don't listen! And finally, he was warned:

(3) through his own doubts Verse 22 says he disguised himself to go into battle. Why? So, nobody would know he was the king just in case this really wasn't such a good idea! He had doubts in his own mind through all

this. But he wouldn't listen to them. And sometimes the Holy Spirit will be saying in our own hearts, "NO, don't do this!" and yet we push His voice aside and do it anyway. So, the bottom line is:

c. he would not change his plan He had too much at risk now. He'd look too foolish or look too scared if he turned back and he couldn't stand the thought of that. So, he pressed stubbornly on in something he hadn't asked about, something he'd been warned about, and something he had doubts about and the result is that we read of:

III. Josiah's Untimely End (35:23-26) Josiah, the godliest King since David, died in that battle. You see:

1. he brought God's discipline on himself He had become so stubborn that God couldn't use him anymore and took him home. Moreover:

2. he brought great sorrow on others The whole land wept and mourned. They loved him. Their mourning and weeping was remembered for centuries Compare Zech. 12:11, *On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo*. Zechariah used the weeping over Josiah's death to describe the way Israel will mourn at Christ's return. But the worst thing is that:

3. he brought Judah to her end Egypt then took control of Judah and the next four kings proved to be worthless. Ultimately, Judah fell back into idolatry and sin and was carried away to Babylon. Just think if Josiah had listened and stayed on the throne. The whole story of the nation might have been different.

See that's how it is when you get stubborn. You don't win. God has to discipline you, you make all those who love you and want the best for you sad, and in the end, you hurt other people by the effects of what you've done. What is it in your life that you may be stubborn about? What is it that you've set your heart on without asking God and others warn you about it and it's not working out too well and you even have doubts about it, but you're continuing in it anyway? It may be as simple a thing as a bad habit you keep on with or as complex as the job you're in or the career you've chosen. It may be as practical as the way you handle your finances or as ethereal as the dream that you've set your heart on fulfilling. Webster says *stubborn* means *continued in a willful, persistent or unreasonable manner*. What might there be in your life that you're being willful about, where you want what you want and that's it? I'll tell you one thing; it doesn't pay. *Between two farms near Valleyview, Alberta, you can find two parallel fences, only two feet apart, running for a half mile. Why are there two fences when one would do? Two farmers, Paul and Oscar, had a disagreement that erupted into a feud. Paul wanted to build a fence between their land and split the cost, but Oscar was unwilling to contribute. Since he wanted to keep cattle on his land, Paul went ahead and built the fence anyway. After the fence was completed, Oscar said to Paul, "I see we have a fence." "What do you mean 'we'?" Paul replied. "I got the property line surveyed and built the fence two feet into my land. That means some of my land is outside the fence. And if any of your cows sets foot on my land, I'll shoot it." Oscar knew Paul wasn't joking, so when he eventually decided to use the land adjoining Paul's for pasture, he was forced to build another fence, two feet away. Oscar and Paul are both gone now, but their double fence stands as a monument to the high price we pay for stubbornness. We'd all be a lot happier if we weren't so stubborn, if we'd only learn to ask God and then listen to God instead of stubbornly persisting on our own!*

NEHEMIAH

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Nehemiah - Building The Church Ch. 1 - Personal Involvement

Simply put, Nehemiah is a book about building; it is the story of how the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt after being destroyed by the Babylonians at the time of Israel's captivity. One might be tempted to wonder what application we might make to ourselves from the setting up of bricks and stones in an ancient city. Well, in that day there was a word from God through the prophet Daniel as he lived in Babylon during the captivity, Dan. 9:25-26. The city would be rebuilt in troubled times and thereafter Messiah would come. Nehemiah is the story of how God built the city He said He would build. In our day we have another word from God, *I will build My church*. That is what God is doing in this age. Paul spelled out the process in 1 Cor. 3:9-15. God's plan of building the universal church is realized in the building of local churches; the local church including this one, is God's building and we are workers; our lives are to be given to the process of building the church. But note that it is important how we build!! So how are we to learn the principles of building rightly? Fortunately God has laid many of them down in the story of the building of a wall around an ancient city some 2400 years ago!

I. The Circumstances of the Story (1-3) The year is 444 B.C. It is winter (our Nov. or Dec.) The Persian King Artaxerxes and his retinue including a Jew named Nehemiah are in the winter palace at Susa when a delegation led by Nehemiah's own brother Hanani arrives from Jerusalem and brings him a report of its state.

1. the circumstances of Jerusalem Nearly a hundred years earlier the first group of 50,000 exiled Jews was allowed to return led by Zerubbabel and they, in spite of great opposition, managed at last to build the Temple (515 BC). However their spiritual lives declined and they intermarried and fell into spiritual lethargy. So in 458 BC a priest named Ezra led a second group back and began a great revival. Many Israelites turned to the Lord and sought His will for their lives. However now, 14 years later, the city still lies mostly in ruins. The wall and gates are still down so it has no protection against enemies. The splendor of Jerusalem of old is gone.

2. the circumstances of Nehemiah He was born there in Persia and lived his life there. He was a Jew but had never seen the homeland of the Jews or its Temple. He did however love the Lord God of Israel, as the whole of this book

clearly shows. Somehow as in Joseph and in Daniel before him, his positive qualities were recognized by the king of the land and he entered the imperial service. Verse 11 says he was cupbearer. At first that sounds menial but in reality it is not so. The cupbearer was the wine-taster. His duty was to taste the king's wine so that any attempt to poison the king would fall on him. You might say he was sort of an SS agent! He laid his life on the line for the king every day and so was one whom the king obviously had come to trust completely!

II. The Concern of Nehemiah (4) When the report came, Nehemiah didn't say, "Oh well, I love God and am doing well for myself here; Jerusalem is no concern of mine." Rather he cared and the reason is:

1. there was discernment Nehemiah understood what the report meant. Jerusalem's condition was a disgrace and reproach to the name of God because the nations round about see their own splendor and attribute it to their gods but when they look at the disheveled state of Jerusalem, which claims to worship the only true God, they cannot believe it! He understood that the condition of Jerusalem reflected on God. Folks, do you understand that the condition of a local church reflects on God in the eyes of the world? I could apply this to the church at large but I'd rather apply it right here: we are much like Jerusalem. Both our congregations have had troubled times; we remember the days when we were much more of a vibrant, growing force for God in our community than we are now, when our buildings were full and people were coming to Christ. Oh, there is real spiritual life here, just like there was at Jerusalem, lovely Godly people who love Him and want to do His will, but we are few; we are not growing basically, we are not winning people to Christ from our community nor affecting this community in a serious way. Do you understand that? Can you see it? Can you see that it reflects on our message that we have found the one true way of salvation by faith in Christ!?

2. there was depth Nehemiah cared. He mourned and sorrowed in his heart. He lost interest in food and fasted and prayed to God over this, not just once but for many days. In fact it was 4 months (It ended according to 2:1 in the month of Nisan which is our March-April) and verse 6 says it was day and night! Nehemiah cared; he had a depth of concern that was more than just words! Do you? Is God really building His church here in a significant way and do you care about it? If this or any other church is to be built there must first be concern, deep concern not for self but for the work of God and the name of God! Most of us worry about whether there will be enough programs to keep our kids interested or enough people like us so we can enjoy company or whether we enjoy what we do as we sing in a choir or attend a service. These are OK but what about the work of God? What about what He wants to do here in this community! Do we really care? We must!

III. The Confession of Nehemiah (5-10) Now here is the prayer of Nehemiah on one occasion, but I'm sure it is similar to what he prayed all through those months. It is a confession but it is a two-fold confession. First:

1. confession of sin (5-7) The reason Jerusalem lay in ruins in first place was sin. God had built her glorious but her rebellion had brought her destruction. Now Nehemiah had never been a part of that but see that his confession is first:

a. it was corporate He confesses the sins of his nation; he identifies himself and his family as part of the body that had sinned. The point is not that he's trying to somehow confess sins for others, but simply that he's agreeing with God, acknowledging that the state of Jerusalem is not God's fault but his people's, that they got themselves into it by specific sins. And in our histories we have had splits, factions, selfishness and pride that led to various events that brought us to where we are today. If we're going to build the church, we must first humble ourselves enough to admit to God that it is our fault that things are the way they are, not His!

b. it was personal One might say, "But I wasn't even here in those times or part of those things". Neither was Nehemiah, but he included himself too. Why? Not only because he is part of the nation, but I think because he has suddenly seen his own lack of concern, his apathy. He has been so concerned about his own life in the comfortable palace that he had put the city of God out of mind pretty much until now. I wasn't here either but I confess that it's real easy for me just to worry about my family and do my job week after week and forget to really care whether the church is built or not! How about you? But here also is his:

2. confession of faith (8-10) Nehemiah did not give up in despair. He was not a quitter; he didn't feel that it was too late and God couldn't do anything. He told God that he had faith:

a. in God's Word He remembered Deut. 30:1-5 and believed it and was bold enough to tell God so.

b. in God's purpose He believed these folks at Jerusalem were God's redeemed people, His servants, and that God's plan and purpose for them had not changed because God doesn't change!

So he begged God to do what He had promised! If we believe that the promise of the Word is true that God is going to build His church and nothing will stand against its onslaught, not even Glenside, Ardsley, North Hills, or Philadelphia, not staunch ceremonial Catholicism or liberal Protestantism, then we need to confess it and beg God to build His church! God has not changed; He wants us to be a lighthouse in our community and win people to Christ just like the first century church and just like we ourselves did years ago! Let's beg Him to do it! But there is one thing more:

IV. The Commitment of Nehemiah (11-12) Nehemiah understood something: *if this thing is to be done, it must begin with me*. And he made a decision: *I am going to ask the king to let me go there*. Not all of us are Nehemiahs, not all of us

have the capacity to be leaders of men as he was. But we can all have the commitment of Nehemiah, "Lord, I want to do something about it; show me what". It was the same as commitment of Isaiah, "Here am I Lord, send me". If this church or any other is to be built there must be caring, someone has to care. There must be confession. There must be spiritual revival in hearts where we cry out to God in utter dependence on Him and not in our own efforts. There must be commitment; somebody has to say "Lord use me". Will you be that somebody? *Dwight L. Moody heard a sermon in his early days which changed his life as a believer. The preacher made the statement, "The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him!" He thought to himself "he did not say a great man or a learned man or a rich man or an eloquent man or a clever man; simply a man...By God's grace I'll be that man!"* You know how many thousands of people he won to Christ in great crusades later in life. God needs a man or woman, boy or a girl, to build His church. Will you be that person?

Nehemiah - Building The Church

Ch. 2 - Preparation

Once you realize that your real purpose and work on this earth is to play a part in God's program of building His church and you have surrendered and said, "Here am I, Lord use me" (Step One: Personal Involvement), then there must be preparation. Look at three New Testament passages with me: 2 Tim. 2:20-21 (preparation involves cleansing - Neh. 1), 2 Tim. 3:16 (preparation involves the Word - Neh. 1), Eph. 4:11-13 (preparation involves training by others). My point is that God wants every believer to be prepared, equipped and ready to play his part in building the church and, to bring it home, you cannot build the universal church without building the local church. God wants you equipped and ready to play a role in building this portion of Christ's body right here! How can we be prepared? Look at Nehemiah. In chapter 1 he made the decision that God wanted him to go build the walls of Jerusalem; in chapter 2 he prepared for that task. Now note his preparation is in two stages:

I. Preparation for the Opportunity (1-8) Once you know God wants you to build the church, the next question is how, in what way? Given your talents and circumstances, what is your opportunity to build? Well you can mark it down that if you tell God you want to serve, to have a ministry that builds the church, God will give you one! He will send an opportunity for you to do it and you have to be ready for that opportunity. Four things will help:

1. prayer (1:6) Remember Nehemiah prayed night and day about the building of the walls from moment he heard about the need. Even when his opportunity to talk to the king about it came, he breathed a quick prayer (2:4). Preparation begins with prayer; you can't just go out on your own and serve God. You need to be asking God for His guidance in how to serve, in recognizing what you can and can't do, in finding the specific thing you are supposed to be doing. Now this also means:

2. patience (2) Nehemiah was convinced early about what God wanted him to do but had a major obstacle. He was King Artaxerxes' trusted servant; he had to get the king to let him go. Remember how long Nehemiah prayed and waited? It was four months until the opportunity came to speak to the king. It was March 5, 444 BC when on that day the king noticed Nehemiah was sad and asked why and Nehemiah got to tell him. You just didn't rush in and speak to the king (not even Esther could do that to her Persian King husband who was Artaxerxes' father!); you waited until he wanted to know! You need to be patient, to wait until God has the right opportunity for you to serve come along. Believe me, if you're looking to Him for it, it won't take too long!

3. propriety (5) When the opportunity finally came, he didn't demand to go in the name of God; he didn't grovel and plead for it and annoy the king. He spoke with respect, spoke humbly and spoke inoffensively. Now there's something I left out of story for you: compare Ezra 4:7,16,21. Early in his reign, this same king Artaxerxes had issued a decree to stop the building of Jerusalem. That's why it took four months of prayer and waiting for just the right opportunity; God had to change his mind! And He did it through Nehemiah's testimony of humility and faithfulness and respect before him! But note how careful Nehemiah is not even to mention the name of Jerusalem and to express his desire in terms that even a Persian king could be sympathetic with, the desire to see that the tombs of his ancestors would be honored and preserved. All I'm saying is that he speaks humbly and chooses words wisely; he acts in proper manner for a believing Jew. We need to be careful in our zeal to find an opportunity to serve God not to offend folks and act proud and rudely make folks aware of all our great qualifications, but rather to be humble and respectful as we approach opportunity. Now the last part of preparation is actual:

4. preparedness It means two things:

a. readiness to seize the opportunity (2) When it came, Nehemiah took it. If you want to serve God, you can't hem and haw and muddle around when opportunity comes; you have to be ready to grab it. Take the first opportunity that God leads you to and let Him lead you to further ones. Don't sit around waiting for someone to ask you to be in charge of something. In God's service as anywhere, you never start at the destination but at the starting point and God leads you to fuller opportunity.

b. research to utilize the opportunity (6-8) Nehemiah hadn't just sat around praying; he'd done his homework. He had thought of the need of safe conduct in travel, of wood for building, and even found the name of king's forester! Once God shows you the sort of ministry you should have, equip yourself to do it; get training, practice your skills and get knowledgeable. Then as you pray and are patient God will lead you to the right opportunity to use that training and you are ready to grab it! The neat thing is that you will feel called of God to do what you're doing!

II. Preparation for the Activity (9-20) Once Nehemiah had the opportunity to go to Jerusalem and lead in building the walls, he then had a second stage of preparation. Had to prepare himself for the specific activity God had called him to do and since he couldn't do the job alone, he had to somehow prepare the people of Jerusalem to do the job with him. You see, we each have our specific ministry that builds the church but the job of building the church takes all of us doing it together! So then how do we prepare as a whole to build the church?

1. it involves investigation (11-16) Nehemiah made a trip by night with a few trusted men and examined the whole southern portion of the city wall, before he ever told everyone what he was there for. He investigated carefully. Why?

a. gathering information - what must be done? If he was going to build walls, he had to know the state they were in, how big the job was. Folks, we must not only look to God for our individual ministry but for what it will take to build this church. We must look at what we're doing carefully and see: are we ministering to the community in effective ways? Is Sunday School the way it is an effective tool? What must really be done to reach people in our community for Christ, to bring them in and nurture them and train them to minister to others? Part of our problem is that we've never bothered to seriously investigate; it's easier to carry on business as usual, to do things we've always done and are comfortable with.

b. counting the cost - what will it require? Nehemiah also had to find out what it would take to do the job in terms of materials and manpower; He had to count the cost. Look what Jesus said in Lk. 14:28-30. Discipleship has a cost and building the church has a cost, a cost in time and effort, a monetary cost, an emotional cost in letting go of things held dear whether that thing may be a name, an object like a building, or a tradition. There is a decision to be made: are we willing to pay the price, to do whatever it takes to build the church?! That's investigation.

2. it involves co-motivation (17-18) There is no word that means what I want so I invented my own!

a. it must become the desire of the whole group It can't be one person's decision; somehow the whole community together must rise up and build. Maybe some of you sat through last week's message and you've sat through this one and it rolled off you like water off a duck's back; you think it's for someone else. It's for you, yes you! It takes every one of us. Now how will we come to that understanding?

b. it must begin with the leader(s) Nehemiah told how God had moved him and led him to the task and how God had paved the way by opening the king's heart. Then they said, "Let's do it!". The leaders of the church must catch the vision first if the church is to be built. The function of a local church elder or deacon is not to see how to satisfy people and carry on business as usual but to be in the forefront of finding out how to build the church and then encouraging and leading all the people in doing it! Leaders, have you thought of this? Are you committed to building this church? I believe you are; the leaders of our two churches include some of the godliest men I know! So let's investigate and get to it and find ways to equip and energize our people to get moving! The task begins with us!

3. it involves determination (19-20) Back in verse 10 we met Tobiah and Sanballat and will again later. There will always be someone like them to stand up and try to discourage us but Nehemiah was determined and so were the people. They had:

a. a holy trust in God's leading God led us to to build and He will give us success. If we determine together to build this church we have to do it because we know God wants it and trust Him to make it happen, but we also need:

b. a wise anticipation of opposition Nehemiah had thought about them already and checked out their situation. Note the language, *you have no historic right here nor claim*. He knew they had no validity to their opposition and had the facts and told them so. Be sure that if you set out to build the church, opposition will come but we need to be wise as serpents while we're being harmless as doves! We must anticipate problems and head off as many as we can and then trust God for our success!

Two questions:

1. Do you have a ministry, a specific way you are serving God and building His church? If not I challenge you to prepare yourself, ask Him for an opportunity and grab it!

2. Will you covenant together like Nehemiah and the people did and say "Let us rise up and build"? Are we as one people willing to pay the price and say God put us here in this community to build His church and that's what we're here for and we're gonna do it no matter what?

Nehemiah - Building The Church

Ch. 3 - Process

Read verses 1-5 as a sample. Frank Boreham wrote "God is a great believer in putting things down!" He records names and details we would omit and overlook. We could skip this chapter (and many like it in Scripture!) but we would miss a great blessing. Here's an original quote to go with the first, "God never puts things down without a reason!" Now lest we miss the lesson while enjoying the details, compare Eph. 4:12-16, especially verse 16. *The body (the church) grows as each part does its work.* That is the lesson spelled out and graphically illustrated for us in Nehemiah 3. Here's how they built the walls and how we can build God's church. But if we're going to build, perhaps we'd better get an idea first of:

I. The Product of the Building Process What is it we're building? This chapter gives a circular tour of the city wall of Jerusalem, beginning in the northeast corner and ending back there. Progress along the way is marked by 10 openings in the wall, gates or passageways where people go in and out. Some of them still stood but most had to be rebuilt. Taken together, their meanings form a picture of a full, balanced Christian life but more importantly for us, they form a picture of a full, balanced, mature church, a picture of what God would have us to build!

1. the Sheep Gate (1) = our foundation We begin here and fittingly so. It faced northeast to the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives. It is through this gate that the sheep were brought by the hundreds to be sacrificed at the Temple. It is through this gate that Jesus went out to Gethsemane and through this gate that the Lamb of God was brought back into the city for the last time to go to His altar of sacrifice on the cross. The church is built on the foundation of the Lord Jesus and his death on the cross and Paul said no man can lay any other foundation! We must first build a Gospel preaching church, one composed of people with personal faith in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. We cannot allow ourselves to get sidetracked like so many churches have across the land into modernism, positive thinking, or simple social improvement! Without a sheep gate, Jerusalem would not be the city of God and without this foundation we would not be a true church.

2. the Fish Gate (3) = our witness On the northwest corner is the Fish Gate where merchants from Tyre and Sidon brought their catches from Mediterranean and those of Galilee brought theirs from the famous lake by that name. Jesus likened fishing to soul-winning on several occasions and told the leaders of the church-to-be that their business would be to "catch men". A mature church is a witnessing church; it has a plan and program of fishing, winning people to Christ both at home and abroad.

3. the Old Gate (6) = our heritage The *Jeshanah* or Old Gate was on the northern part of the long western wall. Perhaps it had been one of the first gates on the original city. At any rate, its name seems to link it with the past, the new wall and city being built with the Jerusalem of old, the one where God's glory had been displayed in Solomon's Temple. They could not forget their heritage. A mature church cannot either; it builds with an awareness of the past, that it is built on the *foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus himself as the Chief Cornerstone*. We may have new methods but what we are doing is as old as Pentecost and our overall task is the same. Many have given their lives in building the church and we follow in their steps!

4. the Valley Gate (13) = our deliverance This gate in the western wall opened out into a valley, the Valley of Hinnom. It was a place where refuse from city was burned, an unclean place. The Hebrew word is *gehenna* which became the symbolic origin of the New Testament word which we translate as the *lake of fire*! This gate reminds us of what we have been delivered from, the very fires of hell! A mature church has a true understanding of the everlasting punishment of the lost and is moved to recognize as it watches the world rush on into the valley that "there but for the grace of God go I" and it reaches out and snatches some as it were from the flames!

5. the Dung Gate (14) = our cleansing At the southern end of same wall right in the valley is the Dung gate through which Jerusalem's trash was taken out for burning and burial. Constant use of this gate kept the city clean and pure and so a mature church must be a pure church with a holy hatred of sin, which will not allow sin in itself but will confront it and remove it and discipline its own members to do so if it must!

6. the Fountain Gate (15) = our power This gate on the southern end of the east wall is near Jerusalem's one natural spring and the Pool of Siloam where its water was stored. On at least one occasion Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit in those terms as a fountain of living water welling up from within the believer. The Holy Spirit is our source of power for the work just as thirsty workers drank from the spring to continue building. A mature church is in tune with and taps the power of the Holy Spirit which means it is a praying church! Nothing of eternal importance is ever accomplished apart from prayer! We must be a praying people who depend on God's power, not our own strength!

7. the Water Gate (26) = our instruction The *Nethinim* or temple servants (the old Gibeonites) lived in this section to draw water for cleansing and gather wood and carry it up the mountain to the Temple area. Jesus speaks of his disciples being cleansed through the Word. Paul in Ephesians says Christ is washing His Bride through the washing of

water through the Word. A mature church is one where there is a solid ministry of instruction in the word of God, where the Word is taught in depth and fullness, where there is meat to be had!

8. the Horse Gate (28) = our warfare Here on the east wall the King's horses were brought in and out from the palace area in olden days. Horses were used to pull chariots and they remind us of warfare and the battles Jerusalem fought in the name of Lord. So a mature church is one that is able to put on the whole armor of God and stand against the wiles of the devil. It understands Satan and his methods and power and practices spiritual warfare; it understands that its ministry is on a spiritual plane as it reaches out, that it is the army of the Lord taking the enemy's camp!

9. the East Gate (29) = our blessed hope This gate was directly east of the Temple area and the way its entrance was situated. East was always the direction of God's coming. Zechariah said Christ would touch down on the mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem on the East; Messiah will come to Jerusalem from the east. So she was reminded of her glorious future hope. And a mature church has its eyes on the future, on heaven, on the glorious Return of the Bridegroom to sweep up his chosen Bride unto Himself. She has an understanding of future things and it moves her to action now! She is looking for His coming!

10. the Inspection Gate (31) = our reward On the northern corner of the east wall was the *Miphkad* or inspection gate. It seems to have been the appointed place where the troops were mustered for review and inspection just as we all shall appear at the appointed place in heaven, the judgment seat of Christ to receive our rewards or lack of them for the service we have done in building. A mature church has its eye, not on earthly greatness, but on pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ!

II. The Principles of the Building Process Here's how they built the wall and here's how we can build the kind of mature, balanced church God wants us to build. It's quite simple actually:

1. everyone was involved in the work With the sad exception of some snooty nobles in verse 5 who refused to get involved, the whole community worked, men and women, rulers and tradesmen, everybody. People even came in from outlying areas such as Jericho (2), Tekoa (5), Gibeon and Mizpah (7); they came from up to 15 miles! Building this church will take every one of us. You must be involved!

2. everyone worked in a specific area Each had a specific portion to build, a particular job to do, not completely alone however, but in teams, some 42 of them. So in the church there must be a delegation of areas of ministry; no one person or one small group of persons can do it all. But all did the smaller job they were assigned and by it built the wall.

3. everyone worked at what was nearest him Priests worked in Temple area (1), people by their own houses (23, 28-30). People from outlying towns worked in areas where there were no houses on the wall. They built in the way that was obviously nearest and dearest to their hearts, in the place about which they knew the most. You don't have to do what someone else does; do the thing God brings to your hand, the thing you are gifted for and have opportunity to do. We can't all do the same thing. But note:

4. everyone worked at building the same wall Some were priests (1) and Levites, some were goldsmiths and perfumemakers (8), some rulers (9). Yet all were doing the same thing, building the wall. I think there's a suggestion here: we all have individual gifts and ministries but we're all doing the same overall task of building the church. Don't assume that because you tend kids in nursery or do something else that may seem insignificant that you are not building!

5. everyone had to coordinate their work 31 times the phrase *next to* is used. Imagine if 42 teams each built without lining up with one another! Each was in close contact with his neighboring builders and matched their progress. We can't get single-sighted and think our particular ministry is the only one or the most important. We must coordinate ours with others in church. Sometimes it means slowing up a bit for others to catch up; sometimes it means pushing to match the pace of others, but we're in it together! We're next to others!

6. everyone worked! This seems obvious but the word *repaired* appears 32 times. They didn't just sit around and talk about it or plan for it or think about getting to it someday; they DID it. They built the wall!!! How about you? Will you rise up and build together with me, work at the ministry God has given you so that together we can build a mature church on the right foundation, balanced, growing, and waiting for the coming of our Lord?

*Rise up O men of God,
Have done with lesser things!
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of Kings!*

Nehemiah - Building The Church

Ch. 4 - Prevention From Without

Back in 2:10 we get the first hint that the process of building Jerusalem's walls will not proceed without opposition. From the moment Nehemiah arrived back in Jerusalem, certain of the area leaders were disturbed that *someone had come to seek the welfare of the Jews*. They wanted the Jews kept inept and struggling and at their mercy; they liked it that way. Perhaps they had designs on ruling Judah. These men are identified for us in 2:19: Sanballat (probably governor of Samaria to the north), Tobiah (leader of the Ammonites across Jordan to the east), and Geshem (leader of the Arabs to the southeast). Satan did not want God's city built and raised up and this unholy trinity of men to try to prevent it. Compare Eph. 6:12-13. Satan does not like the church being built either and will try to prevent it. We are not just in a construction process; we are in a struggle, a wrestling contest, a war. Verse 13 does not say "if" an evil day comes, but "when". Expect it, anticipate it, be ready for it. Paul goes on to outline the armor we have in our personal lives to prepare for Satan's attacks; Nehemiah 4 outlines for us some of the armor that the Church has to prepare for Satan's attempts to stop it from being built.

I. Satan's Four Attacks There are four things Satan tries to use to stop us from building:

1. feelings (1-3) Sanballat and Tobiah began to mock and ridicule the Jews. They said, "The job is too big; they can't do it. The wall is too much destroyed; they'll never get it all done and even if they do, it'll be so flimsy that a little fox's weight could knock it over!" It's the same thing they said in 2:19 directly to Nehemiah. Now what is the purpose of mocking and insult? The old ditty says "...Words can never hurt me". Don't bet on it! Words affect the feelings and this is first place Satan will attack. He'll try to discourage you and make you feel bad about the way you're serving the Lord, like you're not doing a good job, or like your task is impossible. He'll do it by raising up somebody to make some sharp cutting comments! Be ready and expect it! If that fails he will try:

2. force (7-8) Here is a plan to mount a small army against Jerusalem Note how serious this is: they would come from the north, south, east and from Ashdod to the west. All the surrounding areas sent men from all directions. Satan will raise up outside forces to stop church from building. It may be a lawsuit, a community ordinance, a zoning law, anything that he can use to cripple the church. John MacArthur of Grace Community Church was sued because a young person who came to church for counseling later committed suicide. He was acquitted finally in a State Court but think of all the damage and financial drain that caused. Look for it! If you really start to grow a church someone will try to use force of some sort to stop it, sooner or later!

3. fatigue (10) As the workers built, they found the job was tougher than it looked. A century's worth of rubble and dirt had to be moved and made into a viable wall. It was long, hot (the month of August), hard work and people began to give up from fatigue. Satan can make the job so hard you quit! I'm afraid that's what our two churches had sort of done there for a while; we had said, "This community is too tough to reach; we can't get these people saved." and so we really left off trying with the full effort we might have put out! Building the church is tough work. Some nights I come home and wonder why I don't have an eight hour a day job like everybody else and God reminds me that it's just fatigue and that building is tough work!

4. fear (11-12) When the plan for a direct attack became known, the enemies switched gears and started circulating threatening rumors that they would snipe at whoever they found working on the wall. They would slip in and kill some here and there. The object, of course, was to throw fear into workers, to make them afraid to work on the wall. Fear is one of Satan's greatest tools. He'll make you afraid to do this or that for fear of offending someone; he'll make you afraid to reach out in a new way because it might not work or might cost some money, afraid to stand up against some established things for fear of rocking the boat. Fear cripples and Satan knows it. When you begin to get afraid, remember who is sending that!

II. God's Four Answers When Satan attacks and tries to prevent the building of the church there are four things that you must have to combat it!

1. prayer (4-5, 9a) Nehemiah prayed about the ridicule and about the danger! Some of you might have a little trouble with his prayer and without getting theological, let me just make a simple point: you can pray for your enemies to be saved at the same time you pray for their efforts to be defeated! God can do both! You must learn to pray; you are God's servant, appointed to God's special job for you, and if there is a problem in the work you have to take it to the Boss and leave it there! It's His problem!

2. preparedness It only makes sense to be prepared in advance for opposition if you know it will come sooner or later. Being prepared means two things:

a. alertness (9) They prayed and posted a guard, and notice, day and night. They were watching, alert, ready for the first sign of trouble, for any suspicious unknown lingerers outside the wall. Opposition can take many forms and we must be alert, watching, thinking about the consequences of things that seem unimportant at first glance.

b. action plan It is not enough to be alert, we must also have a way to act; we must be ready to do something about it when it comes:

(1) for the expected (13-14) When the initial threat was a frontal attack they put people with weapons by the lowest spots where the enemy could get through. When Satan raises up a foe to the work, you don't just sit and pray and say, "we'll wait for God to work a miracle and do nothing". You develop a way to defend yourself, you work out with the guidance of the Holy Spirit a way of doing something about it and letting God use that plan.

(2) for the unexpected (16-23) They had a plan for the threats of sudden attack too. Some of the men were posted as armed guards, hod-carriers carried a weapon in other hand, stone masons wore a sword on the belt, a trumpet alarm system was set up, and precautions were taken about going out of city, sleeping with clothes on in readiness, and so on. They were as ready as they could be for the unexpected; every possible problem was foreseen and prepared for and they had a means for handling a problem no matter where it arose. I wish we had time to go into how to put on your personal armor and be always ready for Satan's attack in your life. Suffice it for now to say that being daily immersed in the Scriptures and daily in real touch with God in prayer is a good start! It will give you the Biblical principles you need to handle any situation that may come up!

3. perseverance (6, 15) When the insults came, they prayed and kept working. When the threats came, they posted a guard and kept working. When fatigue came and some complained they kept on working. Building the church is not for quitters. The cultural proverb says, "Quitters never win and winners never quit!" Building the church means you have to be convinced that you are doing what you're doing because God said so and you can't stop because your feelings are hurt or threats come or someone tries to stand in your way. You don't quit until the Master says so!

4. perspective (14, 20) Here's the antidote for fear. Remember who you're working for. Remember what God almighty did in the past; you have the resources of heaven on your side, who can stand against you! Part of our problem and part of reason the church doesn't get built is simply this: we are too busy looking down to look up, too busy looking at the circumstances to look at the God of circumstances, the God who stilled the wind and calmed the sea and He can do it again for you!

Are you discouraged today? Has the enemy got you down so that you feel like giving up, like quitting. It may be that class you teach that seems to just never get off the ground; it may be those young people whom you pour your life into and they disappoint you; it may be that ministry of handing out tracts that doesn't show any fruit or just simply the fact that circumstances have arisen and you can't support the work of God like you had planned. Don't quit! Don't give up! Pray, prepare, get a right perspective, and persevere! *The story is told of an old woman who was known for the wonderful answers to prayer she received. People would ask her to pray for them when they had needs and she would do it gladly. Many marvelous answers came. One day a person came to her to ask for her help and said, "Are you the woman with the great faith?" She replied, "No, I am the woman with a very little faith in a great God!"* That's our perspective; we have a great God so let's trust Him and build!

Nehemiah - Building The Church

Ch. 5 - Prevention From Within

To this point the story of the building of Jerusalem's walls has seemed like a classic, men trusting God and obeying Him in the face of all kinds of opposition, persevering in spite of force, fatigue, and fear to get the walls built. However, chapter 5 brings it back into full focus. No group of believers, Old Testament or New Testament, is without its internal problems and Satan will not only work from outside but also from within to prevent the church from being built. Compare 1 Cor. 3:1-3. Paul takes off from this to talk about building the church and how the fire will try what we have built to see whether it was genuine or not. The point is that internal problems in the church prevent it from being properly built. Now let's look at:

I. The Problems that Arose (1-5) They are not unlike problems that we face; actually there is one big problem that can be seen on three levels:

1. economic necessity Isn't it true that the biggest problems in the church usually have to do with money? It appears that some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were very rich and some very poor and those that were poor were falling into dire straits.

a. its causes Verse 2 tells us there was an expanded population; those who had earlier returned had multiplied and had children and now had to support them. Now the workers had been away from their fields for weeks as the crops arrived at harvest stage. Further, verse 3 tells us there was a famine going on, that is, probably either a crop failure or just a lean year for crops. So it became increasingly difficult to get grain to eat or to have any to sell and verse 4 tells us that the king had levied a property tax which made things even worse. You know how all that feels, don't you, and you know where it leads:

b. its calamities It began with borrowing money to pay taxes and who was there to borrow from but rich brethren. With borrowing comes interest, verse 11. It doesn't sound like much but it's 1% and if that is monthly it's 12%. Next

comes mortgaging in verse 3 and without increase in income comes the inevitable foreclosure and loss of property in verse 11. The fact is it got so bad that people were having to sell their own children as bond-servants in order to exist; there was debt-slavery!

2. brotherly adversity The sad part about it is this:

a. it happened among brethren (5) Among the sufferers were wealthy men with the capability to help but instead of helping, they were the ones charging interest, foreclosing, and enslaving their own brothers! They were of one flesh and blood nationally, were of one heart spiritually in worshipping God, yet in their economic lives were devouring one another and acting like enemies toward their own brethren. Now in this case the issue was money but it could be anything that drives brethren apart. Satan wants to create division among the laborers so the job doesn't get done. Remember from chapter 3 that the wall gets built as each one does his work so if Satan can divide the workers the wall stays down and if Satan can divide churches internally and put brethren at each others' throats, they'll never get built! It's the oldest trick in the book, divide and conquer! Both of our churches have serious splits in their histories. The sad part is that while brethren get involved in multiplying differences they don't see what's really happening; Satan is attacking the church!

b. it happened while building the wall Think about this. Every day they worked side by side on the wall but came home at night and took advantage of their brethren! So Christians can sit side by side in pews, serve side by side on boards and in the work of church and yet be divided and full of bitterness and dislike in their personal lives and backbite and hurt others. And if that's not enough:

c. their leaders were the worst offenders (7) It was the nobles and officials, the very ones who should be caring for and helping the people and providing a good example for them. Not even preachers are immune from this kind of stuff, not elders or deacons. It's not only new young Christians but people who've been working on God's building for years. Now look from God's view:

3. spiritual travesty

a. disobedience to the Word (9) Walking in fear of God is obedience. They were disobedient. Compare Lev. 25:35-37,42. They were directly defying the Word of God but it didn't seem to matter and it doesn't seem to matter in a lot of church situations I've known about either!

b. disgrace to the Lord Think of the testimony this was to their enemies, how they who were standing in the name of God and building the walls were acting worse than Gentiles would to their own kind! I wonder what the community thinks when they hear about church splits and problems and, believe me, they hear! Too many people are quick to spread their dirt to unsaved neighbors! Well it almost looks like Satan is going to win, like the walls will not get built, but Nehemiah did not give up even in these problems but applied:

II. The Principles that Solved Them There are four principles in what Nehemiah did which if we would apply them would keep Satan from tearing us apart internally.

1. confrontation (6-9) Nehemiah didn't hide the problem or wait and hope it would go away. He confronted the men involved in sin. Note:

a. it was done directly He went to them first, right to their faces, and told them straight out that what they were doing was not right, that it was unbiblical and a disgrace to God. Then, because so many were involved, he called a public meeting about it.

b. it was done carefully Nehemiah was hot at first but he took time to think and reason out what he would do and say; he didn't just go attack the men in anger but was careful and controlled! Folks, when there is open sin within the church it has to be confronted or the church will never get built. It must be done directly and carefully but it must be done! Next comes:

2. restoration (11-12) They had to give back what they had taken, to make it right. The situation could not simply be discontinued; there had to be a returning of things, a making of restitution, a patching up of the situation. Those who took now had to give! So when there are rifts in the church they must be set right, relationships must be restored and whatever it takes must be done to accomplish it.

3. continuation (12-13) They promised never to do it again; the solution was not temporary but permanent. They pledged themselves under oath never to take advantage of their brethren again. We make the same kind of promises in our church covenant and every time we read it we reaffirm them: to care for one another, to have Christian sympathy, to aid in distress, to pray, to behave in a godly fashion, to never backbite and to immediately seek forgiveness and restoration!

4. demonstration (10) In the process of dealing with them Nehemiah says, "I know how hard things have been but I've been lending and giving to the people but not for my advantage, but rather to help them." Verses 14-19 are Nehemiah's note on his behavior during this whole period. See how he demonstrated to the people the kind of behavior they should have. He didn't tell them one thing and do another. He modeled godly behavior before all and so the leaders of the church should model godly behavior for others to follow in the building process. Now what did he model?

a. Nehemiah demonstrated spirituality (16) The normal Persian ruler in this situation would have used his position to advantage and acquired great wealth and landholdings. Nehemiah didn't do that; rather he gave himself to the work of the wall completely! He demonstrated the principle of Mt. 6:33; he put the Kingdom first. The work of God counted first in his life above personal gain and profit and feelings.

b. Nehemiah demonstrated sacrificial love (18) Even the things that he had a right to ask for as governor, he didn't, because he looked at the people and saw them struggling to make it and realized how heavy their load was. He had love for them and instead of receiving from them, he gave to them. Oh, if we're going to keep from having problems we need leaders who flesh out what it means to put Christ first and who love others with great compassion. We need some Nehemiahs who can demonstrate the life of a builder to the rest and who can confront when necessary to see that the wall gets built!

Friends, as Paul tells us, we are not ignorant of Satan's devices; we know this ruse that if he can get us to fight and squabble with each other, the work will slow down. Let's be smarter than that! Let's act in a Christlike fashion and unite together to oppose him and thus the church will be built!

Nehemiah - Building The Church

Ch. 6 - Perseverance

Chapters 4-6 of Nehemiah have been telling us of Satan's attempts to stop Nehemiah and the Jews from building Jerusalem's wall. Chapter 4 told us of the external attack by enemies. Chapter 5 told us of the internal attack by division. Now 6:1 tells us that the wall was all the way up; the only thing left was the setting of the doors in the gates. Satan has almost lost but chapter 6 tells us of another line of attack and the last one. Satan now attacks the leader of the group, Nehemiah, personally because if he can get to Nehemiah in some way, he might be able to stop the wall from getting built all the way. Here are the last plays Satan called in the game; they have one object and it is, "kill the quarterback and the team will fall apart." But the way the plays were run was very deceptive. Satan did not use frontal assault, "roaring lion" tactics. Compare 2 Cor. 11:13-14. Some men had come to Corinth claiming to be apostles superior to Paul and seeking to discredit him in the eyes of the church. This letter is his defense to the church. In the course of it Paul shares what was really happening: Satan was using "angel of light tactics", having his workers masquerade as servants of Christ to discredit Paul and lead the church astray! Now if you want to see those "angel of light" tactics spelled out, look at Nehemiah because:

I. Nehemiah Faced the Worst Note that this is a sermon directed at leaders, at key people involved in building the church, at pastors and elders and Christian workers and teachers but it applies to each of us because Satan uses the very same tactics on all of us:

1. destruction (1-2) Now Ono was about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem, out on the coast close to the border of Samaria. This sounds like an offer of detente, a peace talk. But why so far from Jerusalem? The answer is obvious and when they did not offer to change location after four refusals, their motives become plain. They wanted to get Nehemiah out where they could kill him! This is so obvious as to be almost unbelievable; like throwing a bare hook to a fish without bait to conceal it! Jesus said the thief comes to kill; Satan would like nothing better than to kill you and get you out of his way and disrupt what you are doing for Christ. What did Nehemiah do? He was careful and kept on building. He refused to go and kept on with the work.

2. distraction (3-4) There was a secondary part to their scheme. If they could get Nehemiah away from the work, it would slow down or cease. If they could distract him into the process of trying to make peace, progress would slow. Here's another thing Satan will use on you; he'll try to distract you from ministry, from building the church. He'll get you to focus on your health or on your job or on making money. He can make it easy sometimes to forget what we're really here for. What did Nehemiah do? He kept on building. He realized he was doing "a great work", a work of God and he was careful to keep on with it. So must you be; don't get sidetracked by secondary interests; keep on!

3. intimidation Now when that first scheme failed, Sanballat and Tobiah tried another avenue: fear. Actually they tried it from two angles:

a. the fear of being misunderstood (5-9) He sent an open (that is, unrolled, public) letter saying, "I hear you're going to revolt and if you don't meet with me, I'm going to tell the King". Now Nehemiah had been away from the King's service all spring and summer. He knew Persian kings had been influenced against Jerusalem before, including this one. He could easily have become afraid that false rumors would bring the king's wrath and have yielded to meet with them. Oh, Satan would love to intimidate you, to make you afraid that somebody will

misunderstand what you're doing and you'll get in trouble. He'll make you afraid to have a van ministry because a parent might sue you, afraid to teach because you might say something wrong or misunderstand something and get people upset with you, afraid to work in the nursery because parents might not like how you handle their babies. What did Nehemiah do? He prayed and kept on building. Here's the time for prayer; when you begin to worry and fear, Satan's got you because your eyes are off the work and on you. Prayer gets them back on the mighty power of God! Pray and keep on!

b. the fear of personal harm (10-14, 19) When that failed, they hired an inside man, Shemaiah, a prophet. Evidently there were some more, including a prophetess named Noadiah and others. They hired them to convince Nehemiah that his life was in danger. Remember what Satan told God about Job, *Skin for skin, a man will give all he has for his own life*. Again, if your eyes get on you and your safety, then the work will cease or slow. Imagine if Satan can feed this line to a missionary or some of our national Christian leaders who get threats constantly! What did Nehemiah do? He prayed and kept on building. Again, commit yourself into the Lord's hands, pray against these plots and keep on building!

5. discreditation (13) This last situation had a more subtle tactic connected with it. Shemaiah tried to get Nehemiah to flee into the Temple, that is, into the Holy Place and close its wooden doors behind him. Now Nehemiah was not a priest; he would never be allowed into the Holy Place. Shemaiah himself was shut-in at home, that is, he was unclean in some way and not allowed in the Temple. You see, they wanted to get Nehemiah to desecrate the Temple, to commit a sin against God and use that to discredit him before all the people. Now here's a common tactic! If Satan can get you to sin, to get angry and explode, to commit immorality, to steal, anything, then he can use it to stop the work! How many Christian workers have been felled by this! What did Nehemiah do? He thought carefully and kept on building. Instead of giving in to instant panic, he kept cool and thought out the consequences of the action, realized what was going on, and kept on building! So you need to think, to weigh your actions and words lest you be discredited by sin, but keep on building!

6. erosion (17-19) This is the summary of what went on all through this time. Sanballat had married a Jewess and his son had also married one. So he had interwoven a whole bunch of relationships with Jews in Jerusalem by this and he used them to full advantage, getting them to speak to Nehemiah over and over and say nice things about him and then report all Nehemiah's words back. This is erosion; it's like rain washing a field away a little at a time. He hoped to wear Nehemiah down by this daily grind and stop the work. Satan will do that to you too, try to wear you down by constant problems and hassles and things that come up in the work so you just feel like throwing in the towel and saying, "It'd be easier just to quit". What did Nehemiah do? He bore it and kept on building! So must you. See it for what it is, get a pair of broad shoulders and keep on building! Do you see the point in all of these? Nehemiah persevered! He kept on building! In spite of fear, distraction, temptation, and frustration he kept on and so must you. Building the church of Jesus Christ is not an easy task; Satan will fight you all the way with these things. You must keep on in the ministry God has called you to! And as you can see, the result is:

II. Nehemiah Finished the Wall (15-16)

1. the wall did get completed About Sept. 20 of 444 BC the wall was finished and the gates were hung. Jerusalem was built. And one day, friend, the church will all be built; the gates of hell will not stand against her onslaught and Jesus will have finished His building, His Bride. Then He'll take her to heaven to be with Him. And what you do to build the local church right now is a part of the process. But take note that it will get built:

a. in spite of all the opposition In spite of all Satan could throw at it, the wall got finished and in spite of all Satan will try to do to stop the church, it will get built! And:

b. in less time than anyone expected, 52 days to be exact, from late July to mid-September. Nobody expected such a massive job to be done so fast. Nobody really expects the task of world evangelization to go real fast either but it's going today at a phenomenal rate; there are more Christians today than in all of previous history combined! The walls are going up and soon the job will be complete, sooner than anyone thinks, so get busy before the trumpet sounds! But the ultimate result was:

2. God got the credit Everybody, even their enemies and the Gentiles round about, knew it was not a mere human feat. They knew God was in it and they could not stand against God. In the end God will get the credit for building His church, not us. It is a humanly impossible task but God will accomplish it through us:

So persevere! Keep on! Are you discouraged today, afraid, down? Keep on! Teach that class; do that ministry whatever it may be! Keep on and the church will be built!

Nehemiah - Building The Christian

Ch. 7 - Principles

At chapter 7 the Book of Nehemiah takes a distinct turn in content. Chapters 1-6 have been concerned with the physical rebuilding of the wall, but 7:1 tells us it's all done and the gates are hung. Chapters 7-13 are concerned with the spiritual rebuilding of the people. We find them reading Word of God, find them in prayer, find them committing themselves to God to be obedient to His laws. Chapters 1-6 told us of the service they rendered; 7-13 tell of their submission to God. So we turn in our application of the book from building the Church to building the Christian. What does it take to build a viable Christian life, one that can become useful in service to God? Chapter 7 lays out two basic principles of the Christian life, but before we look at them, let's compare 1 Cor. 12:12-26. The church is a body made up of many individual parts, all useful, all necessary, yet all one body. Those are exactly the truths that come to us out of Nehemiah 7. First see:

I. The Diversity of Responsibility (1-3) Now that the wall is up, it is time for the workers to return to their normal paths of life. So Nehemiah, organizer that he is, divides them up and appoints them to various responsibilities:

1. the examples in the text There are four groups mentioned here, others mentioned later and certainly only a small portion of the people are included in these categories, however let's see what we can learn even from these limited examples.

a. officers gave administration Nehemiah's own brother Hanani was there with him and also a very spiritual, godly man named Hananiah, probably a military leader. He put them in charge of the city; he left the details of its organization and administration to them. Only two did this. Some Christians have this gift too; they're organizers that can plan and run things, make things happen. They are people suited to be in charge. Then:

b. gatekeepers gave protection A walled city with gates can't leave them open and unattended all the time or they're useless. A gatekeeper opened, closed, and guarded the gates and since there were ten of them, that was a big work. Nehemiah gave specific instructions to them; the gates are not to be opened until full morning and must be shut, bolted, and guarded at night! Their service gave protection to the city. So we have some Christians who are great apologists, great defenders of the faith, who are always trying to identify and refute false theology or warn the church against Satan's latest moves. Then:

c. singers gave adoration There were trained singers, professional singers, among them, probably of tribe of Levi, whose function was to serve in the Temple singing Psalms and hymns to God and leading in the worship of God. Musicians and vocalists, you have a ministry that goes back to Old Testament times, a sacred service to render. You sing the praises of God and lead us in the worship of God. That's a special privilege, I hope you treat it that way!

d. Levites gave instruction The original job of the Levites was to care for and transport the tabernacle. But when Temple was built and even before that, their function changed (8:7-8, 11). They became instructors in the Law; they had a teaching ministry to the people. And so some of you have gifts to teach, to explain the Word of God and make it clear to others. These are but a few examples of the services that Old Testament believers gave but look at:

2. the application in the church We can see two things clearly about ourselves:

a. our individuality - not all had the same gift or responsibility. Everyone had his individual function as part of the community of God's people. So, as we've said before, no two of us are the same nor have the same gifts nor the same ministry. A hand is not a foot and might as well not try to be but see also:

b. our necessity - each was needed; their job was important to the community. Without officers it would have soon fallen apart, without gatekeepers it would have been attacked by enemies, without singers it would have fallen out of love with God, without Levites it would have been ignorant of how to obey Him. All were needed. If everyone was an eye, how could you hear? So each of us is necessary to the Body of Christ.

II. The Discovery of Genealogy (4-73) Now the chapter moves on to a second thing, a genealogical record that consumes the whole rest of it. But in order to understand what it's doing there, you have to understand:

1. the problem (4, 73) The city wall was up and the Temple had been up, but there were not many people living in the city and they had not yet built houses. Many of those who built the wall actually lived outside the city; they had been settled in other areas for many years and now returned home. Who wants to have the capital city of the region, the site of God's temple be a city of ruins! So Nehemiah has:

2. the plan (11:1-2) Here's what's going to happen soon, what Nehemiah is thinking about, bringing 1 out of every 10 people in the land to populate the empty city. So in chapter 7 he gets ready for that but there is:

3. the prerequisite: belonging (5) Nehemiah got the genealogical record of those who had returned to the land with Zerubbabel almost 100 years earlier to use as the starting place to see who belonged to Israel. Verses 6-73 are virtually identical to Ezra chapter 2, word for word. They are a quote; he's reading the old document to us. We won't read it all but I do want to help you appreciate it a bit. Genealogy doesn't mean much to us but to a Jew it was very important. It was his assurance that he belonged to Israel, that he was a descendant of Jacob, of Abraham. Now why was that important? Compare Rom. 9:4-5. God and His promises and covenants belonged to Israel and a genealogy was your assurance that you were heir to all those things! How precious a thing it is to know that you belong to God, that there was a time and place when you trusted in Jesus Christ and were born again into God's family! The thing that knit these Jews together was that they were all one family, the family of Israel and thus the family that belonged to God. So we may be diverse, have different gifts and ministries, but we all belong to the same body, the same family, the family of God. Now see here some important truths about belonging to the family of God:

a. God knows who belongs If this book was recorded under the inspiration of God, then God caused the things written here to be written. Verse 5 even says that God put this in Nehemiah's heart. So God knows who belongs to Him. First, He knows EACH one (6-7). He knows them by name, individually, not just en masse. And God knows individually whether we belong to Him or not as well; He knows you personally. Second, He knows EVERY one (8-67) Just skim these verses and note how specific the numbers are. It doesn't say approximately 2000 or 2100 but exactly 2,172! They were counted, every last one; every last person was acknowledged as belonging and you are no exception. There is no falling between the cracks. God knows you individually and knows whether you belong to Him or you don't.

b. God cares who belongs (61-64) Some couldn't produce a record of their genealogy and some priests couldn't. They didn't say, "Oh, that's OK; these things happen. Go ahead and be priests; it doesn't matter." No, they were forbidden until it could be proven that they belonged! Today we are all priests; we have direct access to God through blood of Jesus Christ, but you can't get in there unless you belong! God cares; it matters whether you belong to Him. You can't waltz your way through this life and into the presence of God by presuming that because you're religious or a nice person that you're going to heaven. You have to belong. Then let me show you something else:

c. God knows what you have (68-69) God even wrote down how many donkeys and camels they had. He knew it all and God knows everything about you and what you have and guess what: it belongs to Him! Which brings us to this:

d. God knows what you give (70-72) He wrote down what they did with what they had, how they gave to Him. and they gave sacrificially! God holds us responsible for what we have, to use it for His glory, to further His purposes.

To belong to God's family is to belong to His purpose and to be accountable as a family member! Oh friends, do you belong today? If you belong, if you're saved, then revel in that assurance; know that you are a necessary part of the body of Christ and recognize your responsibility as belonging to it! Bill Gaither's little song says: *"I'm not worthy to be here but thank God I belong! I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God..."*

Nehemiah - Building The Christian

Ch. 8 - The Word of God

Beginning with chapter 8, Nehemiah steps quietly into the background for awhile and another man steps forward, Ezra the priest, scribe, and teacher of the Law. He had returned to Jerusalem 14 years earlier than Nehemiah and the Book that bears his name tells of the continuing ministry of the Word he had among the people. For the months that the wall was in building he had been quietly in the background, not even mentioned. Nehemiah was the leader of the project, the mover and organizer. But when the time for instruction comes, the people call for Ezra and Nehemiah steps quietly into the shadows. What humility these two great men had, recognizing each other's gifts and deferring to each other as God wanted to use each one! We could learn to imitate it! Ezra's ministry was the spiritual building of the people and his primary tool was the Word of God. Let's read 2 Tim. 3:14-17. Among all the things that says, the basic thought is this: the Word of God is the basis for every aspect of the Christian's life and service. So see in Nehemiah 8:

I. The Necessity of the Word of God (1-2) It was the first day of their seventh month, Tishri, the day of the Feast of Trumpets. Having had 5 days of rest and return home, the whole population returned to Jerusalem in a great assembly. Coming with one heart and thought, as one man, they assembled in the square by the Water Gate on the east wall. Now remember back to chapter 3; the Water Gate was where water was drawn and taken up to the Temple area for washing and cleansing and we likened it to the Word of God and compared it to Eph. 5:26 where it says that Christ purifies His church by the washing of water by the Word of God. It is significant that they assembled here! But see:

1. they were called to the place This is obviously a prearranged gathering because they are assembled by daybreak and verse 4 tells us there is already a wooden speaker's platform built there for the occasion. The text reads as though they did it spontaneously because they did it with their hearts. They were called externally, no doubt, by the blowing of

Trumpets to come to hear the Word of God, but just as strongly they were drawn internally to that place. Friend, as a Christian you are called to the Word of God, to hear it, to read it. You have not only the external command of the Scripture itself but the internal urging of the Spirit. God wants you to be in His Word. Now note:

2. they were all called to listen Verse 2 mentions men, women, and children who were old enough to understand, all of them. Men, God wants you in His Word every day; don't leave it for your wives, don't get so caught up in your job that you forget it. Women, God wants you in the Word. I know you have kids and housework and a thousand demands on you but God calls you to the Word. Young people, teenagers, elementary kids, God wants you in His Word. It is not just for grown-ups. From the time you can really read with any understanding, God wants you to have a habit of reading His Word! Do you? Listen, the Word of God is a vital necessity in your life. How are you going to know what God wants of you? How are you going to grow if your Bible is unopened from Sunday to Sunday?

II. The Reading of the Word of God You have a privilege those folks didn't. You have your own personal copy of the Word to read; they didn't and so had to listen to it read by others and memorize what they could. But there are still some lessons for us here in how to read the Word:

1. it was read with worship (5-6) When Ezra first got up and opened the book (the scroll), the people worshipped and praised God and gave their assent to the Word before it was even read! Reading your Bible is not an academic exercise, like a summer reading assignment to read a quota of so many books to satisfy the teacher. It is the Word of Almighty God; when you read it God is speaking to you; those are His words on the page. When you come to read it, come with a thankful heart that Almighty God would speak to you! Come with a willing heart that says, "God, I love you and I believe your words and I am ready to do what they say! Pray before you start out; worship God!

2. it was read with attention (3) How about next Sunday we'll start church at 6 AM and end at noon? Plus, look at verse 7b. We'll take the pews out and you stand all that while! Want to? Would you still be attentive by 10:00? They wanted so much to know the Word of God that they stood all morning in the hot sun and listened with rapt attention! How do you read your Bible, with yawns and mixed with thoughts of golf games and fishing trips? It must be read with attention! Ask God to control your thoughts and concentrate when you read! Further:

3. it was read with understanding (7-8) Evidently Ezra would read a section to the whole crowd and then the Levites would amplify its meaning to various sections of the group; perhaps they would translate a few phrases from Hebrew to Aramaic which was becoming the real language of the people. Perhaps they would explain a concept that was unclear. The point is they did not read just to read, but to understand; they did not skip over difficult things but did what was necessary to understand. You need to read the same way; stop and look up unfamiliar words and cross references; ponder and pray over sections until you really understand what God is saying!

III. The Effect of the Word of God The greatest thing in the chapter is the four-fold effect the Word of God had when it was read:

1. it brought conviction (9) They wept and mourned as they read. Why? It brought conviction of sin. Here are people who had been back in the land for years, worshipping God, and yet there was just so much they had never heard and learned of the Word and it cut them to the quick. If you read your Bible in right attitude one of first things that will happen is conviction. You'll see God's comments on your own life and behavior and it will make you sorry. But that's good! That's how God cleanses you and makes you grow! Thank God for it!

2. it brought celebration (10-12) The leaders urged them to see the positive side, to celebrate with great joy but reason is in verse 12. They were to rejoice, not because of the guilt and conviction it brought, but because they could understand what God wanted of them, what God was saying to them! Oh when you get into a right habit of reading and studying the Word of God it brings great joy to your heart because piece by piece God is unlocking to you the mystery of Himself! Bit by bit you are hearing and understanding Him! It is not the simple joy of academic discovery but the discovery of God's will and purpose in the world and in your life! and this gives you strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength!

3. it brought sharing (10, 12) As they celebrated they shared the joy of their discovery with others who had nothing, who were poor and could not celebrate. They shared in the physical realm but the joy of knowing the Word of God should bring sharing in the spiritual realm too. There are so many who have nothing in this area, so many believers who have no understanding even of the basics of the Word. Each new discovery should not be kept selfishly to yourself but shared with others who need it. That's part of what fellowship is all about!

4. it brought application (13-18) The next day they came back to hear more and ran across Lev. 23 and understood that God had commanded that in the seventh month, just 2 weeks from then, all Israel should celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths for a week. That is, they should go out and get branches and build little lean-tos in the city and live in them to remember how they lived in the desert and God brought them through. For some 900 years Israel had basically neglected this Feast, at least to the full extent of living in lean-tos. But note what happened very simply: when

they read it, they did it! That's how it's supposed to work! When God says do, you say "Yes sir!" and do it. The Word of God is no good unless you apply it to your life! Note how carefully they obeyed it! They even ran across Deut. 31:10-13 which said that every seventh year they were to read the Law publicly during the feast and so they did it every day just like it said and then held a solemn assembly on the eighth day just like it said. If you read the Word of God rightly, it will change your behavior, change your life. When you start to read pray like Saul, "Lord what will you have me to do?"

Is there dust on your Bible my friend? Are you reading it daily? Are you reading it rightly? Is it making a difference in your life? *Henry Goodear, a London merchant, used to scoff at the Bible but one day his niece got him to go to church. She was disappointed because the lesson was from Gen. 5. She couldn't understand why God would allow such an uninteresting list of names to be the lesson for that particular day. Yet Mr. Goodear was quiet and thoughtful on the way home; the words had struck a rhythm and he heard them echoed in his own footsteps "and he died". He heard them in the striking of the clock, saw them as he wrote in his ledger the next day. He got a Bible and read them again, "he lived and he died, and he died.." He was faced squarely with the fact that for all his wealth he too would die and what then? That very night he gave his heart to the Lord.* The Bible is a powerful instrument of the Spirit and every portion can be used of Him! He wants to use it on you; will you let him?

Nehemiah – Building The Christian

Ch. 9 - Prayer

It seems as though these Jews can't get enough. They finish building the wall and go home and five days later they come back to listen to the Word all morning. That was the first day of seventh month. On the second day many are back for more! Then they come to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for eight days from 14th to the 21st of month, hearing the Word read publicly every day. They go home and two days later on the 24th they're back to assemble for more of the same! How's your thirst for God, your thirst for being together with God's people? Now the ninth chapter focuses on prayer rather than the Word and we get a glimpse of how they prayed on that day. Here's God's next tool, the next basic of the Christian life, prayer. Look at Phil. 4:6-7. Prayer is God's secret for facing life. A person with a prayer-filled life will have a peace in facing circumstances that transcends what the human mind can understand. The question is, "What does it mean to have a truly prayer-filled life?" Well, the first thing we see in Nehemiah 9 is:

I. The Parts of their Praying (1-3) And these should be the parts of your prayer life as well. First there was:

1. preparation Before they ever came to God in prayer, they prepared themselves and so should you. Two things in their preparation are worth noting. They came with the:

a. right attitude Wouldn't you look good wearing a burlap bag with dust powdered all over your head?! Those were cultural acts symbolizing humility! When you come to pray, you don't come to demand something of God because you deserve it, because you're such a faithful servant. You come humbly, realizing it is only by grace that you can talk to God. You come in the name of Jesus, realizing it is only His death that brings you this privilege. Micah said (6:8), *What does the Lord require of you...to walk humbly with your God.* When you come to pray check your attitude.

b. right actions They separated themselves from foreigners, that is, they cleansed their actions to be ready. You can't come to God deliberately clinging to some pet sin and expect God to hear you! Prayer demands a clean life! So prepare!

2. conversation Now let me lay down a simple little definition. Reading the Bible is God talking to me. Prayer is me talking to God. When you put the two together, what do you have? A conversation! This is what God wants our devotional life to be.

a. connection with the Word See how this day they read and prayed together. They heard what God had to say to them and then responded to Him in prayer. And notice also the:

b. balance of the two They listened for a quarter of the day (3 hours) and then prayed for the next three. There needs to be a balance in your devotional life between reading and listening to God and talking to God. That's the difference between a conversation and a lecture! And God wants an ongoing fellowship of conversation with you! Now included in that conversation there is:

3. adoration Their particular prayer on this occasion had two parts: confession and worship. We get a taste of how it starts in verses 5b-7. Praise is adoring God for who He is and what He's done! Think how awful your conversational life would be with your spouse if all you ever talked about was what you wanted him or her to do for you! There needs to be some room for, "I love you; You're wonderful; I need you; Here's what I like about you!" So it is with God. Praise time is loving time, time when our hearts overflow through our lips with love toward God. Oh, your praying needs a dose of that every day!

4. confession This day there was also a lot of confession because of what they'd read over the past weeks, confession of sin. There needs to be a place for that in your prayer life too. You know how it is when you have wronged your spouse somehow and how difficult it is to talk to one another until there's an "I'm sorry." Well so it is with God. We must keep a clean account, keep an open channel of communication by confessing our sins.

II. The Pattern of their Prayer (4-37) Here is the prayer they prayed that day. I don't think that the point is so much that we must pray like they prayed contentwise. Rather let's look together at the pattern of what they prayed because it reveals two attitudes that we should have when we come to pray. First they mention:

1. God's favor They declare and proclaim the wonderful things God had done, the blessings He had bestowed on them, the signs of His love. God has proclaimed His caring for us in these same things:

a. in creation (6), in giving us life and a beautiful and orderly world to live in!

b. in covenant (7-8), the promises He gave that are unbreakable. To them it was the land, peace and prosperity. To us it is heaven and eternal life.

c. in deliverance (9-12) God had delivered them with a mighty hand when they were in trouble. How many times has God delivered you?

d. in revelation (13-14) God gave them and us His Word; He made known His will to us for our own good.

e. in provision (15) How wonderfully has God provided all our needs, given us so many blessings. Oh, God has blessed us like He did them; He has poured out His favor on us but next they mention:

2. their failure (16-17a) In spite of all that God had done, their response was two things:

a. disobedience They disobeyed the Word of God which was meant to give them life. Plus:

b. forgetfulness They so quickly and easily forgot all the favor God had bestowed, all the blessings and wonderful things God had done.

Oh aren't we like this sometimes? God bestows all His blessing on us, provides for us, bails us out of trouble, yet we so quickly forget our own spiritual history, forget what God has done, the answers to prayer that have come and we disobey God. Yet look what they mention next in their prayer:

3. God's faithfulness In spite of how they misused God, He remained faithful to them in many ways:

a. in forgiveness (17b-19) He didn't desert them or wipe them out; He forgave them. He doesn't leave or forsake us but forgives us when we fail Him!

b. in renewed favor (20-25) He goes one step better than forgiveness and blesses all over again after the failure! So God blesses even after we fail!

c. in chastisement (26-27) Now at first this sounds like there is a limit where God did finally at last forsake them. But not really. Their deliverance into foreign hands was his chastisement, child-training, discipline. It was for her own good; He was being a faithful Father. So God is faithful to chastise us when we need it too, to bring things into our lives to point us back to Him!

d. in repeated forbearance (28-31) Here's the summary statement, the cycle that occurred again and again. Blessing-->sin-->discipline-->repentance-->blessing. Over and over, time after time yet God did not quit and give up on them and He doesn't quit and give up on us even though the same cycle occurs over and over in our lives.

4. their petition (32-38) Now at last we have their petition; they stop telling Him about the past and start talking about the present. and here's what I want you to see out of this whole thing: when they come to approach God, they come with two things:

a. acknowledgement of God's justice (33) God has always been right and they've been wrong. The state they are in, no matter how bad it is, is better than they deserve. When you come to God you need to acknowledge His justice, that He always does right. There has been time after time in your life where God has been faithful to you and you've failed Him. No matter where you find yourself today, it is better than you deserve!

b. determination to obey (38) They were really praying to God to tell Him they were going to obey Him and they had a signed document to show it (which we'll look at next time). The point is they came to Him determined to do better, to obey no matter how hard and no matter what the cost.

How is it my friend when you come to pray? Do you come to God like the Pharisee in the Temple? "O God, look at all I do for you. Why is this problem in my life? This is not fair God, you have to take it away! After all look at how I've served you!"

Or do you come like the poor publican "God, I don't deserve even one of your blessings; I've failed You again and again and You've been so good to me in spite of it all. Yet again I come to seek Your mercy and grace to help with this problem." The Bible says that God is near to those of a contrite heart. Which way do you come to God? Or do you really come to Him in prayer at all? Do you have a vital living relationship with Him?

Nehemiah - Building The Christian

Ch. 10 - Commitment

The next element that must be present in the building of a Christian after belonging to God's family, the Word, and Prayer is Commitment. Israel recognized this and chose to express their commitment to God in the form of a signed document (9:38) which is what chapter 10 is. They made a binding commitment to God to obey His law and put it in writing. The reason, of course, is not so much for God's sake as their own, so they could see it and be reminded. It might not be a bad idea for each of us to write out our personal commitment to God along with all its specifics sometime! Compare 1 Tim. 4:13-16. Look at the phrases: devote yourself, do not neglect, be diligent, give yourself wholly, watch closely, persevere. That's COMMITMENT! This is what God wants in us; this is what will make our Christian life effective and our ministry worthwhile, total dedication and devotion. Now let's go back to Nehemiah 10 and see first:

I. The People who Committed Themselves (1-29) The first thing we have in the chapter is a list of signers. I'm not going to read but notice:

1. the categories of people See the variety:

a. the leader (1) Nehemiah himself of course, the man in charge of it all.

b. the spiritual leaders (2-8) the priests, the ones who served in the inner sanctuary, who specifically did the work of God.

c. the religious workers (9-13) the Levites, the ones who did the daily work and service, teaching the Word, collecting tithes, etc.

d. the heads of families (14-27) If you look carefully, you'll note that many of these names are the same ones on the list in chapter 7 whose descendants returned nearly 100 years earlier. Three of them are place names which means the heads of these clans signed their name to stand for the whole clan. So see:

2. the point: ALL NEED TO BE COMMITTED! (28-29) They all committed themselves from the leaders to the children. Everyone did it; it was universal. My friend, commitment is not for someone else, someone with more responsibility or more time than you. Pastors need to be committed, spiritual leaders (elders and deacons) need to be committed, religious workers (Sunday School teachers, ushers, treasurers, etc.) need to be committed, family heads need to be committed. Young people, every one of us needs to be committed fully, sold out to obey God. It is not for someone else; it is for you! Now let's see:

II. The Commitment They Made (30-39) The general commitment is in verse 29, to obey the Law of God. You see, the greatest trouble in translating the Bible is not from language to language but from language to life! They recognized it was not enough to hear the Word in chapter 8 nor to talk to God about the Word in chapter 9; they had to apply the Word in their day-to-day lives, and so do you! So they wrote out a commitment to obey God in three specific areas of their lives. Before we look at them, let me say that it's obvious that we do not commit ourselves to do exactly the same things they did. We are not under the Law; we are not Israelites, have no Temple, no command to tithe to the Levites, to take every seventh year off, and so on. So we must carefully apply each one:

1. to obey God in their social lives (30) God had commanded clearly in Deut. 7:1-4 that all Israelites were to remain separate from the surrounding nations and certainly never to intermarry with them. Our mandate is a little different.

2 Cor. 6:14-7:1. We are not to get yoked with unbelievers; we are not to enter into relationships with them that drag us into their impurity. It's obvious this doesn't mean we have no contact with unbelievers or even no relationships. We have to reach them. But commitment to God means we are not to bind ourselves to them in a way that would dishonor Him. So we obey God in our social life:

a. by purity in personal relationships (28) Note that these first applied it personally; they had already separated themselves from foreigners. So we must be careful in our friendships not to be bound in such a way as to get dragged into sin or pulled away from God. If you have a friend that is a bad influence on you and you find that you are drawn to be like him more than he is drawn to be like you, then break it up. It applies at work, in the neighborhood, at school, etc. We must apply it to ourselves first, but also:

b. by purity in family relationships (30) They refused to let their sons and daughters marry foreigners. Oh, how many a parent has been sorry that their son or daughter married an unsaved spouse and it began because they did nothing to stop it before it got started! Time after time I've heard parents capitulate and say, "Well, when they're 16, they do what they want anyway, so what can I do?" The answer is that you start from time they're small and drill it

into their heads, the difference between saved and unsaved people and how to relate to unsaved people in love without becoming yoked up and certainly never to marry one! If you're committed to God, then you must commit yourself to obey Him in your relationships with people!

2. to obey God in their commercial lives (31) Israel had a command to rest on the seventh day, the Sabbath. It was part of their Law and a duty of obedience to God. Now nobody has too hard a time with the principle of resting but where the rub occurred was in their commercial lives. Saturday was an extra day to make money, to get ahead. We don't have that command; Sunday is not the Sabbath but rather, the Lord's day, a day we choose to set aside to worship God. Still, we can see how they obeyed God:

a. by putting obedience before profit The opportunity was there; they could have sold or bought if they wanted. But they committed to put obedience to God before financial profit and that commitment should be ours too, to obey God's principles like honesty, fairness, and not taking advantage of others, rather than disregarding them to get financial gain! About now somebody's thinking, "Well what about working on Sunday? Is it wrong?" The answer is no, as long as you still keep the command to assemble together and don't allow it to hinder your fellowship with God. The minute it does, it's wrong! If you're just doing it for profit and being disobedient in those other areas then you're not committed! Further:

b. by trusting God in their finances They promised to keep the Sabbath year and trust God and cancel debts that year. They committed themselves to trust Him to meet their needs as He said He would if they were obedient. But how could He prove it to them unless they did it? So they committed themselves to trust Him, to obey Him and let the financial chips fall where they may, knowing that He is well able to provide for them. Listen, are you committed to obey God in your commercial life? Are your scales honest and your day's work really a full one? Are you willing to turn down gain that's made in a dishonest way and trust God to meet your needs? Lastly, they committed themselves:

3. to obey God in their spiritual lives (32-39) As you read these verses, all have to do with their relationship to the Temple and laws relating to it. This was their spiritual life and if you look carefully you'll see their obedience promised in three areas:

a. in their giving They would give the Temple tax, the wood for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithe for the Levites. Commitment meant obeying God in their giving and giving as He instructed. So we have New Testament commands to give cheerfully, regularly, sacrificially, and proportionately as the Lord has prospered. I think the Lord would expect of us at least what He expected of Old Testament Israelites who had to be told exactly what to give! Does your commitment show in your giving?

b. in their service These things had to be gathered and brought manually to the Temple. It was not so simple as writing a check and mailing it. Consequently, even giving meant serving, doing for God.

c. in their worship

How deep is your commitment to God in your giving, in your service and in your worship?

Nehemiah - Building The Christian Chs. 11-12 - Celebration

There is an element that we often forget that God wants to use in building the Christian to maturity and that is joy. The #2 fruit of the Spirit (that is, the result of Holy Spirit being in your life) is joy. Look at 1 Pet. 1:8-9. The result of loving Christ is an inexpressible and glorious joy. God wants celebration in our lives. So many times we give the impression that the Christian life is a long hard road and we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom, so that means that joy is all future for us. But not so, God says our lives should be filled with celebration right now; in fact, our lives should be a celebration, should show forth the joy of Jesus Christ to a world that doesn't even know what real joy is! So at last we finally come to the joyous dedication celebration the Jews had after the wall was built and we see their joy. Now see first:

I. The Dwellers in the City of Jerusalem (11:1-12:26) More genealogies! Remember how we saw back in 7:4 that Jerusalem had a finished wall but was unpopulated. So now after Nehemiah had established who belonged to God's family, after the Word and prayer had had their effect on the people and they committed themselves to obey God, Nehemiah brought many of them into Jerusalem to live and then they celebrated the wall. In order to appreciate this without reading it, let me give you first:

1. an outline of the content This is a record of who lived in Jerusalem:

a. those who moved to Jerusalem (11:1-19) Read 1-2. The plan Nehemiah developed was that 1 in 10 would be chosen by lot to move in. If you total it up, 3044 people from Judah and Benjamin along with the priests and Levites uprooted selves from their homes and moved into the city.

b. those who lived nearby (11:20-36) The rest of the Jews lived in other areas and this section describes where and how far away they lived. These would commute to Jerusalem to serve God from time to time.

c. those who led in worship (12:1-26) First Nehemiah lists the family names or clans of priests who returned to Jerusalem 100 years earlier and then tells who was the current head of that family in his own time. So these were the spiritual leaders of his day. But now let's make:

2. some pertinent observations Be careful in reading genealogies because God often slips in some little nuggets of truth in their midst:

a. they had willing hearts (11:2) This moving to Jerusalem was not forced. They were chosen by lot but they still had to volunteer to go. The KJV says they willingly offered themselves. 3044 people willingly gave up their homes and moved and probably had to build new ones in the city, all for God. You see, celebration is a matter of the heart; that's why they were so filled with joy. They were so in love with God, so committed to Him that they would go anywhere and do anything for Him and that is what fanned the flame of their joy. There is no joy in a heart that holds back from God!

b. they had a practice of celebration (11:22-23) Not only was there spontaneous rejoicing over what God had done, but there was a regular daily practice of it. There were singers who did nothing but praise God; it went on day after day. It was sanctioned by the Persian king himself, probably by providing the necessary funds (compare Ezra 7:20). God made it a regular thing for them to teach them that there ought to be joy and celebration at all times, not just when they remembered it or felt like it. Paul wrote the Philippians to *Rejoice in the Lord always...* James said to *Count it all joy* when we fall into various trials! Is it a practice of yours? Do you rejoice in God or in your circumstances? See, circumstances can never erase what God has already done for you; you can rejoice in Him no matter what is going on in your life!

II. The Dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem (12:27-47) Now, at long last, Nehemiah and Ezra and all the Jews dedicated their wall. The wall had been built, their spiritual house set in order and now they were ready to celebrate, but first there was a:

1. prelude: purification (27-30) The first thing was to sprinkle the blood of sacrifice on people and priests and gates and wall. Why? Just a symbolic reminder that joy is connected to purity. One of the first effects of sin in your life is that it robs you of your joy; the joy of your salvation dries up. You become miserable until there is confession and forgiveness and then it is restored. That's what happened to David when he sinned with Bathsheba and later prayed in Ps. 51, *Restore unto me the joy of my salvation*. So if you want joy in your life, first get a clean slate. Then after the prelude came a great:

2. procession (31-39) The ceremony went like this: they formed two large choirs to sing praises and started at the Valley Gate on the western wall and got up on the wall and paraded on the wall around the city to the east side where they entered the Temple area and had a service. One choir with Nehemiah went clockwise to the north and one with Ezra went counterclockwise to the south and they met on the far side, having covered the whole perimeter of the city. Now notice 2 things about what they did:

a. they rejoiced before the world They made a public parade of this, marching on the wall and singing for all to hear. Remember what their enemies had said? "Even if a fox goes up on the wall he would knock it down!" Not so! They are letting the whole world know what God has done. Oh we need to do that! We need to show our joy in such a way that the world can see what God has done in our lives, that we have something they don't have! Listen, your neighbors ought to know you as a joyful person, not as a complainer and griper and discouraged and down but as full of joy at what you have in Christ.

b. they rejoiced in all that God had done Note that when they started marching on one side and marched around both ways they covered all the gates! They sang and praised God over the Valley Gate (gate of deliverance), the Dung Gate (cleansing), the Fountain Gate (Holy Spirit), Water Gate (Word of God) and wound up somewhere over by the Eastern Gate looking for Messiah's coming. Symbolically they praised God for all that He had done. Oh, have you realized the scope of all that God has done for you in saving you from first to last? If you have nothing to praise God for, you don't fully understand your salvation! Then after the procession they went into the Temple for a service of:

3. praise (40-43) Here the people who had been watching and maybe following them on the walls joined them in the Temple area and they celebrated together. Now note verse 43:

a. the source of their joy: God gave it to them. Joy is not something you work up, something you generate. It is not something that happens because you paste on a smile. It is given by God through the Holy Spirit when you're in love with Him! When your heart is fixed on Him, you're joyful!

b. the scope of their joy: all They all rejoiced together, men and women and children, priests and Levites, rulers and common people. Their joy was a shared joy but it belonged to every one of them. Don't think that joy is just for some Christians but not for you because you have too many problems. It is for all!

c. the sound of their joy: far away It was heard far away, by their neighbors. Neighboring villages and towns heard the shouts and singing. When your life is full of joy, others will notice. They will say, "What is it that makes you so happy, so contented in midst of what you face?" But after their time of praise is recorded a:

4. postlude: joyful service (44-47) With hearts full of joy they went on to gladly serve God. The people were pleased and happy and they gave. The leaders were joyous and they did their service. Joy is one of the biggest motivating factors of Christian service; when your heart is full of celebration of how much God loves you and what He's done for you, then you gladly and willingly serve Him!

How about you today? Are you rejoicing with me in our Great God and Savior? How does the little song go?

J esus
O thers
Y ou

When you get wrapped up in Jesus and give your life to serving others and put yourself in last place, then real joy comes!

Nehemiah - Building The Christian

Ch. 13 - Caution

It would be wonderful if the story of Nehemiah and his wall ended with chapter 12. It would be nice to think that the people went on obeying God and kept their commitment to Him and lived happily ever after. But one of the amazing things about the Bible is its complete honesty. Its heroes have all their flaws spelled out unlike myths and legends. Tragedy and sin are clearly spelled out. So Nehemiah ends his account truthfully; the joyous dedication of the wall is not the end of the story. He goes on to tell what happened in the years that followed and the reason he does is as a word of caution to us. You see, God not only wants you to have the Word and prayer and commitment and joy but there is one last thing that if you get a good dose of it into your life will sail you all the way to maturity, caution. Compare 1 Cor. 10:11-12. The life of Israel is one big type or illustration for us. The story of Nehemiah and his wall and people is part of that lesson. What does it teach us? It teaches caution, that we must pay careful attention to our own lives lest we fall into sin just like they did. None of us is exempt. Caution is a primary prerequisite to a successful Christian life.

I. The Postlude to the Story (6-7) The first verses of chapter 13 are actually the end of the book; From verse 6 on is kind of a flashback to tell how that conclusion was reached. You remember from chapter 2 that when Nehemiah got permission from the king to go to Jerusalem he had to appoint a time to return. Well, as it turned out, he stayed 12 years (5:14) as governor, from 444 BC to 432 BC. During that time we have no record but assume that things went well and the nation obeyed God. Then he returned to Persia for some unknown period, at least a few years. Finally, his heart couldn't stand being away any longer and he asked permission to return for a visit. However, upon returning he found that things had not continued as he left them.

II. The Problems that Developed If you remember the commitment the people made and signed in ch. 10 to specifically obey God in three areas of their lives, you'll see right away what happened here. First:

1. they grew lax in their spiritual lives (4-13) This is where trouble always starts in the Christian life, in the spiritual life, the walk with God. There were two elements to this laxness:

a. compromise (4-5, 7-9) Remember Tobiah, number two of the unholy Trinity of enemies that tried to stop the wall-building? Somehow he's got himself allied with the priest in charge (maybe through marriage of children) but the next thing you know, he's not only in Jerusalem but has his own apartment right in the Temple! A man who opposed God and hated His people is now napping in His Temple! Why? Because they had let down the standards! They said, "Oh well, that doesn't sound like too bad an idea and the room isn't being used anyway," which brings me to the more obvious reason he was there:

b. neglect (10-13) Remember what the people had promised (10:39). They said, "We will not neglect...", but when Nehemiah left that's what they did. They quit giving; after all it was work to bring the tithes of the crops up to the Temple and some had had a bad year and couldn't afford to lose that 10%. and so the store rooms became empty and the Levites had to all go home and give up serving in the Temple, just to eat. So the worship of God was neglected. No wonder Tobiah could move in! See, that's how it is in the spiritual life. It's so easy to start neglecting little things like Bible reading or prayer or going to church or giving. You do it once and next time it gets easier and easier and afterwhile it becomes a habit and you don't read or pray or go or give at all. Then you begin to compromise, to care less about behavior, to do little things you'd never have done before. What can you do about this to make sure it doesn't happen to you?

c. remedy: faithfulness Nehemiah found trustworthy men and put them in charge, ones who would be faithful. That's what God wants of you. You are a steward of the mysteries of God and it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful! If you do right the first time every time and don't give in one time, then laxness won't come!

2. they grew lax in their commercial lives (15-22) The next thing to slip after spirituality was their business dealings. Why did they do this?

a. the pressure of work (15-16) After all there was a lot of work to do! Did you ever live on a farm? There's always work, work, work! And the Sabbath was another day to get it done. But added to that was:

b. the influence of others (17-22) Everyone else around them did it. The men from Tyre were bringing in fish and selling on the Sabbath, making their bucks. Why shouldn't they? So begins the slipping in your commercial life. You have untold pressures at work. You see others getting ahead by doing things that go against the principles of God. So you do it too. First you cheat a little on your hours, then you take home a little company property, then comes fudging income taxes and so on. What can you do to prevent it?

c. remedy: vigilance Nehemiah closed the gates and posted a guard. You need to be vigilant, alert, watch yourself lest you begin to slip, catch yourself at the first letdown of principles. But inevitably:

3. they grew lax in their social lives (23-30) When the spiritual life goes, your relationships with people follow. They began to intermarry with unbelievers again to the point where their kids were growing up unable to speak Hebrew. What brought it on?

a. the pull of emotions After all, he met that girl and she was beautiful and she liked him and they only saw each other a few times but they got attached and afterwhile married. They listened to feelings over God's Word which expressly forbid this thing! But moreover there was:

b. the failure of parents, which is obvious. If these didn't even teach their kids Hebrew, what had their own parents taught them? A generation had been lax in child-training, teaching godly principles of relating to others. So it happens. You grow lax in your spiritual life and you begin to make wrong associations and be influenced by unsaved people and yoke up with them. What can you do to prevent it?

c. remedy: obedience (1-4) They read the Word and found what it had to say about their situation and then they obeyed and separated themselves! Those who refused to be separated got separated along with them I'm sure. You need to be constantly reading the Word of God and consciously obeying it. Now it seems to me that in all of this there are for us three clear principles of caution, three things that it takes to maintain a real solid mature Christian walk:

III. The Principles of Caution

1. keen memory (18, 26, 11) Nehemiah calls them to remember their own history, the examples of their fathers before them. Each of these three trespasses was a lack of memory. We forget so easily. If we could only have a keen memory of how sin got us in trouble, or others in trouble, we would avoid it so much better.

2. strong leadership (11, 19, 21, 25) These things all happened when Nehemiah was gone. He fixed them. When there was a strong leader, the people stayed obedient. You need to put yourself under strong spiritual leadership where you have both the admonition and example of Godly leaders! You need to be in a church like this one where there are some Godly men and women who can help you along. It's tough to stay godly alone!

3. dependence upon God (14, 22, 29) Nehemiah's three prayers. *Remember me* doesn't mean, "Now God, don't forget to give me a reward for putting up with all this; see, look at me!" Not at all! It is a cry for help. Nehemiah saw how quickly they turned away and cried out to God to help the house of God to remain un-neglected and not let it fall into disuse again, to help the people in the keeping of Sabbath and to judge those who defiled the priesthood. You see, he knew he couldn't do it alone; it had to be of God. Anytime you get to thinking you've got it made, that you have the Christian life under control, that's the time to watch out! A fall's coming.

I leave the book of Nehemiah and you with a benediction, Jude 24-25. May it be so in your life.

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

SERIES OUTLINE

- I. Ruins: The Need For Spiritual Revitalization - 1:1-3
- II. Prayer: The Foundation Of Spiritual Revitalization - 1:4-11
- III. God: The Vision That Births Spiritual Revitalization - 1:5
- IV. The Word: The Authority That Demands Spiritual Revitalization - 1:7
- V. Self: The Conviction That Precedes Spiritual Revitalization - 1:6-7
- VI. Surrender: The Faith That Characterizes Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 2
- VII. Building: The Effect Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 3
- VIII. Enemies: The Hindering Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 4
- IX. Sin: The Destruction Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 5
- X. Perseverance: The Completion Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 6

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Ruins: The Need For Spiritual Revitalization - 1:1-3

One day God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision. He showed him a valley filled with human bones that were dry and bleached from the sun. Then God asked him a question, *Son of Man, can these bones live?* Then Ezekiel watched in wonder as he prophesied and the bones came together into skeletons and then flesh covered them so they looked like people and finally the Spirit of God breathed life into them and they stood up on their feet and became a vast army. Then God said, *These bones are the house of Israel.* And God was showing him clearly that “These bones CAN live!” That vision of God’s people Israel as a valley full of dry bones is a pretty good metaphor for the state they were still in a hundred plus years later in Nehemiah’s time. Let’s read the first three verses of his book, shall we? *[Read 1-3]* So we can understand the situation, let me explain to you something about:

I. The Physical Ruin In Which God’s People Were Living The year was now **(444 BC)**. Nehemiah was a Jew who was a servant of the King of Persia and lived in Susa. The story of how he got there begins 150 years earlier. Israel had fallen into such a state of depravity that God had allowed the King of Babylon to capture her and carry off thousands of her people into exile around 600 BC. Their land became a Babylonian province and the people were scattered far and wide throughout the Babylonian Empire. Meanwhile the King of Persia conquered the Babylonians and Israel became a Persian state called Trans-Euphrates. But the Persian king was favorable toward the Jews so:

1. about 50,000 had returned from a 70 year exile in 538 BC They went back to Jerusalem which was still largely a pile of rubble and the first thing they did was to begin to rebuild the Temple of God. However, not only did they meet opposition in the process, but they also got sidetracked by their own need to build their own houses and develop their own means of living there, so it was **515 BC** before:

2. they completed rebuilding the Temple and were worshipping It was a sorry sight when compared with the grandeur of Solomon’s temple that had been destroyed, but at least priests and Levites were in place and sacrifices were being offered regularly. To put it in our terms, they were “doing church” again. Some of them even turned their thoughts toward restoring the actual city for awhile, but their enemies lodged an accusation against them with the King and:

3. rebuilding of the city had been halted by the King of Persia (around 460 BC) by force. Jerusalem was a city surrounded by a wall with gates in it. As long as there was no wall and no gates, it had no real defense and could not stand on its own. It would remain under the dominion of Persia. Now, about 14 years before Nehemiah’s writing:

4. Ezra and 5,000 more Jews had returned with the King's permission to Jerusalem **and he had brought some reform (458 BC)**. Ezra was a priest and he began to call Israel back toward a standard of holiness and there was some response, but yet, when Nehemiah's brother Hanani arrived at his door there in Persia with the most recent report of what was going on with God's people, he said that:

5. Jerusalem, the city of God, still lay in ruins all around them That was Nehemiah's description of it in 2:3. The city was essentially a pile of rubble. The wall was a line of scattered piles of stones as were many of the houses. The gates were gaping holes surrounded by a few charred timbers that were still standing. It was the 5th century BC version of living in the aftermath of a war zone in which God's people were going about their daily lives. And the ruins that surrounded them formed a dramatic picture of the state of their own lives spiritually. Yes, the dry bones had come together and there were people living in the city again but there was no real spiritual life in them for the most part. God's kingdom was lying in ruins all about them as they went about their daily routine.

Now this may come as a shock you, but that is a fairly realistic picture of God's people, the church, today in much of the western world. Europe is filled with grand cathedrals built in the name of Jesus and they're all empty! Many are museums and tourist showcases. Europe, where the church was once so powerful that it often RULED the state, Europe that was several hundred years ago the hotbed of living faith that gave us the Protestant Reformation and the Wesleyan revival and the Anabaptist movement and the birth of the modern missions movement that sent the Gospel out to all the corners of the earth is now a stone cold set of ruins of what once was and is itself a very difficult mission field! Only 2 ½ percent of its population are evangelical believers today whereas more than 5% are Muslim! But let's move closer to home. Patrick Johnstone writes about the United States: *The Pilgrim Fathers were determined to establish a land in which they were free to exercise their Christian faith. On that foundation has developed one of the largest and most dynamic Christian movements in history. In the USA are 19% of the Protestants in the world, 21.5% of the Evangelicals and 35% of all the world's foreign missionaries. Evangelistic vitality, generosity and vision have been major factors in the surge of gospel progress. [However...] The spiritual heritage of the USA is being eroded by an unholy alliance of humanists, New Agers and homosexuals. They exploit the provisions of the constitution and their control of the media to disparage and mock Christians and dismantle all they can of anything Christian in public life. Freedom of religion is becoming freedom from religion. They aim to replace 'intolerant' Christian absolutes with their permissive culture. There is scant tolerance for expression of religious values. [Meanwhile...] Christians display little difference in values and lifestyle from non-Christians. Superficiality and materialism are more characteristic than dedication and passion for Jesus and doing His will.* In short, in spite of good things that are happening in particular churches here and there, WE the people of God in America are rapidly becoming much like that valley of bones drying out, much like those Jews living in the midst of the ruins of what was once their great glory as God's people. Now let's look more closely at:

II. The Moral Ruin In Which God's People Were Living because it is actually very similar to the situation we find ourselves in today. First of all:

1. they were living by the standards of the world around them instead of by God's standards laid down in His Word. For instance, there was:

a. a lowering of morality When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem a few years earlier, look what he found - **Ezra 9:1-2**. Many of God's people had married wives from the other peoples around them who were idolaters. God's law had expressly forbidden this but now it was common and the leaders and officials had led the way in doing it! Nehemiah himself discovered the same thing some years later - **Neh. 13:23-27**. It's obvious the effect that these marriages were having in their lives; the pagan influence of their wives was dominating them; their kids couldn't even speak the Hebrew language. If we look inside the American church today what do we find? There is a profound lowering of moral standards on every hand. Not only do we find believers knowingly marrying people who are not believers without hesitation, in spite of Scripture's warning not to be unequally yoked, but we find that our society's divorce rate of 50% is no different inside the church! Christian marriages everywhere fall apart because we no longer enter marriage truly believing it is for life. If it gets tough we simply look for someone else. Christians have affairs just like their coworkers at the office and we've seen a whole string of nationally known Christian leaders fall one after the other in this area of sexual purity. Many Christian young people become sexually active before marriage just like their friends in school and teen pregnancies happen regularly inside the church just as they do among our neighbors. Our culture has penetrated us far more than we realize. The neverending stream of sexual scenes and innuendoes on our TV sets over years and years has lowered our standards of morality to match the world around us. Then, in Nehemiah's day God's people were displaying:

b. a lenience toward idolatry We just read in **(13:26)** that with these foreign wives would come the influence to worship their gods. This in spite of the fact that the very first commandment in God's law for Israel was to have NO other gods beside the Lord! They might go up to the Temple but at home their wife would be teaching the children to bow down to the sun and the stars or to offer a gift to the god of her people. And instead of detesting that they were tolerating it. Well that same lenience toward idolatry has pervaded the American church over the last century in a powerful way, only our idols are not wood and stone; our new gods are science and reason and we have taken them from our culture and enthroned them right alongside the Father and Jesus. Whole sections of the church no longer believe in the authenticity of the miracles of Jesus or the Old Testament. Things like that just CAN'T happen; they are myths of an ancient generation meant to teach lessons! Jesus could not have been literally born of a virgin

and his resurrection is a spiritual statement that His spirit is always with us, not a literal bodily rising up. And his coming again is just wishful thinking of the ancient church; nothing could ever disrupt the cycle of life as we experience it today! And then there are large sections of the church choosing to recognize gay marriage and to ordain homosexuals to the priesthood in spite of clear Scripture that says it is an abomination, not an alternate lifestyle. And then we are loathe to be called exclusivists, so many have come to hold that as long as a person is sincere in their faith, whether they are Christian, Jew, Muslim or Buddhist, God will accept them. What is this but idolatry creeping into the church and taking it over, with entire denominations being dominated by such thinking today! Then we read that God's people had:

c. a love of money (13:15-17) Later Nehemiah found that the Jews were working on the Sabbath Day and bringing produce into the city to sell just like the men from Tyre who lived in the city did. They learned to transact their business just like godless Gentiles, to let making money become more important than obeying God. And while evangelical churches like ours may still hold the line on moral or on doctrinal issues, almost all of us are impacted by this far more than we realize! The desire for money or possessions plays far more of a role in our lives than we would dare to admit. If you don't believe it, just suppose that Jesus directly asked of you what He did of the rich young ruler. Suppose He spoke to you and said, "Go and sell everything that you have and give it away to the poor." Suppose God said to you, "Write a check for every dollar in your bank account and all your investments and give it to missions." Would you find yourself wrestling with whether to obey or even saying, "No"? Suppose God spoke to you clearly and said, "I want you to move to a third world country, to live in Guinea where our national missionary Lamine Kante lives, where electricity is limited and water has to be pumped and hauled and air conditioning is non-existent and go tell people there about Me!" Would your first response be, "Yes, Lord"? Our passion for Christ is being dulled by living the American dream and we don't even realize it.

Well, after Nehemiah got there he discovered several more things about God's people in Jerusalem. He found that:

2. they were living in self-centeredness that divided them (5:1-5) Times were economically tough and some of the Jews who had money were taking advantage of their poorer brothers to make more, even to the point of foreclosing on their properties or taking their children as servants. Instead of loving their brothers and helping them, they were thinking only of themselves and using them. What a far cry from the early church where believers were so in love with Jesus that they sold houses and lands and gave to those who were poor so everyone had enough, where no one claimed that the things he had were his own! Would we? Yet we find other ways to divide ourselves from each other. We cut ourselves off from our brothers over theological distinctions like reformed and dispensational theology, the timing of the return of Christ, modes of baptism, tongues and healing and a whole host of secondary issues. What matters most is OUR church, not THE church or the advancement of the very Kingdom of God in the world. Then Nehemiah found when he got there that:

3. they were living in ignorance of the Word of God (8:1, 8-9, 14-17) They cried because they had no idea what the Word of God said. Nobody had ever taught it to them. They read about the Feast of Booths and went out and cut branches and made little huts and lived in them as the Scripture says. It hadn't been celebrated like that for a thousand years, since Joshua's day. Why? Because the Word of God was not being read and taught to them. And we have something they never dreamed of. We have Bibles everywhere, but they collect dust on our shelves and remain unread. Yet our brothers in China still copy whole books by hand just to have their own precious copy of God's Word! The further we move into the 21st century the more I'm finding that people, and I mean believers, really have no idea what the Bible teaches about even some of the simplest, most basic things I learned as a teen. Why? Well, the answer is as simple as, "How many of us set aside time to read the Scripture and pray every day?" And perhaps the saddest thing Nehemiah found about the people of Jerusalem was that:

4. they were living in apathy toward their own situation Jerusalem, the city of God, was lying all around them in ruins and they were picking their way through its rubble and nobody is picking up a single rock to rebuild it. Nobody cared. Nobody even realized how low they had fallen. They just accepted the ruins around them as the way things were and went about living their lives dominated by the world, divided from each other and making no difference on the earth for God. The other day I ran into a neighbor at the bank who has been a loyal member of another church here in town all her life. And she was telling me how they had hired some company to come in and evaluate their church and tell them why they were struggling and couldn't seem to attract more people. They were shocked when they were told that their greatest need was "spiritual renewal"! They never even thought of that. They have programs without end and facilities aplenty but never gave a thought to the concept that what they needed was a fresh personal passion to love and serve Jesus Christ with every fiber of their being! Look at Hanani's description in 1:3 of:

III. The Spiritual Ruin In Which God's People Were Living (3) He said:

1. they were in great trouble and didn't realize it The Hebrew literally says *evil*. A great evil, a great wrong, a great calamity had happened to them and they weren't even aware of it. A hole had been blown in the side of their ship and their ship was rapidly sinking but no one even noticed the leak. My friends, I submit to you that the church in America today, the church of which we are a part, is in great trouble. A great evil has been and is being done to us. The world is slowly plating our hull with its barnacles and the weight of them is pulling us gradually below the waterline and we just keep paddling around the lake obliviously looking at the sights. A deadly cancer has been growing and spreading inside the church, one so serious that it will one day kill it, yet we don't feel the pain and keep on ingesting the very things that feed it instead of fighting it! Secondly, he said:

2. they were a disgrace to God's Name before the world This was Israel, the very people of God, the one people Jehovah had chosen as His own and the way they were living in the ruins of His city no one would believe that He was the true God. The church bears the name of Jesus Christ; we are HIS church. But the spiritual ruin into which the church has fallen is a terrible reflection on Him. If He is really the Lord of all then His followers should be living that way; their love for Him, their obedience to Him, should be radical and recognizable by everyone around them! Thirdly, Hanani pointed out that:

3. they were unprotected against the enemy Their walls were down and their gates were gone. There was nothing to keep an enemy from coming in among them and having his way. That's the church. When there is no spiritual armor in place to protect us, Satan and his hosts move into our lives and run rough-shod over everything. They steal and kill and destroy at will.

Friends, we need spiritual, not just "renewal", but "revitalization", the infusion of new life where there is deadness! The church in our land is in the worst state since its inception. But these "bones" CAN live. God can breathe new life into His church. And it starts with us, with me, with you. We all are more impacted and affected by the world that we realize. We all have blind spots we can't see. *When British evangelist Gypsy Smith was asked how to start a revival, he said, "Go home, lock yourself in your room, kneel down in the middle of your floor. Draw a chalk mark all around yourself and ask God to start the revival inside that chalk mark. When He has answered your prayer, the revival will be on."* Spiritual revitalization starts with one person. In our text it starts with Nehemiah. Here it starts with you; it starts with me.

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Prayer: The Foundation Of Spiritual Revitalization - 1:4-11

Last time we looked at the need for spiritual revitalization, both in God's people Israel in Nehemiah's day and in the church in America in ours. The city of God, Jerusalem, lay in ruins; the people of God were walking through the rubble of what was once their glory. And the Church of Jesus Christ is falling rapidly into the same spiritual ruin as God's people are more and more thoroughly impacted by the world around them. Nehemiah's brother came all the way to Persia and brought him this news in verses 1-3 that God's people back in the land were in trouble and that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates burned with fire. And in verse 4 we have his reaction. *[Read]*. Nehemiah prayed. Is that the first thing we would do? Would we call a massive all-church prayer meeting? Or would we more likely do something like one of these:

- Appoint a committee to study the problem and recommend solutions
- Start a "Let's rebuild that wall!" fund-raising campaign and send money
- Become politically active and write letters to the governor of Jerusalem about rebuilding the wall or take them to court and sue for the Jews' right to a wall like everyone else has
- Go to the media with graphic images and try to raise public sympathy for the poor Jews who have no wall
- Plan to send a summer team for two weeks to build a little section of the wall

The truth is that in the church today, not only we would rather do almost ANYTHING than really devote ourselves to prayer, but in actuality we have come to **DEPEND** on those other things we typically do instead of on God to fix the situation. If you read the Old Testament, when real awakening came to God's people Israel, it was because somebody prayed. In Hezekiah's day Israel was in great trouble but Hezekiah prayed and we have a record of the kind of praying that he did. In Josiah's day Israel had been in true spiritual ruin but the Scripture says that at the age of 16 Josiah began to seek the Lord and before long that changed the entire nation. I think it's fair to say that there has never been a time of widespread awakening without God's people praying to Him to revitalize the hearts and minds of their own brethren! J. Hudson Taylor's great missionary movement, the China Inland Mission, began with him wrestling with God, not just once but repeatedly, begging God and trusting Him to move in the hearts of His servants to burden them for China. And the great rebuilding both physical and spiritual that came about in Jerusalem among God's people began with Nehemiah praying. So let's see what we can learn from his example; how did he pray? What are:

I. The Characteristics Of Prayer That Brings Spiritual Revitalization Well, notice 3 things in verse (4) about HOW Nehemiah prayed. First all, his prayer was:

1. it is a cry of the heart He sat down and wept and mourned as he prayed. He cried before He prayed and he cried as he was praying. His prayer was not lip-service. It was not a distracted mention of a need that was brought to him. It was not a list of things half-heartedly prayed through. The need that he was made aware of touched his heart, the very core of his being. And his praying was literally the crying out of his heart for what it wanted. We sing that in the chorus, "It is the cry of my heart to worship you...to be close to you", but I'm not sure that's really true for many of us when we sing it. The closest I've come to seeing a real heart cry is the way that many of us cried out to God for Linda, the teen in our church who had cancer, over the last year because she was so ill. And it's easier to feel that when someone we

love is really ill or in danger. But when's the last time you or I cried over someone who without Christ and in danger of an eternity in hell? When have we shed tears because we are so burdened over someone who has fallen away from God and poured our hearts out in prayer for their spiritual awakening? The prayer for God to bring spiritual renewal to a person or a church or a people is not something you can just write down on today's prayer list and mention in a nonchalant fashion; it must become a burden of the heart and you can't manufacture that. You can't work yourself up to it. If you want it, you have to ask God for it. Secondly, prayer that brings about spiritual revitalization:

2. it is a consuming passion It is beyond the ordinary; it surpasses the kind of day to day things that you talk to God about. Nehemiah devoted a period of time out of his life to praying for this particular thing. Literally, he says *I wept and mourned for days and I fasted and prayed*. It consumed his life for a period of time. When is the last time you or I were so burdened by some need that we prayed at every opportunity for days on end, that we skipped meals and went without food because our hearts were so burdened that praying was more important? Do you remember what the disciples did when Jesus ascended to heaven? He had told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Father sent the Holy Spirit as He had promised. So Acts says *they all joined together constantly in prayer*. They stopped everything and prayed for 10 days and when the day of Pentecost came they were still all gathered together in one place and were, no doubt, still praying! Hudson Taylor commented, *"Today the Holy Spirit is as truly available and as mighty in power as He was on the day of Pentecost. But has the whole church ever, since the days before Pentecost, put aside every other work and waited for Him for 10 days, so that power might be manifested?"* Nehemiah fasted; he was so consumed with praying that he gave up eating for a time. When is the last time you or I set aside a full day or even a half-day to do nothing but pray, for anything? When is the last time that we were so consumed with praying that we prayed right through meal time and forgot about eating? The kind of prayer that brings spiritual life and wakes the dead is special, intense, extraordinary prayer. And thirdly, this kind of prayer:

3. it is a continuing petition Nehemiah kept on praying for "some days". If you check the next date reference in 2:1, it tells you that "some days" was actually some 4 months! This was not something that burdened his heart today and then was forgotten in a day or a week. It remained the burden of his heart and he couldn't shake it. How many of the things we pray for are great and sincere burdens at the time but are forgotten before long? Prayer that changes the world, that changes people, is prayer that is on our hearts day after day until it is answered!

One of the young ladies who translated for our team when we were in Kyrgyzstan in September was Aida. When Aida gave her heart to Jesus at about age 20, she went home and told her mother. Her mother threw her out of the house with only the clothes on her back. She would not let her take anything. She had no job and did not know where to go so she went to the home of a friend who said she could stay there for a little. But the friend did not say that she was free to help herself to food. So she starved herself all day long until the friend came home for days. She became very depressed and she went to her pastor and, wisely, he told her to see these days as days of fasting unto the Lord. So she decided to fast for 40 days like Moses had done on the mountain and like Jesus did in the wilderness. "And", she said, "on the twelfth day Jesus spoke to me!" She was bitter and angry over many things and Jesus showed her how God was her real Father and how much He loved her and how she was His beloved daughter. Day after day He continued to reveal Himself to her mind and her whole life was changed through those many days of intense prayer and waiting on God. And today, years later, she is fiercely loyal to Him and wants to give her whole life for His cause. That's how Nehemiah prayed and I'm afraid that's how we'll have to learn to pray if we want to see real change in the state of the church today! Of course, the obvious question is, "Well WHAT did Nehemiah pray all that time?" What is:

II. The Content Of Prayer That Brings Spiritual Revitalization That's what we have in the rest of chapter 1. We're going to take bird's eye view and fly over it as a whole today and then come back to more specific things in it in the next couple of studies. There are two major elements to this life-changing prayer:

1. it begins with confession of sin: with what we have done (5-7) The immediate effect of hearing about the miserable state that Jerusalem is in is that Nehemiah begins to confess sins before God. Notice two things in verses 6-7. The first is how he uses the word *WE*. He says:

a. we Israelites He doesn't pray for THEM; He prays for US. He includes himself as one of the group. He has a sense of **corporate sin**, which means **I am involved in the sins of my people**. Now Nehemiah lived a thousand miles away in Persia and had probably lived there all his life. He had never been anywhere near Jerusalem. And the sins that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem were committed more than 150 years earlier, generations before he was born. He had nothing to do with the way they broke God's commands, decrees and laws, but yet he did! He was a Jew; He was one of God's people. He was connected to them. I don't know if you and I can understand this fully. That is one of our problems in the western church; our culture is so focused on the individual that we hardly have a sense of corporate anything. If someone's life is messed up and full of sin, in our minds we distinguish between ourselves and them and understand it as *their* problem, not ours. Maybe this will help. Remember when the Israelites conquered Jericho? They were told not to keep anything from the spoils for themselves but to burn it all. Well, one man, Achan, saw some gold and some pretty garments and secretly took them and hid them in his tent. So Israel lost the next battle and as Joshua is flat on his face before God crying out and praying about it, God says, "Stand up! Israel has sinned. They have violated My covenant..." Not one of the other 2 million Israelites had done the deed or even knew about it, but when one did it, they all did it! And until they

found the individual culprit and dealt with it, they were ALL implicated and affected! Our western mind cries, "That's not fair!" but the teaching of the New Testament is that we are all members of one single body and when one part suffers, the whole body suffers with it. The whole feels the effect. Likewise, when one part sins, it impacts the whole just like gangrene in your toe will sicken your whole body and eventually kill it! And we'd say, "I" have gangrene, not "my toe has gangrene", as though my toe and me are different entities! If Jerusalem lay in ruins and God's people were in trouble, Nehemiah was part of it. If the western church lies in spiritual ruins and God's people have become involved in the accursed thing, I am part of it. "WE" have sinned! But Nehemiah also says in v. 6, *I confess the sins we have committed*:

b. including myself Here he's talking about **personal sin** and he means **I am appalled by what I have done** as well as by what WE have done. It is so easy to see the sins of others and enumerate them before God but so hard to see our own, to see that even if we are not the ones out there committing immorality and denying the tenets of the faith, that what I have done is just as serious before God and it impacts everyone else.

Now be honest, how much, if any, of our prayer life involves confession of sin? I'm much more prone to breathe a quick, "Sorry about that, Lord" on the spot than to really get alone with God and genuinely admit my wrong. I don't like to admit disobedience, to admit wickedness and you don't either! But prayer that changes a life, that changes a church, that changes a community, always begins with sincere, earnest, deep confession of sin. But then, secondly:

2. it leads to a confession of faith, to a heartfelt expression of **what we expect God to do**. Now what Nehemiah expected God to do was to move the King, Artaxerxes, to allow the rebuilding of the city and to send him to do it. That's what he says directly to the King in 2:5. This prayer is probably a summary of the way that he prayed in general over those 4 months, but it also seems because of verse 10 to specifically be the prayer he prayed at the end of that time as he was ready to approach the King about it. For four months he has been asking God to rebuild Jerusalem and to send him. Now when we tell God what we want Him to do, that prayer must be:

a. based upon our promises from God (8-9) Nehemiah knew a promise from God found in Deut. 30:1-5 where God had promised specifically that when Israel was punished for her sins and scattered among the nations, that when she turned to Him with all her heart, that He would regather her to His land and restore her fortunes as His people. And Nehemiah claimed that promise; He came to God to ask Him to do what He said He would do. So must we! The New Testament is filled with promises for us, for the church, promises of peace, of joy, of power, of being witnesses to the nations. If our heart is really broken over the status quo of ruins, we have to go to the Scriptures to find what God wants to do, what He longs to do for His Name among us and claim it! And we claim it:

b. based upon our position in Christ Just as Nehemiah did (10). Nehemiah is arguing, "Lord, these are Your people, whom You've redeemed. They belong to You and they represent you. You can't leave them like this, walking among the ruins. You've got to do something!" And are we in the church not the very same thing, God's elect, God's chosen ones, His very sons and daughters of the royal family, the people who bear His Name and are His body on the earth?! For His own glory, for His own sake, because we are bound to Him and one with Him, He **MUST** answer our prayer and do something for us as we sit among the ruins.

God is not a stingy God, sitting up in heaven greedily withholding His blessing and power. He is waiting until His people really want it, until they pray, until they confess their sins, until they ask Him to send His power on the basis of His promise in His Word. God's premise has always been the same; He will draw near to us when we draw near to Him! But there's one last thing I want you to see in our overview of this chapter and that is:

III. The Consummation Of Prayer That Brings Spiritual Revitalization (11) When we pray for God to do something, for God to work in the hearts of His people:

1. it leads to a conviction that I must become personally involved Nehemiah lived in a strategic position. He was cupbearer to the King. He was not some waiter; he was the King's food-taster who would sample all the food and drink that was given to the King to make sure the King would not be poisoned. He was a man the king trusted, a man who put his life on the line every day for the King. He had access to the King like few others did and he was respected by the King like few others were. And as he prayed about the state of Jerusalem and the changing of the King's heart, God began to make it clear to him that HE had to go and ask the King about it. Who else could go? When the cry of our hearts touches God, it always leads to a conviction that there is SOMETHING God wants ME to do. It is not somebody else's problem. I must get involved to change it. And:

2. it leads to a courage that is willing to risk everything to obey God Artaxerxes was the very King whose decree had shut down the rebuilding of Jerusalem 16 years earlier. He, like Esther before him, had to risk the anger of the King, to go to the King of Persia to ask him to reverse his own decree. And I'm sure her words framed the attitude of his own heart, ...*When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish*. You don't cross the King of Persia. Nehemiah knew he was taking his life into his hands, or rather putting it completely into the hands of God by going and asking this. But he went.

To pray for spiritual revitalization in the church, in the lives of people, means being laying your life at the feet of Jesus and being willing to do WHATEVER He tells you to do with it, no matter what that means. If it means changing your daily routine to include time for Him, you must be willing to do it. If it means talking to someone, you must be ready to do it. If it means selling your house and moving to the ends of the earth you must be ready to do it. It is that kind of spiritual abandon, complete trust, that God honors and God answers. *Hudson Taylor labored in China himself as a missionary for 5 years and came home burdened that millions were dying without the Gospel and a special agency was needed urgently to recruit and send workers to China. But no mission would undertake his cause. He prayed and prayed but eventually God's question came to him, "What is to hinder YOUR obtaining the men and the means?"* Hudson Taylor said yes to God and thus the China Inland Mission, today Overseas Missionary Fellowship, was born. God needs more Isaiahs who will not only pray, "Lord do something; the need is great!", but will say, "Here I am, Lord, send ME!"

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

God: The Vision That Births Spiritual Revitalization - 1:5

Last week we looked at Nehemiah's entire prayer in chapter one so that we could see that prayer is the foundation of spiritual revitalization. Spiritual change happens through deep, fervent, continued prayer. But I promised you that we'd go back and look more closely at this chapter and over the next couple of weeks we will. If we are honest, neither you nor I will pray the way Nehemiah prayed unless we are driven to it by something that more or less "crashes" into the normalness of our existence, by what I would call a "God moment". He has to use something to wake us up from the sluggishness of daily life and make us aware of Himself in a new and fresh way. For Nehemiah, that "God moment" came through a piece of news he received in verse 3; it was what must have been an unexpected report of how very awful the situation back in Jerusalem was. It blew him away and immediately he began to pray. God can use anything, a doctor's report, an accident, the death of a friend or spouse, a book or even something as simple as a sermon like this one, to drive us to begin praying in earnest. The prayer that begins in verse 5 is a prayer that Nehemiah prayed at the end of four months of similar praying and as we seek Him over time we will, no doubt, arrive at the same three places Nehemiah did: at a fresh vision of God in verse 5, a new bowing before the authority of His Word in verse 7 and a deep change in our understanding of our own lives in verses 6-7. But for today, let's focus on verse 5 *[Read 5a]* I don't begin my prayers like that, do you? I doubt Nehemiah normally began his like that either. I think it's an indication of something fresh and new that's been happening. You see:

I. Spiritual Revitalization Requires A Fresh Vision Of God's Nature (1:5a), a fresh glimpse of WHO He is! *In 1973 Dr. E. Schuyler English told of a visit to China by the Philadelphia Orchestra. In one city, the Chinese Philharmonic Orchestra performed Beethoven's Fifth Symphony for the visiting musicians. According to reports, it was not done very well. But at the end of the first movement, the Chinese conductor passed the baton to the American conductor, Eugene Ormandy. What a transformation! You would have thought Ormandy had been conducting the Chinese Philharmonic for years. As the members of the Philadelphia Orchestra listened, they were impressed in a new way with Ormandy's talent and genius. They suddenly realized that they had begun to take him for granted, and had lost sight of the greatness of their conductor. That's what happened to Nehemiah and the Jews. They were taking God for granted and had lost sight of the greatness of their God. We have prayed this since we were kids at the dinner table...God is great and God is good and we thank Him for our food... but in reality I would include myself as I say that most of us have really lost sight of how great our God is and:*

- 1. we must realize anew how GREAT God is** To try to encourage you in that regard, turn with me to chapter 9. After Nehemiah had gone to Jerusalem and the wall was built, the leaders of the people, the Levites, prayed a prayer on that occasion, a prayer that expressed the revived thoughts of their own hearts and look how that prayer starts in **9:5-6**. They too had caught a vision of the greatness of God and they elaborated on it in four ways. First:

a. He is eternal He is, verse 5, He exists, from everlasting to everlasting. From that which has no beginning to that which has no end. Moses prayed like this in Ps. 90:1-2, *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.* Look at the vastness of all that you see around you, the mountains, the sky, the earth; before any of that ever existed God had already been around forever; He has no beginning. And after it is all gone one day, He will still be around forever; He has no end. He IS the Beginning and the End! He is eternally self-existent; His existence depends on no one and nothing outside of Himself so He is God throughout all the thousands of generations of human history plus before it and after it, yet He is concerned about the details of your life! Second:

b. He is unique Verse 6, *You alone are the LORD, You alone are Jehovah.* He is God, the Supreme ONE. No other being is what He is; that's what being GOD means! There are not many gods; the gods of the nations are idols, false gods. Jehovah, the Lord God of Israel, who revealed Himself in our Lord Jesus Christ, He is the God of all the earth! That's why all the earth should be on it's face before Him; that's why all the nations MUST come and worship Him. Third:

c. He is the Creator of all things Verse 6. What an awesome statement that is! Go out tonight and look up at the sky. Those stars up there, each one billions of miles away, God put them there and the Scripture says He knows each one of them by name. The sun with its vast magnitude and tremendous store of energy which makes life on earth possible, God made that! Go to the shore and look at the magnificence of the ocean, the thundrous power of the waves and tides and the vast array of marine life it harbors. Or look around you on the earth at the immense variety and complexity of the animal kingdom, the infinite chains of interdependency between creatures and plants. Or look within you at the mind-blowing complexity of the systems of the human body. Listen, GOD MADE ALL THAT! No wonder John saw multitudes in heaven singing, *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."* - Rev. 4:11. By the way, that's you! Those 24 elders around the throne represent the church, so YOU are going to sing that song one day! God created all things for HIS pleasure. All that stuff you call yours isn't yours at all; it's His. He created it for His purpose, even you; you are not yours. The world is not about me getting what I want and living the way I want. It is He that hath made me and I am His! And, of course, fourth:

d. He is the Sustainer of all things Verse 6, *You give life to everything.* Hebrews says He upholds all things by the word of His power. The fact that the earth turns and the sun shines and that your heart pumps and your lungs breathe and that the very atoms that make up your body hold together in their groupings without flying apart is due to the power of His word. Everything that exists and every living being owes its very moment by moment existence to God Himself.

There is no way I can picture for you how great God is in words; there is no camera that can show it to our eyes! God Himself has to shine it into our heart as He did Nehemiah's. And along with that:

2. we must realize anew how AWESOME God is Back in 1:5 Nehemiah mentioned that God is awesome. The Hebrew root of awesome is the word "fear". As we pray with a fresh realization of the greatness of God there is a holy reverence that stirs inside of us; we are struck with awe at Him. And the root of that awe is that fact that:

a. He is holy Isaiah saw Him in a vision one day. **Is. 6:1-3** *...I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings ...And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." And his immediate reaction was to cry out, "Woe to me! ...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."* Isaiah was touched with how pure He is, how perfect and good He is, how righteous and right and just. When you and I get there **Rev. 4:8-10** says *...Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever.* The Levites referred to this very thing in **Neh. 9:6b**, *All the multitudes of heaven worship You! You see:*

b. He is to be worshipped To catch a glimpse of His holiness and His majesty is to be overwhelmed with this strong sense of wanting to fall on our knees and bow with our faces to the ground. I had a dream one time when I was a teen. I dreamed Jesus was coming and the Rapture was about to happen and I was so overwhelmed that all I could do in my dream was to fall on my knees and keep on saying, "Thank you, Jesus; Thank you Jesus!" It is that sense of overwhelmedness that consumes us when we catch a glimpse of who He is. All of heaven does it: **Rev. 5:11-14**, *Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

That, my friends, is the God you are here today to meet. That is the God who saved you. Thomas Aquinas, a medieval theologian, created one of the greatest intellectual achievements of Western civilization in his *Summa Theologica*. It's a massive work: 38 treatises, 3,000 articles, 10,000 objections. Thomas tried to gather into one coherent whole all of truth. What an undertaking: anthropology, science, ethics, psychology, political theory, and theology, all under God. On December 6, 1273, Thomas abruptly stopped his work. While celebrating Mass, he caught a glimpse of eternity, and suddenly he knew that all his efforts to describe God fell so far short that he decided never to write again. When his secretary, Reginald, tried to encourage him to do more writing, he said, 'Reginald, I can do no more. Such things have been revealed to me that all I have written seems as so much straw.' [Leadership, Spring 1993. Page 48.] I need a vision like Thomas got. I need a fresh vision of just who My Heavenly Father is, the great and awesome God! How dare I trifle with Him and ignore His Word and disregard His presence in my life! But that is only half the story. That great and awesome God has chosen to LOVE ME! Look back at Neh. (1:5b). You see:

II. Spiritual Revitalization Requires A Fresh Vision Of God's Love and that love is expressed to us in so many ways. Those Levite leaders on that later day in Jerusalem also had this vision of the love of God as they prayed in chapter 9 and they spelled it out in three ways. First:

1. He is a faithful God - (9:7-8) God had called Abraham out of Ur and promised him the land of Canaan and there they stood 1500 years later in Jerusalem to testify, "You have kept Your promise!" God is a faithful God and when He makes a covenant, when He makes a promise to His people, He stands by it and fulfills it forever. I like Joshua's testimony when he was an old man, *Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.* - Josh 23:14. Is that not true for you and I also? God has never failed you in one thing He has promised you as His child. He has never left you nor forsaken you, not for one moment. Not once has He allowed temptation to come your way without controlling it and making a way of escape from it. His love in caring for you is steadfast and it always will be; He will not change His mind tomorrow, aren't you glad? Second:

2. He is a redeeming God - (9:9-11) He saw the people of Israel down in Egypt crying out in bondage. He saw them trapped against the Red Sea about to be massacred by Pharaoh's chariots. And He redeemed them! He reached down with His finger and opened the Sea and led them through while He drowned the chariots of Pharaoh! That is Israel's corporate salvation testimony, but God has done even more for you and I! Listen to what the redeemed church in heaven shouts: *... You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*" - Rev. 5:9-10. That is OUR corporate testimony; that is what WE will all shout in heaven. Jesus Christ redeemed us by His own precious blood; He stands today in heaven as the Lamb who was slain. One day we will fall at His feet and cry, "Worthy! Worthy!" But why not now? Oh may God give us a fresh vision of the cross, a vision of the great love of Almighty God for us dripping down in the drops of blood from the wounded side of His Son that rescued us from the flames of hell that were lapping at our feet! And this great redemption was not for our sins alone, but for the sins of the world to bring together into one body a great multitude from every people, tribe, tongue and nation. He is a faithful God; He is a redeeming God. And third:

3. He is a providing God - (9:12-15) He provided for His children, the children of Israel. He guided them in the way that they were to go. He gave them His law so that they might live right. And likewise:

a. He gives us spiritual provision In fact, He has done so much more for us than He did for them. His own Holy Spirit indwells each of us to teach us and to guide us in the way that we should go. And not only has He given us His word in the completed Scriptures of the New Testament to show us how to live, but His Spirit inside us gives us the power to live it! When we lean on the power and guidance of His Spirit, He literally lives out His life through us! What more spiritual provision could there be? But He also:

b. He gives us material provision Just as He gave Israel bread from heaven and water from the rock and carried them all the years of their journey in the wilderness, so He has done with us all the days of our lives. Our Father has met all of our needs according to His riches in glory; everything that we have and enjoy down to the very breath we take is a gift from His hand.

Oh How He loves us! Now you and I know all these things, don't we? We've known them for years. We know that God is great and God is good. We know He created all things and He's holy and He loves us. Yet somehow it is so easy for all the grandeur that we've tried to express to become a set of trivial facts that fail to impact our lives. You see:

III. Spiritual Revitalization Requires A Personal Vision of God It requires a "God Moment. Isaiah had one. Listen to his words: *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.... "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"* - Is. 6:1, 5, 8. That's exactly what happened to Nehemiah. As the news of the ruin of Jerusalem came crashing into his life, he wound up on his face before God and lifted his eyes to behold God in a whole fresh new way and ended up praying, "Here am I, use ME!" Through the centuries in life after life there have been "God moments" like this.

Blaise Pascal was a 17th century French scientist, often classed as one of the six great thinkers of all time, a genius in mathematics, a philosopher and a writer. But one night he experienced an overwhelming personal encounter with God that changed his life. When he died, they found a worn creased paper in a pocket next to his heart. He evidently carried it with him as a reminder of that encounter. Here's what it said, "From about half-past ten at night to about half-after midnight --fire! O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob-- not the God of the philosophers and the wise. The God of Jesus Christ who can be known only in the ways of the Gospel. Security--feeling--peace--joy--tears of joy. Amen" [From "Whatever Happened To Worship", A.W. Tozer, p. 90-91]. I need a "God moment"; you need a "God moment", if we are ever to be changed and empowered. And it is most likely to come to us when we are in His Word and listening to Him. That's what we'll talk about next time.

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

The Word: The Authority That Demands Spiritual Revitalization - 1:7

When God begins to do a work in His people to bring spiritual revitalization and renewal, there are several things that begin to happen. The first is what we talked about last week; we begin to have a fresh vision of God, of who He is and how much He loves us. We'll talk about the second one today; we begin to have a new regard for God's Word. You know, our response to what a person says is very much determined by how we regard the person. Would you agree? For example, if a person whom you know to be thoroughly undependable and never keep their promises tells you they'll be over to your house at noon, do you interrupt your plans and wait for him? Does it even bother you when he doesn't show? Likely not, because you've already learned to disregard what he says and not act on it. His words have no value to you because of who he is. Now if your child asks you to stop what you're doing and take him to McDonalds, do you do it? Well, maybe. He is your child and you love him and want to do nice things for him, but you also know the relative importance of what you're doing at the moment and you weigh out the two based on how you regard him. In this case his word is optional in your mind because of who he is to you. However if your boss at work, the owner of your company, tells you to stop what you're doing immediately and go fix another problem, will you do it? Yes, you will and right away! Why? Because of WHO your boss is in your eyes. His word carries authority in your eyes. Now let's take that a step further. How seriously you take God's Word depends on your view of who God is. Whether you think His Word doesn't matter or whether you think it's optional or whether you think it carries absolute authority depends on who you think God IS. So last time we attempted to renew our vision of just how great and awesome God is and that should change how we see His Word. It did for Nehemiah! [Read 1:7] Let's look at the second half of that verse first. For spiritual revitalization to happen:

I. We Must Comprehend The Nature Of God's Word (1:7b) As he prayed, Nehemiah saw something clearer than ever before. The Scripture that he had available to him in his day was more than a set of rules set down by Moses; it came from GOD Himself! God gave His words directly to him (Nehemiah) through Moses as a channel. There's the crux of what I'm trying to say: when I read my Bible these words are the words of GOD HIMSELF. They are not just the words of men. They are not like the articles in the morning newspaper that some guy wrote; they are the speech of the Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of the Universe speaking directly to ME! Now Nehemiah uses three terms to describe God's Word here. And it's not that he's describing it as various parts, as though commands, decrees and laws are different *types* of things. What would be the difference between a command, a decree and a law? Rather they are three different terms that describe the character and nature of God's Word. Each one tells us something distinct about it. First of all, God's Word:

1. it is a *command* to us: Webster says that the word command means "to direct with authority". To us the Word of God is a command in that **it carries the authority of God** directing our lives. This concept is so hard for us to grasp because here in our western American lives there is no place left where anyone or anything is an absolute authority whose word carries absolute authority. We have nothing to relate the concept to. So let me show you a couple of things about the authority of the Word of God from Scripture itself. Turn with me to Hebrews. The Word of God:

a. it has the authority to create - Heb. 11:3 In other words God *commanded* things to be created and His very word actually caused them to exist. **Gen. 1:3 (TLB)** *Then God said, "Let there be light." And light appeared.* That is how the universe was created. God did not take his hands and fashion it. He did not shoot some beam of energy from His extended arm to create it. He merely SPOKE and his very WORDS did the work of creation. He spoke to things that did not exist and they came into being at His Word. God's Word carries power inherent in itself. The material elements of the universe obey it instantly as if they had a mind to understand it. When God speaks, it happens. That is the authority the Word of God carries. Now let's go to the New Testament and learn from Jesus a second lesson:

b. it has the authority to control - Mat. 8:5-9,13 This centurion who came to ask Jesus to heal his servant was a high-ranking military officer. He understood the concept of authority. He knew that as a captain his word carried authority. When he spoke, his underlings did what he said, no exceptions, no hesitation. And he had enough spiritual insight to see that the same was true of Jesus in a much broader sense, that he had authority over all things including sickness and demons and so on. He could simply command the sickness and it would depart and He didn't even have to be present to do it! So Jesus spoke the word and the servant was healed. God's Word controls all the events of history, all the events of our lives. What God says, happens. What He tells to stop, stops. Whom He tells to get well gets well! Now I think you're ready to see the point:

c. we must allow God's Word to have that same authority over us You see, in every other realm of creation, in the natural world, in the angelic world, in the events of history, God's Word is obeyed instantly and without question because it carries with it its own power and authority. There is only one group in all of creation who have the amazing freedom to decide whether to obey God's Word or not: human beings! The weather doesn't have a choice! The animals don't have a choice! The angels don't have a choice! But in grace and love, God has given you and I a choice whether to obey or not! So don't you see how audacious and prideful it is for us to even consider whether we should obey God's word or not? How awful it is for us think that we can tell the Creator of the Universe whether

or not we will obey Him? Can the clay tell the Potter that it will not be what He says? Can the wood tell the carpenter it will not be the object He makes it to be? Of course nonbelievers don't get that, but for us as believers this is what should be true: to hear is to obey! God's Word is the command of Almighty God and it demands instant compliance! Secondly 1:7 says:

2. it is a decree to us: The Hebrew word means to be *written* or *engraved*. The Ten Commandments were written on stone tablets. Why? Because they didn't know anything about papyrus parchment? No, because God was sending a message: My Word is permanent; it is **unchangeable**. **Ps. 119:89**, *Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens*. So many people, including believers sometimes, come to the Word with the attitude, "Well, those things were true for then but they are not true now." For centuries everyone accepted that God created the world and that He did it in six days as the Bible said. But along came Charles Darwin and even believers are saying, "Now we know better; there was an evolutionary process that created it over billions of years." Except that now there's a whole bunch of scientists saying that there's a ton of evidence to talk in a framework of several thousand years! And God was right after all! Or think about the area of morality. For centuries immorality was a sin, divorce was a shameful thing and homosexuality was a despised practice but our generation has said these things are no longer so; we know better. Listen, the Word of God is settled forever. It does not change. Of course there are things in the Bible that were given to particular people and were meant for a specific place and time and were clearly not meant for all people everywhere to carry out. But the Bible itself explains that! I cannot presume to come to God and tell Him things are different now and His decree doesn't apply to me! His Word is unchanging! Thirdly, Nehemiah said God's Word:

3. it is a law to us The root of the word *law* means to be just, fair, righteous; it is **right** - **Ps. 12:6**, *...the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times*. It can't get any more pure or right; it has no flaws. There is nothing wrong with it. I can't come to an Almighty God who is absolutely holy and pure and righteous and tell Him that what He says isn't fair, what He commands isn't right because I don't like it! If God says it, it is right because God is right.

In 1874 the Scriptures were under severe attack by critics, and John W. Haley published a defense entitled Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible. In the preface he wrote, "Finally, let it be remembered that the Bible is neither dependent upon nor affected by the success or failure of my book. Whatever may become of the latter, whatever may be the verdict passed upon it by an intelligent public, the Bible will stand. In the ages yet to be, when its present assailants and defenders are moldering in the dust, and when our very names are forgotten, God's Word will be, as it has been during the centuries past, the guide and solace of millions." Now if the Bible is what it claims to be, then:

II. We Must Comprehend The Nature Of Our Response To God's Word Go back and look at Nehemiah's words in (1:7a) Nehemiah came to see that:

1. disobedience is rebellion against God's authority It is the creature telling the Creator to "go take a hike!" It is the child telling the Father that He has no right to tell him what to do! But we don't look at it that way. So often we see obedience as a "take it or leave it" proposition, simply because God has allowed us the freedom to choose. We think, "I'll find out what it says and decide later whether to obey it." Disobedience is not some misdemeanor committed by a child. When a soldier treats the order of his commanding officer like that there is a special word for it: insubordination, the failure to submit to orders. God's word for it is rebellion. But it's even more than that; Nehemiah says that:

2. disobedience is utterly wicked Let's think about an Old Testament story while you turn to 1 Sam. 15, shall we? God gave King Saul a direct order through the prophet Samuel to go and totally destroy the Amalekites. Saul went and attacked them and conquered them but he left their king alive and he brought back some of their livestock. He came back to Samuel saying, "I have carried out the Lord's instructions!" And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears?!" Now look at Samuel's comment: **1 Sam. 15:22-23**. Did you get that? Disobedience is as wicked and horrible in God's eyes as witchcraft and idolatry. To know what God has told me to do and not do it is just as evil in His sight as abortion or some violent act. Lawbreaking is lawbreaking and sin is sin. To break a law is to be a lawbreaker; it is utter wickedness whether it looks big or little. That is how eating one piece of fruit could condemn the whole human race. It is not the magnitude of the act in our eyes that determines its character; it is the rebellion against the authority of God that makes it wicked.

Now if you and I get ahold of that it will change our lives. It will make a tremendous difference in the way we listen to and read God's Word. In fact, when the people in Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day were back in Jerusalem and renewed spiritually, God worked this very change in them. They listened to God's Word in a brand new way. So let's go over to the eighth chapter of Nehemiah and examine that because it is important for us:

III. We Must Comprehend The Process Of Listening To God's Word (8:1-3) Can you imagine that? Imagine if this sermon had started at 6 AM this morning and instead of nice cushioned pews you were standing up the whole time and instead of preaching and giving you illustrations, I was simply reading the books of Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy with brief explanations of various sections. Would you still be here? (Don't answer that!) But verse 3 says they listened *attentively*! They were desperately hungry; they wanted to hear and know the Word of God. Why? Because God had been at work in their hearts and they had a fresh vision of just how important it is to know what His Word says and

they didn't want to miss a bit of it! So from them we can learn what it really means to listen to God's Word. First of all, as we listen:

1. we must approach it humbly (5-6) When Ezra opened the book they all stood up out of respect and then they all praised God and knelt and bowed down with their faces touching the ground like you see pictures of the Muslims doing when they pray. Of course I'm not saying that we have to do all of that every time we open our Bible, but we DO have to approach it with the same kind of attitude. We have to come to it in humbleness because this is the very Word of God and be in readiness to do whatever it tells us. If we don't come in this attitude, it will never yield to us its treasures. Second, as we listen:

2. we must understand it thoroughly (7-8) These Levites explained what was being read to the people clearly as they heard it being read. We cannot profit very much from a cursory reading of the Word, from just reading for reading's sake as though reading the Bible was some act of merit in itself. We have to invest the attention and the time it takes to understand what we are reading or hearing. First of all:

a. we must understand what it says Sometimes the language gets in the way and we have to read it several times or in some other translation to figure out exactly what is being said in the first place. But then we must go further:

b. we must understand what it means And that often means reading a commentary or comparing a couple of different translations or even asking somebody to explain it. This is important. Unless we understand it thoroughly, we can't begin to obey it properly. But the final step is this:

3. we must apply it personally (9) The people understood that what they had been reading applied to themselves. They looked at their lives and said, "We have not been doing what God says we should do!" and they wept! When we come to the Word of God, we must not only come with an attitude of humbleness and a determination to find out what it means, but we must come with the question on our lips, "What does this mean in MY LIFE? What things need to change for ME? What things do I need to start doing? What does God want ME to know?" The Bible is not a book for somebody else. It is God's Word to ME, individually and personally and as I read it I need to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what it is that He's trying to say for my own life!

Dr. James M. Gray, a former president of the Moody Bible Institute, commented on Jeremiah 15:16, "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty." He said, "There's a great difference between finding the Word and eating it. Swallowing makes digestion possible, and when these functions are normal in their working, the result is health and strength, and all the usefulness and joy of living. Putting the Word into your mind is like holding food in your mouth; it allows you to get the first full taste of it. Prayer then does for your spirit what saliva does for your body. Turning a Scripture around and around, thinking of it from many points of view, asking questions about it, and searching for its meaning in a commentary, is like chewing that makes good assimilation possible. The only way to hold the Word in your mind is to memorize it! Make this task as easy for yourself as possible by fixing your attention on only a small portion at a time. This way it can be readily recalled throughout the busy day. You will find that concentrating on the meaning of each word and phrase will give you new strength and joy, and help you to become fruitful in the Lord." Martin Luther said, "For several years I have read the Bible through twice in 12 months. It is a great and powerful tree, each word of which is a mighty branch. Each of these branches have I well shaken, so desirous was I to know what each one bore and what it would give me. And the shaking of them has never disappointed me."

How about you? Do you comprehend that the Book you hold in your hand is the very Word of Almighty God to you? Will you eat it, every day? Will you shake its branches? Will you hear the Word of God and bow before it in obedience?

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Self: The Conviction That Precedes Spiritual Revitalization - 1:6-7

The first thing that happens when God begins to do a new work of spiritual revitalization in the hearts of His people is that we catch a new vision of Him. We see anew how great and awesome He is and how great His love for us is. And because of that a second thing happens: we get a new respect for His Word. We understand its full authority as the just command of Almighty God to us and we see its right to rule our lives. And then the third thing happens, which we'll talk about today. We see ourselves afresh in light of who God is and what His Word says. And the result of that is what we commonly call conviction of sin. The English word *convict* means *convince*. To be convicted means I become convinced of my sin. Focusing on this concept is particularly necessary for us because we live today in a generation and a society that has somehow managed to virtually obliterate both the meaning and the consciousness of sin in people. Our culture has taught us that God is irrelevant to our daily lives. He either doesn't exist or is some good-natured heavenly grandfather you'll meet after you die. It has taught us that morality is relative, that right and wrong are simply norms set by a society and they change over time and that what's right is what's right for ME at the moment. And the more this climate is all around us, the more deadened and insensitive our consciences become to sin. We do wrong and we don't feel it any more. We

have no sense of offending a Holy God. We see ourselves as basically nice people who make a few mistakes now and then, good people who have a few flaws. After all, we're only human! Jonathan Edwards, the great New England preacher of the early 1700's who was the chief voice of the Great Awakening in America, a movement in which thousands of people were converted to Christ, wrote this in trying to describe what he saw: *"Persons are first awakened with a sense of their miserable condition by nature, the danger they are in of perishing eternally and that it is of great importance to them that they speedily escape and get into a better state. Those who before were secure and senseless are made sensible of how much they were in the way to ruin, in their former courses....When awakenings first begin, their consciences are commonly most exercised about their outward vicious course or other acts of sin, but afterwards are much more burdened with a sense of heart sins, the dreadful corruption of their nature, their enmity against God, the pride of their hearts, their unbelief, their rejection of Christ, the stubbornness and obstinacy of their wills and the like."* He, of course, was writing about unsaved people being awakened to their need of salvation. In saving us God brings upon us by means of the Holy Spirit a genuine convincing of our sin. I remember it in my own case at 15, being scared to death that I did not have Christ and would be lost and I prayed by my bed at night for God to save me but I had no assurance that He did for weeks. It was an awful, heavy feeling! But now that we are saved, that same Holy Spirit lives right inside of us and one of His functions is still to convince us where there is sin in our lives. So when God begins to wake up and revitalize a believer who has become callous and self-centered and backslidden, the Holy Spirit does much the same thing. He erases that insensitivity into which we have sunk and brings us into a fresh clearer vision of just how we really are before God. So when spiritual revitalization begins to happen to me three things will happen. First:

I. I Will Comprehend The Sin In My Life My thinking will change and I will get a new understanding of myself in the light of God and His Word. That's what happened when God revitalized Nehemiah. You can see it in his prayer in **1:6-7**. Nehemiah sees himself and his people in a whole brand new outlook. Before, everything is fine, hunky-dory, no problem. But when God begins to work in me, I begin to understand things in a new light. First:

1. I will recognize the FACT of my disobedience, the fact that there actually is something wrong with me and the way I'm living. I am disobeying my Heavenly Father. Our tendency in the flesh is to justify ourselves in everything we do, isn't it? If I lose my temper, it's always the other person's fault and I'm justified in doing it because they provoked me. If I do something without permission, I justify it with, "Well nobody told me I couldn't do that!" When I don't tell the whole story, I justify it by saying, "Well, I didn't actually lie; I just didn't tell everything." Conviction begins with the Holy Spirit changing my mind so I am able to look at myself and my actions and see them in truth, so I comprehend that I have actually disobeyed God and there is no excuse for it. But once I get there, the Holy Spirit takes me even further:

2. I will recognize the NATURE of my disobedience Notice the end of verse 6, *the sins we...have committed AGAINST YOU. We have acted VERY WICKEDLY toward YOU!* That is what I begin to comprehend:

a. I have sinned against God Himself Even David, the man after God's own heart, went through a time of spiritual deadness and laxity and backsliding when his love for God waxed cold. I'm sure he kept on going to the Temple and singing his Psalms and saying his prayers but on the inside he had drifted away. It came to a head on that fateful night walking on his rooftop when he saw Bathsheba and desired her and committed adultery with her and she turned up pregnant. It led to desperate attempts to cover up his sin and eventually to secretly murdering her husband and marrying her. The child was born and David was still going about his business as usual until one day God sent conviction in the person of the prophet Nathan who pointed his finger at David and said, *YOU are the man*. David's response is noteworthy. He says immediately, *I have sinned against the Lord*. But to see the process that went on inside of him, let's turn to Psalm 51, his prayer on that occasion. **Psalm 51:1-4**. The first thing that grabs him is what we've been talking about, verse 4, *Against YOU, YOU only, have I sinned!* It was not primarily against Bathsheba, not primarily against Uriah, not primarily against Israel as her king, though it DID injure all of those; it was first and foremost against God! When I sin, I have committed an act that is against my great, awesome, loving God! And if you look closely you'll discover that there are four words, synonyms, that David uses in these verses to describe what he has done. In vs. 1 and 3 He uses the word:

- **transgression**: The Hebrew root means *to rebel or revolt*. When I sin, **I have refused God's command**. I know His order. I know what He has said in His Word and I have rebelled against His authority. I have turned to my own way and decided to transgress His command, to openly defy the Living God, my Heavenly Father. How many of you enjoy watching Super Nanny on TV? For those who may not know, she's this British lady who tries to teach clueless American parents how to raise their children. Anyway, the other night we were flipping channels and she was down on her knees nose to nose with this strong-willed curly-headed little boy. And whatever she told him to do, he screamed "NO!" and smacked her on the face, just like that! It's hard for me not to comment on that, but I mention it for our purpose, to say that's in effect what we're doing to God when we sin! That picture seems ludicrous to us because it's a little kid defying this huge adult. Yet how much more ludicrous is it for a tiny little human creature to defy his infinite Creator! Then in verse 2 David uses the word:

- **iniquity**: The Hebrew root of this word means to be *twisted, perverted, distorted*. You see, when I sin, **I have perverted God's order of things**. I have twisted and distorted His image that should be reflected in me. I have corrupted the way He made the world and me to work. I have acted against the very nature of things; the way I have acted is vile before Him! Also in verse 2 David uses the actual word:

- **sin:** The root of this word means to miss the way, *to miss the mark*. **I have fallen short of God's standard.** God has a standard of behavior, a standard of righteousness and purity and holiness that is all that He Himself is. And I have missed the mark. I'm not even on the target. My arrow hit the ground before it got half-way there! And finally, in verse 4 David says that what I have done is actually:

- **evil:** It is not just a mistake, not just an error of judgment, not just doing something stupid. **I have offended God's nature, all that He is.** I have chosen darkness over light. I have sided with Satan over God. I have done that which ought never be done, wrong, evil!

Until I learn to see the seriousness of my sin, I'll never be done with it. I'll never want to let it go. Until I utterly abhor it because it is sin against God Himself, my Creator and Redeemer, I won't even want to get rid of it! But once I do, I will desperately want what David wanted. I will realize that:

b. I need to be cleansed from sin Listen to his prayer: **Psalm 51:7-10.** When I have sinned, God has to do something both for me and in me. I can't stay in this state; I have to get out of it. First:

- **I need to be restored to God** And notice that I deliberately did NOT use the word *forgiven*. When we talk about forgiveness, we are usually referring to being released from the guilt of what we have done. For us who believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, that was taken care of at the moment of our salvation. When we placed our trust in Him, a great exchange took place. Our sins became His as He died at the cross and His righteousness became ours. By faith we are forgiven for all our sins once for all, forever. When I sin as a believer, in that sense it is already forgiven at the cross before I commit it, though God forbid I take that lightly. But what HAS happened is that my action has created a great gulf in the close personal relationship that I have with my Heavenly Father. He cannot draw near to me because I have chosen to defy and disregard Him nor can I draw near to Him with a clean conscience and open heart until I settle this issue. I need to be restored to God in this relational sense and:

- **I need to be changed by God** David cries, *Create in me a clean heart, O God...* "Do something in me; change me or I'll do it again! I couldn't save myself and now I find that I can't keep myself from sinning! But You can, Lord! Take control of my life and change it! Take out this sinful thing and make me to live YOUR life."

That's what true conviction of sin is really like. I will recognize the FACT of my disobedience. I will recognize the NATURE of my disobedience, how awfully serious it is. And thirdly:

3. I will recognize the REWARD of my disobedience The people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day experienced this same conviction of sin once he came there. And you can see it in the prayer that the leaders of the people pray to God in chapter 9. In their prayer we find two more elements in conviction. Look at it - **9:32-35**. What are they saying?

a. I deserve whatever consequences I have experienced They recounted in their prayer the whole history of Israel's disobedience to God. By their time God had disciplined Israel by sending her into captivity and at that very moment they were living, not as free men, but as servants of the King of Persia. It was a hard, struggling life they were experiencing, but they pray, "You are right and we are wrong; whatever has happened to us, we deserve!" All sin has consequences. It promises a great reward but what it brings is suffering. If I drive drunk, I go to jail. If I am unfaithful it destroys my marriage and impacts my children forever. And when consequences come my flesh wants to complain, doesn't it? Real conviction sees that I deserve discipline, that whatever consequences I experience from my actions, I deserve. And it also sees the opposite, that:

b. I don't deserve the mercy I have experienced - 9:29-31 They pray, "Time after time we've rebelled and YET You have been patient and gracious and not given us ALL that we deserve!" Real conviction sees that God doesn't HAVE to be merciful to me, but in the midst of my rebellion He HAS been merciful and the fact that He longs to restore me and change me even now is not something I deserve but an act of sheer mercy and love.

And so if God is revitalizing my heart, I will comprehend the sin in my life and I will flee to God on my knees and I will do the second major thing I want to point out this morning:

II. I Will Confess The Sin In My Life That's what Nehemiah did. He comprehended the nature of what he and his people had done and he ran to God and said in 1:6, *I CONFESS...* Now what is that? Confessing simply means AGREEING with God. It is telling God you understand and you agree with His view of your behavior. It means not defending yourself, not justifying what you did, not making excuses, but simply coming to God and admitting, "What You're saying to my heart is right; I have sinned against You. I'm sorry!" You'll probably say, "Forgive me!" but what you're really asking for is not eternal forgiveness of guilt, but rather the restoring of full relationship with nothing between you and God. Now look with me at the promise of **1 John 1:9**. This verse applied at our salvation. When we confessed our sin and called to God to save us, He was faithful and just to forgive all our sins once for all forever and to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness by re-creating us a brand new person on the inside. But its principle also applies to us now as His children. When we confess our sins, He is ALWAYS faithful and just to send that sin away, to remove it from between us, to restore us to the joy of close fellowship with Him. Confession is what God is just waiting for. He longs for me to be fully restored more than I

could ever long for it! And finally, once I comprehend my sin and I confess my sin, if I am for real, I will do a third major thing:

III. I Will Correct The Sin In My Life Look with me at **2 Cor. 7:8-11** Worldly sorrow means, "I'm sorry I got caught" or "I really shouldn't have done that" or "I know it's not right but I can't help it". Godly sorrow ALWAYS produces repentance, a change in thinking that leads to a change in behavior. If I am genuinely sorry, I will correct what I have been doing; I will stop it. By God's grace I will change and that's the second part of His promise. He will cleanse us from unrighteousness; He will empower us and help us to get it out of our lives.

Spiritual revitalization always begins with a new and close look in the mirror at ourselves. That's what happened to Nehemiah and that's what has to happen to us. Maybe this story by Joe Harris will help God to knock on the door of your heart: *In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in the room. There were no distinguishing features except for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read "Girls I have Liked". I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one. And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn't match. A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching. A file named "Friends" was next to one marked "Friends I have Betrayed". The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. "Books I Have Read", "Lies I Have Told", "Comfort I Have Given", "Jokes I Have Laughed At". Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: "Things I've Yelled at My Brothers". Others I couldn't laugh at: "Things I Have Done in My Anger", "Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents". I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped. I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my 20 years to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature. When I pulled out the file marked "Songs I Have Listened To", I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly, and yet after two or three yards, I hadn't found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much by the quality of music, but more by the vast amount of time I knew that file represented. When I came to a file marked "Lustful Thoughts", I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: "No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!" In an insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn't matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it. Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh. And then I saw it. The title bore "People I Have Shared the Gospel With". The handle was brighter than those round it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand. And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that the hurt started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file helms swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key. But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn't bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one? Finally He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn't anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn't say a word. He just cried with me. Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card. "No!" I shouted rushing to Him. All I could find to say was "No, no," as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn't be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood. He gently took the card back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign the cards. I don't think I'll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, "It is finished." I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written. Spiritual renewal begins with a trip to your "file room". Will you go with Him there?*

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Surrender: The Faith That Characterizes Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 2

Let me review once more the process that happens when God begins to do a work of spiritual renewal or revitalization in our lives. First, we begin to get a fresh vision of God, of who He is and how great He is and how great is His love for us. Second, His Word takes on fresh meaning for us; we see its authority over our lives. Third, in light of that, we see ourselves as we truly are and fall under a genuine conviction of the sin in our own lives and we confess it to God and determine to correct it. Now the fourth thing that happens is that we rise to a whole new level of commitment. Or rather, to put it the opposite way, we fall to a new level of surrender. *In 1864 it became clear to the leaders of the Confederate States that their army was defeated, their supplies were exhausted and their hope of victory was gone. And so General Robert E. Lee met General Ulysses S. Grant at Appamattox Courthouse to work out terms of surrender. And at that courthouse Lee did something monumental; he handed Grant his sword. And in that one symbolic act control over the Confederate States was passed completely to the rightful government of the United States of America and to the legitimately elected President, Abraham Lincoln. It was an absolute surrender.* And when God revitalizes our cold hearts, that's what we realize: our Creator and Redeemer and Sovereign Lord wants us to hand Him full and complete control of our lives. So many times we want to come to Him and negotiate "terms of surrender" for ourselves. "Lord, I'll do this if You'll do that!" Or "Lord, I'll do whatever you want, but please don't ask me to do THAT!" But God has only one set of terms that are acceptable to Him: absolute, unconditional surrender where He is Lord, where He is the one in charge of your life, without hesitation or reservation. That's what Nehemiah came to over his four month period of praying about the situation of His people in Jerusalem. Let's look together at:

I. The Surrender Of Nehemiah In Approaching The King (1:11) Now this doesn't look like much to us at first reading, but Nehemiah has been fasting and praying about this one thing for four months. He knows God wants him to go in and speak to King Artaxerxes, the King of Persia, his King. Every day he has been tasting the King's wine to make sure it is not poisoned and bringing the wine to the King. Every day he has been in the King's presence. But today's the day he's going to ask the King about what's on his heart. Now if I could read between the lines a little bit, I assume there has been something of a struggle going on in Nehemiah's heart. When God broke his heart over the condition of Jerusalem four months earlier when the news arrived, he wasn't ready at that time to speak to the King about it. He was sad, crushed, overcome with sorrow, but 2:1 tells us that for all of those four months he did not dare to let it show in the King's presence. That is, until today. In a sense, this prayer of chapter 1 is really Nehemiah's prayer of surrender. It is where he tells God, "OK, I'll go speak to the King and I'm trusting You to give me success and grant me favor with him!" Now lest we take this decision of his too lightly, I'd like to point out:

1. the hindrances that tried to keep him from trusting God There were some serious things that were in the way, that kept him from doing what seems like such a simple thing. First of all:

a. he was hindered by history Some 14-20 years earlier in his reign, King Artaxerxes had received a complaint about the Jews' attempts to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem and at that time it was painted to him as an attempted rebellion. So he published a decree which we have in **Ezra 4:18-23**. King Artaxerxes had decreed that the work of building should be stopped until he such time as he would issue a personal order to do it. Artaxerxes had done his homework; he had investigated and saw Jerusalem from his viewpoint as a trouble-making city, one which was always trying to rebel against its conquerors instead of being peacefully subject to them. Nehemiah was not only going to ask him to reverse his own decree but also to change his mind about the city, to trust that no rebellion would come out of it. And of course, he would be held personally responsible if it did! So many times, we are kept from surrendering to God by what we know of the past. We know how things have been and what has happened "back there". And if we trust God and do what He wants now, we're afraid that history is going to dictate present reality. If I stand up for Jesus now, the same thing is going to happen that happened in the past or that happened to others and history keeps me from surrendering. Second:

b. he was hindered by opportunity (2:1-3) Did you hear Nehemiah admit his fear? In the Persian world, the King was like a god; he had absolute authority over life and death. Nehemiah could not even risk expressing normal emotions for fear of offending him and dying in the process so daily he painted on his smiley face and kept up his duties. But when he was finally ready to trust God, he couldn't just come out and ask the king. He had to begin by simply letting himself look sad so the king would ask *him* to speak. You just don't speak to the king except by invitation! Do you remember Esther's story? She was Queen of Persia and was married to King Artaxerxes father, King Xerxes. She couldn't even go in and see her own husband unless he invited her, under penalty of death! And before she could ask him what she wanted, she prepared two days worth of banqueting first. Imagine what it took for Nehemiah to even bring up the subject of Jerusalem once he was asked! Sometimes we know what God wants us to do but we are kept from it because we have no opportunity to do it; we don't see how we can do it; there are too many obstacles in the way that keep us from it. Third:

c. he was hindered by responsibility (4-5) He felt God wanted him to go to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls, but he was the King's trusted cupbearer who protected his life. For him to even appear to want to do anything else was dangerous business; the King could easily mistake that for disloyalty and he'd end up impaled on a stake! But even if he did ask, the King would never let him go because of the responsibilities he had. And sometimes we know what God wants us to do and we are kept from it by the responsibilities we have! The responsibility to provide for our family or to care for our children or to keep the family business going stands clearly in the way of what God is saying to us.

So Nehemiah was left with a choice: "Do I trust God enough to surrender and do His will *in spite of* the history, *in spite of* the lack of opportunity, *in spite of* the responsibilities? Do I trust Him enough to simply obey, in faith that He will have to remove all the hindrances that stand in the way if He wants me to do this?" It's the same choice that we are faced with. And though he wrestled with it, Nehemiah's answer was "Yes!" Now let's see what that means; let's look at:

2. the things he chose to trust God with in the process First, it meant that:

a. he laid down his life He made the decision that obeying God was worth his life, if need be. His decision was like Esther's decision - do you remember it? Her husband the King had passed a law that all the Jews would be killed on a certain day. Esther wrestled and struggled with talking to the King; she hadn't been called into his presence in 30 days and to go uninvited could mean death. But look at her decision: **Esther 4:15-16**. "I will trust God and go anyway and if I die, I die! It is worth my life!" That was Nehemiah's position, *If I perish, I perish!* "Lord, I surrender to You my life. If you choose to take it, take it. I put the decision of life and death in Your hands!" Second, it meant that:

b. he laid down his livelihood He may have been only a servant but he had a privileged position. He was a personal servant to the King and was, no doubt, well treated. Going to the King, even if it didn't get him killed, might get him imprisoned or reduced to slavery or, at the least, fired. He laid down before God the security of his livelihood. Do you remember Matthew? He was a tax collector; he made good money; he had a nice thing going there in Galilee collecting taxes for the Romans and pocketing the extra profit. But **Lk. 5:27-28** says ...*Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi [Matthew] sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.* He left it all to follow Jesus. So did Peter and Andrew, James and John; they left their nets and their boats and their fishing business and followed Jesus. They thought, "Lord, you are more to me than my livelihood; if you want to take it from me, take it!" That's what Nehemiah chose by his decision. Then thirdly, it meant that:

c. he laid down his lifestyle He was asking to leave the life of the palace, the life of the royal court, to go and live in a city full of rubble and burned down houses, to become a governor and organizer of men who lived in rough conditions. Amos was a shepherd and a farmer but God called him to be a prophet and to go speak His word to Israel. And on one occasion when one of his enemies told him to shut up and go home, here's what he said: **Amos 7:14-15**, *Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"* "This isn't my idea; this is God's idea. God took me from my lifestyle and gave me His. I laid mine down and now I want no other! Lord, You are more to me than my surroundings and my way of life. If you want to put me elsewhere, do it!" That's where Nehemiah was! He laid everything down before the Lord, chose to trust Him and went in to make his request before the king.

Now when you do that, when you surrender everything to God, you might as well do it knowing that it will have consequences, just as it did for Nehemiah. Let's look at:

3. the consequences of his act of surrender The first one was great!

a. his request was miraculously granted (6) Stop and take that in a moment! *It pleased the king to send him!* That is nothing less than a miracle. Only God could have done that! Only God could have turned the King's heart to reverse his own decree, to release his most trusted servant, not for a couple of weeks but permanently! 5:14 tells us that he did not end up returning to the King for TWELVE YEARS. This was not a request for a leave of absence; it was a job transfer. He was made governor of Jerusalem permanently! Without a hint of hesitation or restriction on the King's part. That was God! When you surrender everything to God and decide to trust Him and do what He calls you to do, you WILL see God sweep away all the tremendous obstacles that stand in the way and accomplish His will and His purpose. You will see God at work; in fact you will be joining Him in what He's doing! However, that is not the *only* consequence of Nehemiah's surrender...

b. it led him on to face danger (7-9) The journey to Jerusalem was almost a thousand miles! It was a long, difficult and dangerous trip. There was danger, not only of attack by bandits but from petty political enemies whose territories he would have to pass through on the way. That's why he asked for safe-conduct letters and that's why the King sent army officers and cavalry with him! Don't think that surrender guarantees safety! Surrendering everything to the will of God may put you in harm's way. Moreover, surrender:

c. it led him on to face apathy (11-17) When he got there he made this exploratory tour by night. These walls had been in ruins for 150 years; Israelites had been living in the midst of them for nearly a century and there they lay. Nobody had really done anything about it. Nobody seemed to care but him. Surrendering everything to the will of God may make you a minority. It may be that nobody will understand what you're doing or why you want to do it. It may be that nobody will care. Further his surrender:

d. it led him on eventually to face opposition (10, 19-20) When he got there, the local big-wigs, Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem, decided to fight him all the way. Instead of cooperation as the King's representative, he was opposed at every step. His road was paved with thorns instead of roses. Surrendering everything to the will of God will often put you in the middle of a battle. People won't like it; they will oppose you and try to stop you from what God is compelling you to do. But surrendering everything to God gave Nehemiah one thing that made it all worthwhile:

e. it gave him the joy of seeing God work When he went to the people and shared his plan God worked in their hearts... **(18)** They caught his vision, were encouraged by his testimony and joined his purpose. They said, *Let us rise up and build!* And they began the process! And in 52 days, what had not happened in a hundred years was done. The wall of Jerusalem was built! Nehemiah saw God accomplish His purpose through his own hands and so have hundreds of other people both in Scripture and throughout history who have surrendered to God and given Him their lives unconditionally. So will you today and no matter how difficult it may seem at the moment, in the end it will be worth it all. So let's go to the New Testament and talk about:

II. The Surrender Jesus Wants From Me You see, when I call Jesus "Lord", that means King. He is my Master; I am His servant. And He calls me to surrender in exactly the same way that He called Nehemiah. He said so.

1. He wants me to surrender my possessions To the rich young ruler He said, **Mt. 19:21** ...*"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* He failed that test because he loved his things more than his Lord. Would I? Now I'm not saying Jesus wants you to literally sell everything you have, but He does want me to lay everything I have at His feet and put it at His disposal to do with as He wishes, to stop saying, "This is mine" and say, "Lord, all this is yours". And:

2. He wants me to surrender my relationships Look with me at **Mt. 10:37**. In **Lk. 14:26** He uses the word *hate* but Matthew spells out what He means. Is there a person in my life that I love more than Him? If obeying God required me to be separated from my parents or from my children, from my dearest friends or even my spouse, would I resist and rebel against Jesus or follow Him? That is exactly what it means for many of our new brothers and sisters in other lands; to choose Jesus may mean being disowned and hated and cast out or even attacked by their own family, their village, their friends. But it is for me too! Have I laid my family, my dearest relationships on the altar and said, "Lord, these are yours; do with them and do with me whatever you will!" In fact, Jesus:

3. He wants me to surrender my life Read the next two verses with me **Mt. 10:38-39**. He died for me. Surrender means being willing to die for Him, to be executed on a cross like He was, if that's what He chooses. Here that seems like such a remote thought. In 2002 Bonnie Witherall and her husband Gary were serving the Lord happily together in Lebanon. She volunteered at a medical clinic and they were helping plant a church. One day she rolled out of bed early to go open the clinic. There was a knock at the door and when she opened it, an armed gunman took her life on the spot. Her husband wrote a book; he titled it *Total Abandon* and his message, based on Bonnie's life is simple: that we need to be willing to give up everything, even to place our very lives in His hand and serve Him with total abandon of self. Isn't that what Jesus said? **Lk. 14:33**, *In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple*. And that includes the fact that:

4. He wants me to surrender my will to His as He did to the Father in the garden the night before the cross. **Mt. 26:42** ...*may your will be done*. Not what I want; I choose what YOU want. Even if it's a cross. Even if it means suffering. Even if it means losing everything. But the good news is that:

5. He promises me the joy of His reward now and forever - Mark 10:28-30 Peter said to him, *"We have left everything to follow you!"* "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, *"no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life*. It is worth it. Jesus said, "I have a hundred fold blessing to give you in this life, for everything you lay at My feet, I will reward you with spiritual blessings you can't imagine in the midst of your suffering. You will know the immeasurable joy of having lived life with Me carrying out My purpose and you will spend eternity with Me enjoying the glories of My Kingdom, sharing My joy."

Now the choice is yours. When God begins to do a work of spiritual revitalization in you and shows you who He is and who you really are, it always comes down to this: "I am God; will you surrender everything in and about your life to Me?" I have told you this many times, but I fought that battle when I was 19 years old. God spoke to me one Sunday morning

after a service like this through a suggestion that was made to me by my pastor. He said, "God keeps bringing you to my mind and He won't stop. It's like He's trying to tell me something for you. Have you ever considered going into the ministry?" I shook my head "no" but in my heart I basically said, "No! I want to be a biologist. I want to work outdoors. I don't like crowds of people. I don't want to go away to school and have to live wherever I get sent." And I began to try to make bargains with the Lord, "Lord, I'll do anything you want. I'll sing with a group; I'll help in anything else; just NOT THAT!" And for 6 months I was absolutely miserable. All the joy was gone from my life. There was no peace, no satisfaction, not at school, not at work, not in the hobbies that I enjoyed. Until one night I went back to God and said, "OK God, you win! I will do whatever you want me to do. You are free to send me anywhere you want and do anything with me that you like. You are God; I surrender." And in that moment it was like a giant weight was lifted off my shoulders. I knew what God wanted me to do and set out to do it counting on Him to make a way. And I can honestly say as I stand here 30 years later, I wouldn't have traded this life-long adventure of following Him and being involved in His purpose for anything. Nothing I've had to let go of along the way holds a candle to it. That's what Nehemiah discovered. How about you? Jesus wants you to have an Appamattox. He wants you to hand Him your sword, to absolutely, unconditionally surrender full control of everything about your life to Him as its rightful Owner. I can tell you that to keep on fighting the battle isn't worth it! Give up, give in, hand it to Him today.

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Building: The Effect Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 3

When God begins to send spiritual revitalization and renewal among His people and they surrender everything to Him, it begins to have a clear and noticeable effect. Let me read to you the words of Jonathan Edwards as he describes the beginnings of the Great Awakening in his little town of Northampton MA in 1734: *"And then it was, in the latter part of December, that the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work amongst us; and there were, very suddenly, one after another, five or six persons who were to all appearance savingly converted, and some of them wrought upon in a very remarkable manner.... Presently upon this, a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages; the noise amongst the dry bones waxed louder and louder. All other talk about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by; all the conversation in all companies and upon all occasions, was upon these things only.... The minds of people were wonderfully taken off from the world; it was treated amongst us as a thing of very little consequence. They seemed to follow their worldly business more as a part of their duty than from any disposition they had to it; the temptation now seemed to lie on that hand, to neglect worldly affairs too much, and to spend too much time in the immediate exercise of religion.... But although people did not ordinarily neglect their worldly business; yet there then was the reverse of what commonly is: religion was with all sorts the great concern, and the world was a thing only by the bye. The only thing in their view was to get the kingdom of heaven, and everyone appeared pressing into it. The engagedness of their hearts in this great concern could not be hid; it appeared in their very countenances.... [Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative" - web, p. 6]* More than 600, he writes, were converted that year and soon visitors to town were converted and took home the effect of it and the awakening spread to other towns and then swept outward to engulf all of New England and then spread to the other colonies. That is the effect of spiritual revitalization. When God revives His people, their purpose in living changes and the result is that His church is built. Or, to make it personal, when God does a work in me and I make an absolute surrender of my life to Him:

I. God Changes My Purpose In Life: He gives me **A New Vision**, a new way of looking at the world. Look with me at **Neh. 2:17-18**. I like the KJV translation there; the people said *Let us rise up and build!* When God sent Nehemiah back to Jerusalem and revived their hearts, there was a change in their purpose. He gave them a new view of what their life was all about. They who were before artisans and merchants and farmers and weavers became builders, builders of Jerusalem! And that's what happens to me when God revitalizes my tired, dead old spiritual life; my whole purpose in living, my whole view of life and what I am here on earth for, changes. All of a sudden I realize that I am not really a plumber or a carpenter or a receptionist or a sales clerk; I am a builder of the Church of Jesus Christ! Now let's examine this great change for a moment. You see:

1. my natural view is self-centered Turn back with me to **Haggai 1:2-9**. This passage dates from about 100 years before Nehemiah's time, just after the first Jews had been freed to return from the Babylonian captivity. They had enough spiritual gumption to go back to Jerusalem and even to start building the Temple but afterwhile they just kind of forgot about God's project and worked at making their own houses and basically living self-centered lives. Everybody was busy building his own house, not God's house; with his own agenda, not God's agenda. And God in that day used the prophet Haggai to bring spiritual revitalization and get them back on track. But by Nehemiah's day the people of Jerusalem had relapsed to the same old place. The Temple was up, but the walls of Jerusalem were lying smashed to ruin along with most of the houses. Everybody was going about his own agenda again, instead of God's. And, sad to say, that is how many, many believers live today. That's how some of us sitting here this morning live every day of our lives. You see, when I am in need of spiritual renewal:

a. my needs are my primary focus I make my own decisions in life. I go about life as I have set it up. Yes, I'm a Christian and I go to church on Sunday. I decide whether I'll help do something in the church. I decide how much I'll give. But on Monday I go back to work and do what I do, the way I do it.... Do you hear the key word? !! My life is focused around what I and my family need and want and:

b. serving God is a secondary issue that is separate from the rest of life. I serve Him if I have the time or if the opportunity comes up. But it's secondary. I am first of all, Joe Jones, businessman, husband, father and I'm also a Christian; I serve God when I can. That doesn't sound so bad, does it? But it is built on this underlying premise that unfortunately too many people believe down deep:

c. God exists to meet my needs He is here for me! He is here to save me. He is here to help me. He is here to protect me. He is here to do for me what I cannot do for myself and that's why when He doesn't do what I want or believe I need Him to do, I get angry at Him or walk away from believing in Him. Do you see how very opposite of the truth this is? But when the Spirit of God begins to deal with my heart, that:

2. revitalization brings a new view that is God-centered Suddenly I realize that the world doesn't revolve around me; it revolves around God! I'm here for Him, my life is to accomplish HIS purpose. And what is that? Well, as my heart is awakened:

a. I have a new understanding of what God is doing in the world:

(1) I see His purpose: What is it? Look with me at **Mat. 16:18**. This passage is key; it's important. In it Jesus is revealing His whole plan for this age in one short phrase: *I will build my church!* Friends, the dearest and most important thing on earth to Jesus today is **building His church!** He put it another way in **24:14**. The Good News of the Kingdom of God, God's reign in the hearts of people through Jesus Christ HAS to be preached to every people, every ethnic group on earth before Jesus comes and this age is over. **Advancing his Kingdom** is what God is about! Bringing people to know Christ, to be discipled and built up in Christ and sent out next door and to the ends of the earth to bring others to Christ so that the church is built, THAT is what He's up to and wants done! In Nehemiah's day, He wanted His wall built; in our age He wants His church built until the project is completely finished and Jesus comes to claim it! And, of course, when I see His grand purpose:

(2) I see that I have a place in it Look at **Eph. 4:12-16**. Notice two things, His purpose in verse 12, *that the body of Christ may be built up* and His method in verse 16, *as each part does its work!* The body grows, builds itself up, when each part does the work it was intended to do. And I am a part! I am a ligament, a tendon, a toenail, a hair follicle or whatever I am, but I am A part of His body and each part of the body has only one purpose; it works to build up the body by doing its job. So in God's purpose of building the church, I have a place, an assignment to fulfill. God needs me! And when I see that:

b. I focus my life on His purpose. So:

(1) building His Kingdom becomes my primary focus I am on earth to build the church of Jesus Christ. It really does not matter how much money I amass or how many promotions I get or whether I can take that dream vacation my neighbor had. Money is a tool the Lord provides for me, His servant, so that I can serve His purpose. My job is not an end in itself; He placed me there to represent Him to minister to the people I work with or sell to to draw them to Christ. You see:

(2) everything else becomes integrated with that purpose It is not that I no longer care about my job or my home or my possessions; it is not that they don't matter. I just see them differently. They are all a part of how God has provisioned me and planned to use me to advance His Kingdom! PEOPLE become the most important thing in my life and seeing people find life in Christ and be built up in Him becomes the most precious thing on earth to me. One missionary just wrote from Kyrgyzstan on Wednesday that she and a friend had taken a nonbeliever out to dinner. She says, *The unbeliever had many questions. I had shared my testimony with her on Sunday. She asked my friend how she came to believe. It was so wonderful. Words can't express what that felt like- to hear someone asking about believing. She isn't ready to believe yet but you can tell she is seeking. Pray for this young lady. She would like to go out with us again. She said she will go to church again on Sunday. That is why I am here!* That's why we're ALL where we are! When God renews my heart I see that I have spent too much of my life chasing wood, hay and stubble and I start concentrating on the real treasure, the only thing that lasts forever, PEOPLE! To see people find life in Christ, to build them up in their most holy faith, and to present them to Jesus as devout worshippers who go out and give their lives to bringing Him more people, THAT becomes the most important task in the world to me! I rise up and build; I become a builder for life! Now once I see and commit myself to His purpose, a second thing happens:

II. God Clarifies My Assignment In Life: He gives me **A Strategic Purpose**, a place that I specifically fit into what He is doing. Now to most folks **Neh. 3** is simply a boring list of people who built a wall 2400 years ago. [Read 1-4] But really this is an exciting picture of what happened when spiritual revitalization hit the people of Jerusalem. As one man they rose up

and ALL became builders and this is the record of specifically how they did it. Now once I see that God's purpose for me is to be engaged in building the Kingdom:

1. He leads me to a particular place of labor This list tells *who* built *where*. It doesn't say that Nehemiah assigned each man a particular spot. I think it happened pretty spontaneously. They all got up and went to the wall and started to fit into the process where it was natural, where they could. Others came after them and filled in the gaps between. In essence, God led each of them to their particular place of labor and that's exactly what He does for us. He reveals and makes plain to each one of us the particular ministry that He wants us to have, the particular way and place in which we can use the gifts that He's given us to build His church with. Now:

a. that place may be near where I am For instance look at vs. **(23, 28-30)** Some people built the section of the wall that adjoined their own houses, the piece that was in front of, or beside, or next to, or across from where they lived. For many of us God's assigned place of labor is that which is closest at hand. He may want to use me in the neighborhood where I live. Maybe I could impact the kids there by hosting a kid's club in the summer or being an influence as I let them hang out at my house with my kids. Maybe there are other wives with problems in their homes that would come and have tea and let me pray with them and enter their struggles. Maybe there are older people who need a loving hand with things or simply a listening ear in their loneliness that might lead them to listen to the most wonderful Story of all! He may want to use me where I work to pray for the people I interact with all the time, to find opportunities in their lives to get to know them and eventually introduce them to Jesus. Maybe help get a Bible study together there if it's allowed. Maybe I'm His agent at school, His means of impacting those friends that always want to hang out with me that have so many problems. Maybe I'm His person to pray for them, invite them to youth or Pioneer Club, and tell them what He means to me. God has given each one of us a host of opportunities to be involved in building His kingdom right in the place where we are every day. But on the other hand:

b. that place may have nobody near Look at verses **(2, 5, 7)** There were some parts of the wall that nobody lived near, so men from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon and Mizpah, from the outlying towns, came to Jerusalem to help build in those areas. And you know there are still a lot of places in the world where God wants to build His church but He has nobody near to do it! He has to send somebody there to build it. He may call me to be a missionary, to actually move to a place where there are few believers to plant and grow the church. He may call me to be a prayer warrior and a giver as part of the team of someone else that He sends. He may want me to go on one of our short term teams and use my skills to impact the nations. Or He may lead me to volunteer to go to a Nursing Home or into a prison or to be involved in an outreach to a dark neighborhood where His light is not shining. But wherever it is, if I am seeking my part in His purpose, God will give me a clear sense of where and how I am to build! But God also does something else:

2. He makes me part of a team Let's read verses **(1-3)** again. Notice all the plurals. Small teams of people worked to build each section of the wall: a group of priests, a group of neighbors from a town, an extended family group. No one person could do the job alone nor did anyone act like he was doing it alone. Even when it mentions a single name, it almost certainly means the man and his family or friends working together. And in that is another beautiful truth. When I enter into the work of building God's Kingdom:

a. I'm part of a local team and a larger team We're looking at the task of building almost two solid miles of wall around Jerusalem. Each section was built by a small team, while all the groups together formed the entire team of people that built the wall. God never meant for me to go at this alone, so He makes me a part of a local team that is involved in building a specific piece of His global project. Glenside Bible Church is one of those local teams. And God has made me part of this local team so we can build both where we are and around the world in places He's called us to impact. And yet as part of this team, I am also part of a global team of thousands and thousands of local teams like this one all over the world and together we are the global team that is building the Church! And doing my small task that God has assigned me to as part of my little team ultimately involves me in building up the entire body of Christ. Isn't that neat? Now because I am part of a team and my team is part of a team:

b. I operate in cooperation and coordination Look again at verse **(2)**. Notice the words *adjoining* and *next to*. Can you imagine if each little group worked on its own schedule or used its own plumbline and plans to place its part without respect to the next section? What would the wall look like? Like a whole mess of disjointed little walls set near each other, almost like those old wooden fences they used to build without posts by laying the ends of the next set of beams between the ends of this one so one section would angle this way and the next the opposite way. Have you ever seen those? They don't look like a real fence to me. When I am revitalized, God leads me to function in cooperation and coordination with other builders in my local ministry team and He leads my local team to function in cooperation and coordination with other local teams so that the church we build together looks like THE Church instead of fragmented bunches of believers. Ministry is a team process and I should always work hard at unity with my team!

So God leads me to my place of service, makes me part of a team and then I go to work and:

3. I labor with all my heart Look at **4:6**. The wall got built because now the people put their hearts into their labor. Some of us may know where and how God has called us to serve and have even been doing it, but maybe our hearts

aren't in it any more. We just do the same old thing we've been doing for years, week in and week out. But when God revitalizes us, our service takes on new meaning: "I am building the church; the work I do is GOD'S work! It's important!" and we do it with all our hearts. And when we do that, the end result is that:

III. God Builds His Church - 6:15 The job gets done faster than we would ever believe. They built two miles of wall in 52 days, think of it! What hadn't gotten done in 100 years got done in less than 2 months. Why? When we all become builders instead of living self-centered lives and compound that with the fact that there are millions of us, we could do in this one generation what hasn't gotten done in 2000 years. We could preach the Gospel to every people on earth and plant and build the church in every one of them. But it all has to start somewhere. It has to start here, with me, with us. What I'm trying to say to you this morning is so eloquently summed up in the words of William P. Merrill's old hymn which seems to echo the people's words from Neh. 2:18:

*Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
to serve the King of Kings!*

*Rise up, O men of God!
The Church for you doth wait;
her strength unequal to her task;
rise up, and make her great!*

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Enemies: The Hindering Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 4

Whenever God begins a work of spiritual revitalization in His people, whether it's within an individual or a whole body of believers, there is one thing you can bet on and never lose. Satan will ALWAYS do everything within his power to hinder and oppose it. Satan does not mind much if you go to church and sing songs now and again. He doesn't care that you put some money in the offering plate or listen to an occasional sermon or Sunday School lesson. But just let yourself be drawn to spend time with God and develop a powerful prayer life, surrender your whole life to God and let Him really begin to use you, let Him set your life on fire with a passion to build His kingdom and Satan minds! And He attacks! He'll do everything in his power to put the fire out and reduce you to where you were before, to keep you from living the life God really wants you to live. That's what happened in Nehemiah's day. Look at verse **(1a)** The Jews had lived in the rubble of Jerusalem for a hundred years and nobody bothered them much. But as soon as they began to build the wall as God told them to, it made certain people angry. Their very obedience raised up enemies to stand against them. And that is the first major fact that I think God wants to impress upon us this morning:

I. We Will Always Have Enemies I know that we don't like to think so. We would all like to think that somehow everyone can just live in peace with each other and let each other alone, but that is a pipe dream. Jesus warned us explicitly about that. Look with me at two New Testament passages. First turn to **John 15:20**. "What they did to Me, they will do to you! Sure, some will listen to what you teach; some will be saved. But they also persecuted Me; they arrested Me and tried Me and hung Me on a cross, so they WILL persecute you! In this world you will always have enemies!" It's sort of like this: the minute you were born here, you became an American and in that moment you had enemies simply by being born. There are people in this world (like radical Islamic terrorists you've seen on TV) that hate you and would love nothing more than to kill you and wipe you off the planet, just because you exist and are an American. You didn't have to do anything to develop their hatred and you can't do anything to erase it short of becoming exactly what they are. No amount of talking will take away their hatred and there is no place you can go where they'll be satisfied and simply let you alone. Only Jesus Christ can change the heart of an enemy like that. And the same thing is true in the spiritual realm; the minute I was born again into the Kingdom of God, the entire kingdom of darkness, led by the prince himself, became my enemy and set itself against me. Why? Because:

1. Satan continually seeks to hinder what God is doing Either he still labors under the illusion that he can beat God and take His place in the end or he's merely determined to do as much damage to God his enemy as he possibly can on the way to hell, but either way he always seeks to hinder and destroy wherever God is building His kingdom. Christ issued us more warnings over in Matthew 10, if you'll turn there. First of all, Satan:

a. he may work through family - Mt. 10:35-36 Your family may have been glad when you received Christ but in much of the world, it may not work that way. In Kyrgyzstan when Aida came home at age 20 and told her mother she was now a follower of Christ, her mother threw her out of her house with the clothes on her back. I believe Maxat's mother told him, "You are dead to me!" In the Chronicle in your bulletin today there is a request for an Afghani brother who hasn't even believed yet but his life is already in danger from his own family members simply

for spending time with believers! Even here how many husbands have railed against their wives' faith and forbid them to go to church. Sometimes Satan will raise up enemies to hinder you right in your own household. Or:

b. he may work through religious leaders - Mt. 10:17 Who were Jesus' worst mortal enemies? The most religious people of His day: the Pharisees, the religious leaders and teachers of the Jews. They plotted to kill Him His entire ministry. When God revitalized Martin Luther's heart, the church excommunicated him and would have put him to death if he hadn't been protected in Germany! When William Carey got up in a church meeting all on fire with a burden to go to India to build the church, the elders said, "Sit down young man! When God desires to convert the heathen He'll do it without your help or ours!" The church almost killed the modern missions movement of the last 300 years before it began! One of the biggest enemies of the growing evangelical church in the former Soviet Union countries has been the Russian Orthodox Church! Their leaders have stood with Islamic mullahs against believers! Sometimes Satan will raise up enemies to hinder you from those whom you would think would welcome your faith, from religious leaders. Or:

c. he may work through political authorities - Mt. 10:18 Sanballat was a governor who opposed Nehemiah and it was Pilate the Roman governor who ordered Jesus' crucifixion. It was the Roman Emperors who tried to stamp out the church for more than 200 years during its infancy because it was spreading all across the Empire, just as it is absolutely illegal and punishable by death in some countries today to convert to Christianity from Islam. In Kyrgyzstan today the SNB (the old KGB) is threatening to arrest pastors and throw out foreign workers as you'll also read in today's Chronicle, just as our leaders have already told us that we can't pray or teach anything about Christ in our schools.

On every hand, it seems, Satan raises up enemies to stand against us when all we want to do is love people and give them eternal life and help them any way we can. What irony! Why is that? Why do people hate and oppose us for no good reason? Well, Jesus said that:

2. people oppose us because we don't belong to their system Go back with me to **Jn. 15:18-19**. You and I don't belong. By choosing Jesus we have opted out of the system the people all around us are in; we've stepped outside the way their world works and they can't tolerate it. First of all:

a. our character and message exposes their true nature Jesus said men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. If I live an honest life, my coworker who steals from the company gets angry because it points out how wrong he is and pokes holes in all his rationalizations. If I tell the truth, if I say, for instance, that homosexuality is a wrong moral choice, not a genetic trait, that makes people angry because it exposes the nature of what they want to do. Further:

b. our success threatens their power or profit Sanballat was the governor of Samaria to the north and he saw his power and rule over the Jews slipping away. That's what makes religious leaders so mad; their power and domination is threatened when people start to really follow Jesus. The silversmiths at Ephesus rioted against Paul and the believers because, as the church grew and people stopped worshipping idols, their livelihood was going down the tubes! Organized crime or prostitution, the illegal drug industry, and even corrupt government officials are often threatened by the growth of the church because honesty and truth kill their income and their control over people.

Yes, we will always have enemies; the world will hate us if we live for Jesus. *In fact, Paul said, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted - 2 Tim. 3:12.* Therefore, the second major fact today is that:

II. We Must Understand Enemy Tactics And How To Combat Them and that's exactly what we can learn in the fourth chapter of Nehemiah. Satan raised up an unholy trio of enemies to oppose Nehemiah and the Jews as they built the wall. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria to the north; Tobiah was the leader of the Ammonites across the Jordan to the east and Geshem was the leader of the Arab peoples to the south/southeast of Judah. And there are 4 specific tactics that Satan tried to use to hinder God's people, not coincidentally, the same ones He uses against us. First, as we are building the Kingdom:

1. Satan may attack us through insult (1-3) Mocking and ridicule are usually the first things that get thrown at us when we start to really live for Jesus. Somebody will inevitably call me a "holier-than-thou" attitude, mock my attempts to do good or laugh at my desire to serve God. That's a deliberate enemy attack and:

a. the target is obviously our emotions. It's point is to make us feel bad, feel stupid, feel rejected so as to **discourage us** from what we are doing, to shame us back into line with the system, acting like everybody else. Among youth we call it "peer pressure"; on the news it's labeling us things like the "religious right". How do we deal with those feelings? Well, Jesus gave us:

b. a transforming truth: Mat. 5:11-12 *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.* The truth is that when we are insulted and mocked for Him **we are blessed!** We're in good company. We're like God's servants of old; we're like old Daniel against

whom they could find nothing to accuse him of except that he loved his God too much and wouldn't quit praying! Think about it. If the reason people are mocking me is because of Him, I should be happy because God is well-pleased! And what should I do? Here's:

c. our course of action: prayer! (4-5) Nehemiah prayed when they were ridiculed! Now Jesus brought a little different spin on how to pray than Nehemiah was aware of then, but the point is that he prayed. Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for them!" Realize that they are insulting God; pray for their forgiveness and their salvation! They are the ones to be pitied; they are lost; they are blinded. They need the power of God to break open their hard hearts! Pray and you will not be discouraged! Now secondly:

2. Satan may attack us through action (7-8) Now the enemies planned to mount a small army against Jerusalem to force the builders to stop. Satan will try to use force, to bring pressure to bear on us. Suddenly the husband or the parents who never cared before now forbid us to go to church. The tax officials suddenly inspect and demand money or the security police show up and threaten. Permits and registrations are withheld and withdrawn. In cases like this:

a. the target is our circumstances, to try to put something in place that will **eliminate us** or at least force us to go back to compliance. The SNB came to Pastor Dima in Osh and said, "You're Russian and for you to be a Christian is OK. But if you preach to the Kyrgyz we'll arrest you!" And he replied, "God says that I have to preach to EVERYONE!" Well, when Satan tries to force you to give up, remember this:

b. a transforming truth: *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. - 1 Pet. 5:8-9. We are not alone!* Expect that this kind of attack is coming. Watch for it and be ready and when it comes, stand firm. All over the world our brothers and sisters are experiencing this same kind of persecution and attack. God is carrying them through and He'll carry us through too! So what do we do? What is:

c. our course of action? Two things: **(9)** They prayed to God and posted a guard: **prayer and preparedness!** The first thing is we pray; we put our trust in Him. Then we prepare in any way we can. Look what Nehemiah did **(13-23)**. They put visible guards at some of the lowest places in the wall where the risk was greatest. They divided up and some stood guard while others worked and then they switched places. And they carried their weapons while they were working so they were always prepared for attack. They literally slept in their clothes. So they prayed, they trusted in the Lord who is great and awesome and were ready to fight. Now we are no longer talking about physically fighting our spiritual enemies, developing a literal armed resistance; in fact, Jesus told us to do the very opposite, to turn the other cheek to our persecutors, to go a second mile when they make us go one. When Peter was arrested, the Christians didn't storm the jail to get him out; they stormed the gates of heaven in prayer for him unceasingly; prayer IS our weapon! And being prepared and alert means covering every weak spot of our lives, every vulnerable place in our ministry with prayer even BEFORE trouble shows up! And they continued to share with others and build the kingdom, no matter how many obstacles and threats were put in their way and so should we. Thirdly:

3. Satan may attack us through fatigue (10) As they started to build, the workers found the job was tougher than it looked; clearing the debris of a hundred years and building a high wall was no picnic and they got tired. And so do we; constantly pouring out our lives in the service of Christ, ministering to others, building the church DOES get wearying, but this in itself is an attack and:

a. the target is really not our bodies; it is **our mind**; it is to make the task seem too hard and our strength too small and **to convince us to quit!** But remember this:

b. a transforming truth: *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. - Gal. 6:9. We will reap a Kingdom harvest!* As we go forward trusting in Him for His strength, determined to press on, there will be a tremendous spiritual harvest in the lives of people. People's lives will be changed both now and forever. Heaven will be filled and God's glory increased. So what is:

c. our course of action when we are attacked with fatigue? Guess! **(6:9) prayer!** They prayed all along, "Lord strengthen our hands"; they cried out to Him for strength to do what they couldn't do and **(15) perseverance!** They all went back to the wall and kept on building. They never stopped. They kept on lifting one stone at a time until the job was done! When you think you can't go on any more, remember, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!", cry out to Him and go back to work and the church will get built! Then lastly:

4. Satan may attack us through intimidation (11-12) Threats. "We're gonna kill you; before you stop us we'll be there!" "I'll throw you out if you don't stop this religious stuff!" "I'll divorce you if you keep on!" "You'll be fired unless you do what the boss wants!" Intimidation! In this case:

a. the target is both **our mind and emotions** and the idea is **to paralyze us with fear**. Fear is a powerful thing. If you can make somebody afraid, you can control them! Satan has been doing it for centuries, using the fear of death to enslave people into all kinds of crazy rituals. But when threats come remember this:

b. a transforming truth: *So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" - Heb. 13:6. Man can do nothing to me!* God is bigger than any enemy I have and not a single thing can happen to me unless He chooses to allow it and if He does, it will be for my good and His glory! So when we're threatened what is:

c. our course of action? (14, 20) "Remember the Lord; trust Him; our God will fight for us! **Prayer and perspective!** When I'm fearful, all I need to do is remember who God really is, how great He is and that I am about HIS work. So I trust Him and move forward.

General George Patton, the famed general of World War II was seldom at a loss for words. What he said during a battle in North Africa may be legend, but it typifies the man. Patton's troops and tanks were engaged in a successful counterattack of German forces under General Erwin Rommel. Patton is reported to have shouted in the thick of the battle, "I read your book, Rommel! I read your book!" And that he did. In Rommel's book "Infantry Attacks", the famed "Desert Fox" carefully detailed his military strategy. And Patton, having read it and knowing what to expect, planned his moves accordingly. Friends, we are in a spiritual battle and enemies will abound. But God has fully exposed our enemy's tactics in His Holy Word. We must study it and plan our defense!

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Sin: The Destruction Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 5

As we return to our study in Nehemiah today, this is our second last study; we'll end with chapter 6 next time. The spiritual revitalization that God had worked first in Nehemiah himself and then in the people of Jerusalem had been having a tremendous effect. The people had given themselves wholeheartedly to God's building project. The wall was already half way up around the city; the gaps were closed. They had kept on building in the face of all Satan's attempts to hinder them by raising up enemies in chapter 4. But as we enter chapter 5 they are in even greater danger, not from the enemies outside the walls, but from a force that was found right inside the walls among them all, a force that threatened to destroy all that God was doing. You remember that back in Joshua's day as Israel entered the land, they had great success crossing the Jordan and in the siege of Jericho where the walls fell down for them. But when they went up to take the next little town of Ai, they failed miserably. And Joshua fell on his face before God and *The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned..." - Josh. 7:10-11* Achan had become greedy and stolen for himself some things that were dedicated to God and all that God was doing to extend His Kingdom came to a screeching halt because of sin within the camp. Sin destroys the work that God is doing through His people in short order and the particular area of greed and materialism seems to be a primary area of temptation! Now let's look at what was going on in Nehemiah's day. First we are told in chapter 5 about:

I. The Stresses God's People Face In Building His Kingdom (1-4) Now in reality the stresses that the people of Jerusalem were facing are the same stresses that you and I face today. Just like those in verse 2:

1. we face the financial strain of providing for our families (2) The people were giving all of their time for these weeks to God's building project and they hadn't been able to go out and work in the fields or gather grain. So some were saying, "We have to feed our families; we have to provide for them and our supplies are running out." The struggle to pay the bills and put food on the table is as old as Adam and Eve. And just like those others in verse 3:

2. we face the struggle of paying off debt we've incurred (3a) Some had already had to borrow money to stay afloat. They had put their homes and fields and vineyards, their businesses, up as collateral. And now they had to figure out how to pay off what they had borrowed so that they would not lose it all, but how were they going to do that if they didn't have enough in the first place? Sound familiar? And the thing that exacerbates it is that:

3. we face crises that create financial shortage (3b) At the end of verse 3 it mentions that there was a famine going on. We're not told why, but often in Palestine that simply meant a year with little rain so the crops did not grow and there was not enough grain. For us that crisis time might be the loss of a job or an accident or health problem that makes us unable to work. Often that's why finances get tight and we end up in debt. Then of course, like those in verse 4:

4. we face a burden of taxes that must be paid (4) The King of Persia levied heavy taxes on all his subject peoples. For us April 15 is right around the corner and for some of us that's a nightmare. Our tax burden can be close to 30% if you add it all up and theirs might have been heavier! When you've got somebody taking away 1 of every 3 eggs your chicken lays, it gets even tougher to keep food on the table.

Now you would think it would be the poor among God's people, who were struggling so hard, that would be tempted to sin by stealing or using illegal means. But in the midst of this renewal, that wasn't the case at all. Look at:

II. The Sin Into Which A Portion Of God's People Fell (5-9) You see, it was not the poor but rather:

1. those who had money were taking advantage of their brothers It was the rich among them, the nobles and the officials. Even though on one hand they were all helping to build the wall, their business instinct had kicked in and they saw this time of famine as a golden opportunity. What were they doing? Well, first:

a. they were charging interest instead of loaning to help (7) Usury means interest. In later use it has come to mean an exorbitant amount of interest. We're told the rate of it in verse 11, the hundredth part, ie. 1%, which is probably per month or 12% per year, just about what we might pay on a car loan or credit card. But the point was not *how much* interest they were charging, but the fact that they were charging interest *at all*! Nehemiah was loaning money to people too, but he was doing it out of love and concern to help them because they needed it, not to make money back on the misfortune of others! And, of course, there is no investment like real estate, is there? So some of these guys:

b. they were acquiring land by foreclosing on properties (5b) When their brothers couldn't make their payments, they were foreclosing and taking possession of those homes and fields and businesses. They were amassing land to themselves while the price was low, so they could make a killing when the market turned around later! And in fact, this is how far it went with some of them:

c. they were selling their brothers' children into debt-slavery (5) In that society when you had nothing left to sell to pay your debt, YOU or a family member became the payment. You were sold into servanthood and worked off the debt. Well, some of God's people had been forced to let their daughters go into slavery and then the new owners were turning around and selling these poor Jewish girls to the Gentile peoples who lived round about. Meanwhile Nehemiah and his crew had been busily trying to buy back every Jew they could out of slavery from the neighboring peoples and these guys were feeding the front end of the process by selling more *into* it!

It wasn't right; greed had taken them over! The prospect of financial gain had blinded their eyes to what God was really doing and the lure of materialism had caused them to buy into the system that the world all around them used. Now folks, we ought to relate to that. While I'm sure there are a number of us who are tempted to sin by not having enough, as I see it, by far the greater temptation here where we live in Glenside is the opposite, to get caught up in a materialistic desire to get more and let it destroy the spiritual work God is doing in our lives! How many times have you watched someone who seemed zealous for God and was active in church and desired spiritual things gradually lose themselves in their job and have their spiritual desires gradually choked out by increasing responsibilities and commitments until they fade out of the picture and go totally AWOL from the process of building God's Kingdom?! You see:

2. when God's people fall into sin, no matter what type of sin it is, whether it is greed and materialism or immorality or whatever, **it destroys the building process** that God wants them involved in. They inevitably STOP building the Kingdom and fall into a situation that tends to tear all that they've done back down. In this case you can see clearly how:

a. sin creates division between the builders The poor brothers who were being taken advantage of raised a great outcry in verses (1a, 6a) against their rich brothers who were using their suffering to advantage. Do you think they were going to stand and work together side by side on the wall with injustice like this standing between them? Sin in the camp inevitably divides God's people from one another and turns them against each other. What we do impacts each other and the sin of one affects the whole, just as Achan's did. But what's even worse is that:

b. sin brings a reproach upon God's Name (9) Nehemiah said, "Those unbelievers out there will see the unjust, greedy way you're treating each other and they will mock your God! They will say, 'Your God is no different from our gods! Is He a god of thieves?!'" What is the first thing people say when you do something wrong? "And you call yourself a Christian!" Since we are called by His Name, how we behave affects His reputation, how He is known by the people that surround us! And when it is sinful, it blocks them from coming to Christ; it drives them from Him and destroys His Kingdom rather than building it.

And it can happen whether we're poor or rich. As an example, I got this email on Thursday just as I was working on this spot in this message. Our friend Karen in Kyrgyzstan wrote: *It is 11 pm at night here, Thursday night. Pray when you get this. Some friends and I have been trying to help a blind refugee from Afghanistan, a believer, who got robbed on his way here and was left on the street, but was taken in by a good Samaritan woman, who is not even a believer, who has kept him now for two months. However, she must leave on a business trip and asked the church to help find housing. We found him a place with a local family, but he refuses to leave her house, making all excuses that this new family would not be suitable. Finally, they told him he cannot stay longer, and he must go to the new family, so I took him there tonight, but he refuses to stay and said he would rather stay in the park. I said he could come to my house for one night, if he needs one night to decide. He said no, and left for the park, where he is now. We feel he is trying to manipulate this lady into keeping him, but all he is doing is ruining the Christian witness he has had to this family for this two months. Please*

pray...for safety for him, for wisdom for us, for this lady and her family to still come to the Lord despite his unreasonable behaviour, and whether or not the new family should even take him in given his attitude. Thank you for supporting us. This is the same blind man and seeking woman that Nancy Bell was interacting with and asking us to pray for. Our investment in reaching this woman for Christ through Nancy's testimony and love for the last month or more could be easily destroyed by the self-centered behavior of this poor brother trying to manipulate her. The sad thing is that it could just as easily be any one of us in our own individual circumstance! Now Nehemiah was quite clear to spell out:

III. The Steps Which Must Occur When God's People Fall Into Sin (9-13) When we fall into sinful behavior, it is not too late. God has an antidote, a way to turn it around and get glory out of it, but before that there must first be:

1. confrontation: somebody must make us aware of sin as Nehemiah did in verse (9). He told them to their faces, *What you are doing is not right!* We need God to put people like Nehemiah and people like Nathan who confronted David with his sin into our lives. I've always been thankful for a young lady in our college fellowship whom God used to tell me how proud I was in my early days of following Him. And we have to have the willingness to be that voice for others when they are stumbling, for the sake of the Kingdom! Second, there must be:

2. repentance: we must change our mind about what we've been doing (12) They turned about 180 degrees from the way they were acting just the day before. Repentance is a change of mind, a change in thinking. We must see the true nature of what we've been doing and that will lead us to determine to stop it, to change by the power of God. But just agreeing that we've been acting wrongly and asking forgiveness of those we've offended is not enough in itself. Third, there must be:

3. restitution: we must right the wrongs we've done (11) *Give it back!*, Nehemiah said. All the money you've taken wrongly, all the houses and lands you've foreclosed on and so forth. Do whatever is in your power to make it right, to UNDO the damage. But even that is not enough. It must lead to a fourth step:

4. transformation: we must become givers who serve others as Nehemiah was in verse (10). The taker must now become a giver. The one who has must now freely share out of love with the one who doesn't have enough; He must give to the poor and thus lend to the Lord! That kind of transformation, from being a taker to a giver, as God works it in us, will ultimately get God glory and draw people to faith. It will build the Kingdom in spite of our faults!

Now as we come to the end of the chapter, Nehemiah inserts a personal note, almost like a diary entry that he's writing to us and God about his own part in this whole situation. So lastly we have:

IV. Nehemiah's Personal Example To Them And Us (14-19) and it's one we would do well to imitate in order to keep from falling into sin and becoming useless for the Master's purpose. Nehemiah:

1. he never used his financial privileges as governor as others did (14-15) He was governor of Jerusalem for 12 years. And you know that any governor gets an allotted salary. Previous governors taxed the people they ruled for their own benefit. But Nehemiah never took any of it. He paid all his expenses out of his own pocket, just the way Paul made tents to support himself almost everywhere he went, so that no one would say that he was trying to "make money off his religion or his followers". He was able to offer the Gospel "without charge". What a lesson, that we must be careful to avoid the appearance that we are using the building of the Kingdom to fill our own coffers. Secondly:

2. he and his men were devoted solely to the work of God, not profit (16) He himself was found working on the wall - every day. He built the Kingdom; he was devoted to it. And so were those disciples with him. They did not acquire any land; they didn't spend half their time running a side business that made them wealthy or take land from others like those other characters did. It was clear they were seeking first the Kingdom of God and trusting Him to meet their needs. In fact, Nehemiah:

3. he personally fed many others at his table (17-18a) How would you like to have 150 people for dinner (and lunch) every day at your table? We don't know whether these were officials or whether many were simply poor people that he was feeding personally just as he was buying people back out of slavery personally. But it took a lot to feed them all and he didn't charge the King for even that but bore it out of his own resources. He set an example of being a giver and a servant and the reason is given in the end of the verse:

4. he considered the burden that others bore rather than his own (18b) He saw how heavily burdened the people under his charge already were; he thought of their plight and considered relieving their load more important than making his own easier. Now there's a godly politician! A humble servant attitude that puts the needs of others above your own is what will truly draw others to Christ and build His Kingdom. But above all:

5. he trusted God to meet his needs, as you can tell in the sentence prayer he tacks on in verse (19). I'm not so certain that is a plea to get a heavenly reward; I think it is more like, "God care for me as I am doing all I can to care for them! I'm leaning on You; I can't sustain this on my own!"

May the Lord help us to be like Nehemiah, to be like Jesus who didn't cling selfishly to His own rights and privileges but made himself of no reputation and became obedient all the way to death on the cross. Why? To build His church. To transfer US out of the kingdom of darkness into His marvelous light! *One day John Wesley was preaching at an open air meeting in the slums of London. Many people had gathered to hear him speak. At the back of the crowd stood two ruffians who were intent on disrupting the meeting. One said to the other, "Who is this preacher? What right does he have to come here and tell us how to live?" Picking up stones, they moved forward until they got very close to Wesley. As he talked about Christ's power to change men's lives, he was so filled with the love of God that a warmth and beauty spread over his countenance. The two hecklers stopped short and were dumbfounded as they saw his radiant face. With a note of awe in his voice one of them said, "He ain't a man, Bill; he ain't a man!" The stones fell from their hands, and their hearts were softened as they listened. When Wesley finished and began to leave, he saw the two ruffians. Putting his hands on their shoulders, he said, "God bless you, my boys," and continued on his way. As he disappeared into the crowd, one of the fellows exclaimed, "He IS a man, Ned; he IS a man, but he's a man like God!"* Nehemiah was a man like God. God help us all to be men and women like Him so that His Kingdom may be built through us.

These Bones CAN Live!

A Study In Spiritual Revitalization - Nehemiah 1-6

Perseverance: The Completion Of Spiritual Revitalization - Ch. 6

In Ezekiel's vision where he saw Israel as a valley of dry bones, he watched as the Lord worked and the bones began to rattle and then to come together to form skeletons and then flesh was restored to them. Then finally the Spirit breathed life into them and they stood up as a mighty army to serve God. So we have watched God work spiritual revitalization in His people in Nehemiah's day. It began in Nehemiah's own heart and as he obeyed God it spread to the people of Jerusalem and they began to build the wall of the city as God wanted them to. And they worked together and the wall rose to half its height and all the gaps were closed and the work continued until at last the wall reached its full height all the way around the city and finally the moment came when all the gates were set in place and the process was complete at last. And not only was the wall finished, but the people were revitalized spiritually and ready to serve God on into the future. Chapter 6 is where they reach that point of completion and it's where we will leave off our study. But before we do, we have one more lesson to learn. In chapters 4 and 5 we saw how attacks were made on the people to get them to stop the work. In chapter 6 we see how the enemy concentrated on attacking Nehemiah personally as the leader of the work. And the lesson featured here is:

I. The Perseverance Which Nehemiah Displayed Perseverance is the key quality which brings spiritual revitalization in our lives to it's completion. James said, *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* - Jas. 1:4. Perseverance is the quality that works in us to bring us to complete maturity, to experience the fullness of the life that God intends us to have in Him. The dictionary says that perseverance is *steady persistence in a course of action...especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement.* That's a good description of the meaning of the biblical concept. To persevere is to keep on steadfastly focusing on your God-given task, persisting in advancing the Kingdom, carrying out the assignment that He has given you where you are on your part of the wall, so that His church is built, so that the Gospel advances into your workplace and school and neighborhood as well as into all the world. Perseverance is what completes the task, but unfortunately, James also tells us that the quality of perseverance is only produced by experiencing trials of many kinds! And in chapter 6 we watch as Nehemiah chooses to persevere through four different types of trials. First of all:

1. he persevered through repeated distraction (1-4) Now this was a strange request. The plain of Ono was about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem, about as far as you could get from it in Judah, and as near to the border of Samaria where Sanballat was governor as you could get. To go there alone or with a few men would have been suicide. To go there with a full army would have meant taking everyone away from their work of building to go do "peacemaking". So Nehemiah sent word simply refusing to come. And they sent the offer back and he refused it again. Four times they sent and he refused to stop what he was doing to go meet with them. You see:

a. Satan always attempts to sidetrack us from our task When our lives are fully engaged in the most important purpose in the world, God's work, he will try to get us to run down every rabbit trail he can that leads away from what we are doing. Solomon was going great guns for God, a humble heart as a youth, building the Temple, declaring His Name to the nations through his wisdom. But the more nations he impacted, the more they wanted to give him another wife to make an alliance with him and pretty soon there were 700 of them pulling at him and their combined influence and the need to keep them happy sidetracked him into building them temples for their gods and eventually to worshipping with them and in the end they turned his heart away from God and his ministry was over. People can get slowly pulled aside from God's work into everything from addiction to technology or a hobby to devotion to a particular cause, even if its a good one. Satan will use anything available to draw us away from God's first purpose in our lives and like Nehemiah:

b. we must recognize the danger in it Verse (2b) makes it clear that he could see through their seemingly innocent offer. He knew they wanted to hurt or eliminate him! We may not see much of a threat in getting caught up

in bowling or golf or RV'ing every weekend of the summer, but whatever begins to consume our lives is dangerous and does us spiritual harm because it takes us away from the eternal work that God has assigned us to do and ultimately cools our relationship with Him! Nehemiah put our response so well in verse 3. Here is what we need to realize:

c. we are involved in God's great purpose and must not interrupt it (3) God's work is important. How He's called me to serve is important; it is part of finishing the church, His great building project, and that work must not stop! I must persevere and press on through every distraction like Nehemiah did. Then next, we see that:

2. he persevered through false accusation (5-9) *[Read 5-7]* In other words, "If you don't meet with us and settle this, we're going to voice an accusation to the King of Persia that you are leading a revolt against him and proclaiming yourself king of Judah! Your goose would be cooked!" Of course, that wasn't true at all. Nehemiah was a loyal and trusted servant. But Satan is an accuser; it is part of his very character and:

a. Satan always attempts to falsely accuse us in any way he can. Jesus even warned us to expect this. Look at **Mt. 5:11**. His implication is that this is going to happen; you can expect this. "People are going to try to stop you from serving Me by accusing you of all kinds of things that you really aren't doing, simply because they want you to stop!" False witnesses are a favorite way to stop God's people. That's how Jezebel got Naboth's vineyard for Ahab. That's how they tried to convict Jesus. People will accuse you of everything from being greedy, to being neglectful, to being a subversive enemy of the state. And the natural tendency is to immediately launch into defending yourself. You have to set the record straight and make sure everybody knows it. Then you start second-guessing everything that you do and worrying about what accusation someone could make if you did this or that. And in reality it's just another sidetrack, to consume you with fear and keep you from building the Kingdom. So we must do what Nehemiah did **(8-9)**:

b. we must recognize the tactic and simply declare the truth We must understand they're just trying to scare us so that we'll stop, but rather than spending all our efforts to defend ourselves, we simply say, "That's not true; nothing like that is going on!" And:

c. we trust in God to strengthen us and keep on Nehemiah prayed **(9b)** and kept on building! He left the consequences of the threats and whether or not they would be brought to the King, in God's hands and he persevered; he kept right on building that wall. Now the next incident shows us that Nehemiah:

3. he persevered through disguised temptation (10-14) *[Read 10]* Now this is a strange little incident. This Shemaiah guy was an insider, a Jew who lived in Jerusalem, probably one who claimed to be a prophet. And he is acting as though he is in danger, shutting himself tightly into his house. Then he tells Nehemiah that he is convinced that there is an assassination plot and to save Nehemiah's life the two of them should go hide in the Temple and go into the inner sanctuary and shut the doors. Nobody would ever dare to go in there after them! On the surface that kind of sounds like a good idea, doesn't it? But since we're not Jews, we forget what every Jew would instantly realize: nobody but the priests was allowed inside the Holy Place of the Temple! When King Uzziah tried to go in there God smote him with leprosy and he was a leper all the rest of his life! You see:

a. Satan always attempts to make wrong look right, to make something that is definitely wrong and evil look like the right, natural and even godly thing to do. Look at **2 Cor. 11:14-15**. Satan never walks up to you and says, "Here; this is purely evil; it will kill you and God will judge you for it - wouldn't you like to do it?" He says, "Here; this fruit will make you wise and you'll be just like God. You won't die!" "Here, just live together; look at all the money you'll save and after all you love one another; that's the main thing isn't it?" Then once we choose to do the wrong thing which looks like the right thing:

b. he will use any sin on our part to discredit us (11-14) He'll lure us to it and then turn around and accuse us of what we've done! If Nehemiah had gone into the Temple to hide, not only would he have been accused of cowardice, running away from his position of leadership, but he would have been accused of desecrating the Temple and his leadership would have ended really quick. It would have stopped the work. So there is an important principle to grasp here:

c. we must recognize that God never encourages us to sin No matter how reasonable it sounds or how pleasant it looks, if it is wrong according to the Scripture, then GOD is not the one encouraging us to do it and we have to persevere in resisting it and keep on doing what God has called us to do! Then let's skip down to verse 17 where there's a fourth thing Nehemiah persevered through:

4. he persevered through hypocritical disloyalty (17-19) Tobiah the Ammonite had a number of relatives by marriage among the leaders of the Jews so they were loyal to him, even while they were building! And they would tell Nehemiah all this good stuff about Tobiah and they would tell Tobiah anything Nehemiah said so he could use it against him. Does any of that sound familiar?

a. Satan often attempts to discourage us through people, particularly people who should be on our side or who at least to appear to be with us and in favor of what we're doing. But under the table they're gossiping and accusing and telling a whole different story. And we know that we can't trust them for all of their smiling appearance; we know it's false. And that can really get to us. David experienced this as he was committed to serving God. Look at **Ps. 41:5-9**. Oh, how that can hurt! And yet:

b. we must recognize that God is for us and press on In spite of the fact that this was going on all along, Nehemiah's attitude was that of **Rom. 8:31**, *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* And he kept on building. He pressed on in the cause of God. He persevered! And there are two very powerful verses in this chapter that show us:

II. The End Result Of Nehemiah's Perseverance (15-16) Did you hear that? It paid off! Because Nehemiah persevered through all this adversity, because he refused to be distracted, because he refused to defend himself when accused, because he refused to disregard any command of the Word of God and because he refused to let fickle people discourage him, two amazing things happened! The first thing is in verse 15:

1. God's building project was advanced, in fact in this case:

a. it was advanced all the way to completion The wall was built to its full height and all the gates and bars were in place. Jerusalem had 2 miles of high heavy wall surrounding it to protect it. And the neat part is this:

b. it happened more quickly than anyone had imagined It was done in 52 days! What hadn't been done in 100 years was completed in less than 2 months; nobody expected that! Building projects of that magnitude took years, sometimes many years! But when absolutely everyone, all God's people, got involved, they steadfastly persisted and didn't give up despite all obstacles until the job was done; they got it done in record time!

Then the second amazing thing that happened is in v. 16:

2. God's reputation was advanced among all the peoples who surrounded them and who had stood against them. They realized that no little band of Jews could have stood alone against them and accomplished such a feat in so little time. The Hebrew literally says:

a. they realized that this work was done by GOD! It was God's work; it was God's doing! They found themselves to be fighting against God and they knew it! And when they did:

b. it destroyed their pride and self-confidence When they saw the hand of God, THEY became the ones who were afraid. They gained a huge respect for the God of Israel and I have no doubt that some of them from among the nations began to seek after Him to worship Him.

Well, as I've explained before in this series, some 2000 years ago, Jesus gave us our assignment. He said, "I will build MY church! And here's how I'm going to do it: YOU go and make disciples from among every nation, every people!" That's our wall; that's our building project, yet here we are 20 centuries later and it is still not built! Fully 1/3 of the peoples in this world are still unreached, that is, they have no significant worshipping church planted among them! But at last there is great news! In the last half century the church all over the world including Latin America and Africa and Asia has begun to flock to the wall and throw its heart into building and today in these 3 regions alone an average of 3,000 people come to Christ every single hour of every day, 24/7! Across the world an average of 3,500 new churches open every single week! 3 billion people have already seen the Jesus film, by 2025 Wycliffe says they will have the Bible translated into every language that needs one and today 90% of the earth can listen to Christian radio in a language they understand! You know what? From where we stand today, you can see the top of the wall! What hasn't been done in two millennia could be done in the next "52 years", to choose a symbolic number! There could be a church movement planted in every people and it could happen in short order IF we persevere! God's reputation could literally be advanced to all the nations, all the peoples of the earth so that some from each one would fall down and worship Him and it could be done IN THIS GENERATION! The task of mission could be finished IF we all persevere! IF we refuse to be distracted, refuse to defend ourselves when accused, refuse to disregard any command of the Word of God and refuse to let fickle people discourage us and if we all keep on plugging away at our places on the wall, the task will be done sooner than we can imagine and God's reputation will be known in every nation on earth and some will worship Him. Perseverance is the key to completing our task. *On October 18, 1879, a young inventor by the name of Thomas A. Edison sat in his laboratory. He was weary from 13 months of repeated failure in his search for a filament that would stand the stress of electric current. To add to his problems, the men who had backed him financially were now refusing to put up any additional funds. Having tried every known metal in his experiment, Edison was admittedly baffled. Casually picking up a bit of lampblack, he mixed it with tar and rolled it into a thin thread. Suddenly the thought struck him, why not try a carbonized cotton fiber? For 5 hours he worked on the first filament, but it broke before he could remove the mold. Two entire spools of thread were used in similar fruitless efforts. At last a perfect strand emerged, Only to be ruined when he tried to place it inside a glass tube. Still Edison refused to admit defeat. He continued to work without sleep for two more days and nights. Eventually he managed to insert one of the crude carbonized threads into a vacuum- sealed bulb. "When we turned on the current," he said, "the sight we had so long desired to see finally met our eyes!" His persistence in the face of the most discouraging odds gave the world one of its greatest inventions--the electric light!* WE, my friends, are the light of this world, Jesus said,

and if we will persevere despite all the failures and setbacks and disappointments and oppositions and even martyrdoms, we can light every single dark corner of this world for Jesus. As we end this series the question is, will YOU live for Jesus and His Kingdom and will you persevere, no matter what?

God's Control In A Secular World: The Book Of Esther The Wife Who Wouldn't Obey - Ch. 1

Here we are on the very last day of the second millennium after Christ, ready to enter a new one. And what is our world like? It's as insecure as it was in the days when Caesar Augustus sent out his decree. We have a presidential election and it takes 5 weeks of ups and downs afterward to figure out who won, every day the odds changing hands. Two months ago, the candidates touted our record economic prosperity; yesterday on the news the pundits say we may be headed for a recession. We look around the world to the Holy Land where the town fathers of Bethlehem had to cancel their plans for the celebration of the birth of Christ because of the level of violence between Palestinians and Jews, higher now than any time I can remember in the last 30 years. The USS Cole sits at peaceful anchor in the Gulf and a terrorist rams a small boat with a bomb into it and blows a huge hole in it, killing unsuspecting sailors. In parts of Indonesia Christians are being killed and their churches burned; they're fleeing for their lives. It's not much different from a world where a King Herod can order all the infants 2 years old and under to be forcibly seized and killed. Where do you turn to find security in the kind of world we live in? Well, I turn to the unshakeable word of the Eternal God. And in that word, though we could look many places, there is one book in particular which gives great hope for those who live in the kind of seemingly godless, crazy world in which we live. Esther is one of the most unusual books in the Bible. It is the only one where the name of God is never mentioned once, even though you can see Him at work all over the place. There is no teaching, no law, no Temple, no sacrifice, no worship, nothing at all that ties it to the other Old Testament books. And you'll find the reason for that as we look at a brief:

I. An Introduction To The Book (1-3) First let's try to understand:

1. the secular world in which Esther lived: the Persian Empire The king here, known in history as Xerxes (or as the Hebrew calls him, Ahasuerus) was ruler of the vast Medo-Persian empire that in its day stretched from the border of what is today Pakistan on the east, to the shores of Greece on the west and south to what is now northern Ethiopia. It stretched nearly 3000 miles east to west and more than 1000 miles north to south, roughly the size of the United States. The location of this story is the seat of Xerxes' government which (at least in winter) was at Susa or Shushan, not far from the Persian Gulf. Now there are two important background things to note:

a. the date of the story: 483-473 B.C. The events in this book are accurately datable from secular history and cover a 10 year span. Xerxes became king in 485 BC. Four years later in 481 he launched an all-out invasion against the Greeks, the largest ever mounted by the East against the West, at the famous battle of Thermopylae, which he won. But then afterward he lost battles at Salamis in 480 and Plataea in 479 and had to return home in defeat. It was in that very year that Esther became queen in chapter 2! So as our story opens in 483, it is still before these battles and Xerxes is in the process of uniting his empire and planning this massive invasion, hence the banquet of chapter 1.

b. the dispersion of the Jews Jerusalem had been destroyed and Judah taken captive to Babylon back in 587 BC. When the Persians conquered Babylon, Cyrus the Great declared that all Jews could go home, but not all did. In their 70 years of being out of the land, many had settled into new lives. They were no longer agricultural. Instead, they became tradesmen and shopkeepers. Few wanted to go back to depopulated and poverty-stricken Palestine. The first small group that returned finally got the Temple erected but Jews were not coming back. In fact, they were scattering farther and farther abroad throughout the Persian empire until many of the provinces and major cities had recognizable Jewish populations. The Jews living in Palestine were pretty much disregarding the law and living disobedient lives. Ezra had not yet returned and enforced the Law. Nehemiah had not yet been there to rebuild the walls. And if the handful of Jews back in the land were at a low religious ebb, the Jews dispersed throughout the empire were probably even lower, which explains the secular lack of "religiosity" in this book. But it also gives us opportunity to see clearly:

2. the control of God over that secular world or what theologians would call the doctrine of **Providence**. Thiessen says the Providence of God is *that continuous activity of God whereby he makes all the events of the physical, mental, and moral realms work out His purpose, and this purpose is nothing short of the original design of God in creation*. So, Providence means:

a. God controls all events for His purpose God is a sovereign God. He is not limited by, nor forced to react to, circumstances. He controls everything from the rise and fall of world empires to the finding of your lost thumbtack. And He is working all of those events together to complete His sovereign purposes in history, for saved and unsaved people alike. Nowhere can you see that any better than in this book. If any single event in this book had not occurred or had been off in its timing, some of them by as little as a few hours, there would probably not be one single Jew left in the world today! God put a little Jewish girl named Esther on the throne of a world empire and saved His people from annihilation. It's an incredible story. I'm told Ben Franklin once read this book to a society of

atheists in France who applauded it loudly until he revealed to them that it was from the Bible. Then they were very angry because it so clearly pointed to God! Either the Jews have incredibly good luck or there is a God in heaven! But secondly Providence means that:

b. God always cares for His people even when they are backslidden Part of that control means caring for His own people. At this point in time His people had pushed Him out of their lives. They were backslidden, disobedient, ignoring His command to return to the land and the place of blessing. And yet as the hymnwriter put it, He was still "somewhere standing in the shadows keeping watch above His own!" Listen, God loves you and works in your life even when you backslide and stop living for Him! Isn't that wonderful? Now as we come to the story, we read of:

II. The Disobedience Queen Vashti (4-12) Now please understand that the Queen of Persia and the Queen of England have no comparison in position. King Xerxes, like all good Persian kings, had an entire harem of women, concubines for his personal use and enjoyment. For official purposes, one lady, Vashti, got to be his official wife, the Queen. That basically meant that she got to officiate in affairs for the wives of Xerxes' officials and to bear the official child who would be the next emperor. And that's about it. There was no real personal relationship. (You can see later that Queen Esther wasn't even allowed to go into Xerxes' presence without an invitation and he hadn't even spoken to her in 30 days at one point!) Now with that background look at:

1. the order of the King Xerxes threw a banquet that ran for a full 180 days, half a year, with officials and governors coming and going, hundreds of people feasting and drinking each day. Imagine the cost! Why?

a. the purpose of his banquet: preparing for war (3-4) The military leaders were there. Xerxes is doing two things, planning and preparing his military strategy against Greece and uniting all of his leaders behind the idea by displaying to them how great he and the Persian empire really are! At the same time, you can see:

b. the pride of his heart: impressing his people (5-8) When the big banquet was over, he threw a local one, inviting all the residents of Susa, even the common people, for seven whole days. And the wine flowed freely! He impressed them all with the ornateness of his palace and the golden cups individually crafted. He impressed them with his wealth and liberality, wanting to prove what a wonderful and powerful monarch he was. But in the midst of it all, he had a little too much to drink and gave an order, a perverse and selfish order that cost him his wife:

c. the perverseness of his order: displaying the queen (9-11) We're in Persia now. Even though Islam isn't here yet, it is still not proper for women to associate freely with men. They have their own banquet in another part of the palace at which Queen Vashti presides. So, while the men may have had dancing girls and who knows what, at least their wives were properly separated from their drunken orgy, that is until the last day when you see King Xerxes in high spirits, which means drunk. Xerxes really was on a head trip. He had proved to the guests that he had the most wealth, the most power, the biggest heart, and now he wanted to prove one more thing, that he had the prettiest wife! She was just another object, another possession to show off to gain the admiration of his subjects! And sadly enough, you know, there are still men out there who think of their wives like that! But the queen stood up and refused his order!

2. the refusal of the Queen (12) Be clear there is no hint that he wanted Vashti to appear before the men in some loose, immoral dance or something like a concubine. She was to wear the royal crown. But his purpose was that they might look at her great beauty and that meant at least that she would have to appear before the men with face unveiled, which was totally against cultural tradition. Now Vashti was not a worshipper of God or anything close to it, simply a Persian idolater. But she did have some scruples and she refused to be treated like a possession to be shown off and said, "No way, I'm not coming!" Well, as you can imagine, that set off quite an angry reaction in her husband.

III. The Reaction Of King Xerxes (13-22) I suppose he could have had her physically drug in and held on display but you've got to understand:

1. the problem she created It is two-fold. First:

a. she was a public embarrassment to the King (13-15) The "great king who rules all Persia" can't even rule his own wife. She totally embarrassed him in front of the whole town, even the common people. So, he knows that he HAS to do something to her in order to save face and asks his advisers what the law says. But there's a second problem:

b. she set a personal example for other wives (16-18) I don't know what kind of husband old Memucan was but it sounds like he's afraid his wife might be encouraged to get out the old frying pan and chase him! If Vashti got by with disobedience, everybody else's wife would think they could too, and heaven knows we men have got to keep those women in their place! How man has perverted the beautiful relationship God gave him in the garden! So together the King and his advisors came up with:

2. the proposal to solve it (19-22) Two things would be done. First:

a. the permanent deposing of the Queen Vashti would be deposed by royal decree or law. And in Persia laws were beyond repeal; they could not be reversed, not even by the King. He could make them at will but not even he could break them! So the Queen was out! We don't know what ever happened to her. But the second thing to be done was:

b. a proclamation of universal submission for all wives They wrote a law on the books and made sure it got translated into every language of the empire and that it got to every province, that a man is the king of his own castle so disobedience to him becomes punishable by law. Can you imagine the court cases that would arise? We're also never told how well that worked, but what's more important than whatever Xerxes did are:

IV. The Principles We Can Glean From The Story First, do you notice:

1. the deplorable treatment of women in a world without God It seems that they have been a special target of Satan somehow throughout history. Men have so often seen them as property to be owned rather than blessed companions. And it continues in our own day. Just 3 weeks ago Matt and Betty Bristol (who were here at GBC recently) reported that their language teacher in Kyrgyzstan, a young lady named Umut, was stolen as a bride. That means a young man who fancied having her as his wife came to her apartment with several friends one night and kidnapped her, taking her to his apartment and forcing her to have sexual relations, and that quick she was married. In Kyrgyz custom she is now his wife but all of her personal hopes and dreams are shattered, not to mention the trauma she went through. Yet it happens all the time there and is legal. Among the Soub people of Irian Jaya, before the Good News of Jesus came, the women were told they didn't even have souls! They had no voice and did all the work while the men wouldn't lift a finger until Jesus changed all that. In Afghanistan they are forced to be completely covered in dark cloth. Not one inch of skin may show and they may hold NO positions of any kind, even if they had been doctors or lawyers, so the Taliban have declared. The list goes on and on and America is no better. How many shelters do you know of for battered men? None, but every city has them for women! A pornographic industry that takes in, not millions, but billions of dollars each year sells images primarily of women, treating them as objects to be used and discarded instead of people to be cherished. What can change all that? Thousands of years of secular history don't offer much hope. Only God does! It is when the Gospel comes and a man's heart is filled with the love of God that he sees a woman as a fellow human being, created in the image of God to live in a joyous and unique relationship with him that is unlike any other in the world! It is sad that the women's liberation movement has traditionally been against Christianity; Christianity is THE original and only true women's liberation movement for in Christ there is neither male nor female but we are all one in Christ Jesus! You won't find that in any other religion or in any secular culture in the world! Secondly, we can see in this story:

2. the distortion of God's intended relationships in marriage Turn with me to **Eph. 5** so that we can compare the true biblical perspective. This story points out in a negative way:

a. the loving care husbands should give their wives (25-28) Far too many husbands still think of their wives as a possession, not a person. They are for cooking, cleaning, kid-tending, and lovemaking, but "I am the really important person in this marriage". And unfortunately, that sometimes carries over into even Christian marriages. That's why Paul has to say, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. Nourish them, cherish them...the same way Jesus loved you and laid down His life for you!" That's our role, not to get our own way, but to give up ourselves in every way we can for them that they may have all the love and nurture that they need. Then Paul also talks about:

b. the loving submission wives should give their husbands (22-24) The same way you love Jesus and would do anything for Him and look to Him to lead you because He loves you so much, that's how you're to respond to your husband's love! Out of love, husbands sacrifice; out of love wives respect and follow, but:

c. neither can be forced (21); Too many husbands are like Xerxes, they want to legislate submission. And they try to do it by waving a Bible. "You have to obey me, God says so!" Never does the Bible say anywhere that a husband has the right to demand submission. The wife has the duty to give it but the husband has no right to demand it. It must be earned by love. However, **abusive demands must be opposed**. A wife can't take advantage of her husband's love by demanding that he continually give up everything he needs and give her everything she wants. If she does, he has to say "Stop" because that's abuse. Nor can a husband take advantage of his wife's willing submission by asking her to do what is not right. The limit of submission is obedience to God. If your husband wants you to do something that is contrary to God's clear will, then, like Vashti, you have to be brave and say no and be prepared to take the consequences! But if both of you are in love with the Lord, you'll never find yourselves in that position! Then thirdly the story points out:

d. the danger of rash, irreversible reactions The first words of chapter 2 speak volumes about this. Later regret cannot undo certain things, especially when we're talking about marriage and other human relationships. Separation and divorce can be like that. So can affairs. So can just leaving and walking out. So can the giving of ultimatums. It is very easy to break things that can't be fixed, to burn bridges that can't be rebuilt, to do and say things in

a moment of pride, in the heat of anger, that you pay for the rest of your life because you can't undo them. Xerxes sought the wisdom of counselors and destroyed his marriage because they didn't tell him, "You're acting like a jerk; you need to apologize to Vashti because she's right!" Instead, they told him, "Throw her away and get a new one!" That's the same advice that's out there all around you and if you ask, you'll get it. If you have a problem in your relationship, you need to ask for counsel from God and from godly people who think like He does and not like the world does. And finally, the story shows us:

4. the direct control of God, even over circumstances which thwart His will Do you know that if Vashti had been a wimp and had gone and flashed her face to those men, Esther would never have become queen and a few years later every Jew in the Persian empire which was literally every Jew in the world would have been exterminated wholesale. And if Xerxes hadn't had this stupid idea in his drunkenness, the same thing would have happened! The whole of history turns on such small things. Yet God delights in choosing to use the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things of the world to shame the strong and the lowly and despised things to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before Him. The fate of a race hangs on the whim of a drunken king and the response of his wife and yet God uses it all to save His people. History does not turn on the will of man but on the Providence of God. What a comfort that is in a godless world!

"Some years ago, a family from London, England, camping in the Scottish Highlands, pitched their tent near the foot of a towering waterfall that spilled from the crags above and roared through a gorge below. The spot was wilderness, except for the family of a Scottish shepherd camped further downstream. In a careless moment the preteen son of the Londoners fell into the raging current and was swept down the gorge. The boy would certainly have perished on the rocks but for the youthful son of the shepherd who, without thought for his own safety, leaped into the torrent to rescue the young Londoner. In a few moments, both families gathered around the two wet and frightened little boys who were still blinking water from their eyes. The Londoners, overwhelmed with gratitude, offered money to the shepherd lad, but he refused it. So the grateful parents asked the shepherd, 'Where does your boy go to school?' The somewhat awkward reply came, 'In this part of Scotland, the children of shepherds rarely go to school.' 'Then that's it,' exclaimed the Londoners. 'Why not let your son come with us to London and go to school with our son.' So, the unlettered shepherd boy went to London and to school. Although he started slowly, soon he did quite well in his studies. He went on to university, graduating with high honors; then to medical school, gaining national acclaim as a brilliant research physician. His name was Alexander Fleming, who is known in history as the man who discovered penicillin. And the little fellow he fished out of the stream? His name was Winston--Winston Churchill-- who was to become prime minister of Great Britain. [And neither would have been what they became, but for an "accident" by a waterfall.] But God knew it all along." [TEACH Newsletter, Spring 1995. Pages 1-2.] Even the streams you fall into, those things in your world that make no sense, that seem so unfair and wrong and even evil, even those things, God knows all along and is busy working them together for good. Wait and see.

God's Control In A Secular World: The Book Of Esther

The Girl Who Couldn't Lose - 2:1-18

Chapter 1 of the Book of Esther set the stage for the story. King Xerxes of Persia held a great banquet in the year 483 BC rallying all his leaders for a great battle against the west. During that banquet he got drunk and commanded his queen to display herself to the men which she boldly refused to do. So, a law was passed and Vashti was deposed as queen. Because of that, Chapter 2 contains the story of what we might call "The Great Persian Empire Beauty Contest." I'm sure you've watched Star Search and all the Miss America and Miss Universe pageants but this contest is far different from anything you've experienced or even can imagine. It is done Persian style and is sort of the moral epitome of everything that God stands against in male-female relationships. Like the Crucifixion, it would be far better to forget it forever than to remember it and enshrine it permanently in Scripture, except for one thing: as detestable as it is, it is the very thing God used to save His people from destruction! You see, God not only uses the wrath of man to praise Him. He makes even the most horrible sin of man to serve His purpose in the end. If there had been no such contest, there would have been no Queen Esther and without Queen Esther there might not be one living Jew in the world today. Our God is a Providential God who controls all the events of history and the universe and in His miraculous wisdom makes them all accomplish His intended purpose! So, let's look at:

I. The Great Persian Empire Beauty Contest (1-4) First of all, we are told where the idea of the contest came from:

1. what prompted it There are really two factors that led to it. The first was:

a. the King's sadness (1) That first word *later* means about 3 years that passed by. Two years after his big banquet, Xerxes mounted his great invasion in 481 BC and won that battle at Thermopylae. But the tide of the war did not remain in his favor. A year later in 480 he lost the next major battle at Salamis. That's when chapter 2 opens. The king has lost a serious battle. The king is depressed, sad, maybe sullen. He begins to have regrets and one of those regrets was what happened with Queen Vashti. Now please remember that King Xerxes already had a harem of hundreds of women at his disposal. He was hardly lacking for female companionship. But despite all of that, Xerxes must have had some actual love for his queen Vashti. After all, she was the mother of his royal son Artaxerxes who would succeed him to the throne. At any rate, when he was no longer so proud and boastful, his anger at her "arrogance" in defying him calmed down, he began to think about her and to miss her and to realize that by

making a royal decree his own hand had cut off the possibility of ever having her again. And it saddened him. I tell you what, there are a lot of people today that feel just like that, people who ran out of marriages hastily, angrily, selfishly, men or women who traded it all for the pleasure of the moment with someone else or because they thought the grass would be greener elsewhere and now it hasn't worked out so well. They're sad; they recognize the folly in their own lives; they see how they destroyed what could have been a wonderful thing and maybe they wish they had stayed. There's something about marriage that's like that. There's a oneness that God creates in marriage that can't be replaced by anything else once it is broken. There's a lesson here. Do you have struggles in your marriage? Get help. Work on it together. Don't ever think that you can just throw it away like this king did and not hurt! So, the king is hurting over his regrets but there is another factor that created this contest and that is:

b. the attendants' safety There is nothing more dangerous than a hurting tyrant! And his attendants knew it. It wouldn't take him long to remember whose idea it was to get rid of Vashti. It would be really easy to shift the blame and think, "Those snakes conned me into this; it's their fault!" Their lives were on the line; they had to think of something and they did. Here's:

2. what was proposed (2-4a) They knew which side of this king's nature to appeal to. They said "Let's have a 'find-a-new-queen contest'. We'll search the whole empire and bring in to you all the prettiest young ladies, dozens, maybe hundreds of them (after all there were 127 provinces). Just think of the variety of women, virgins of all nationalities and shades of color and complexion. We'll prepare them and purify them so they're up to your worthy royal standards and you can sleep with them one at a time until you find the one you like best and then make her queen! And keep the rest for concubines!" Talk about a low, immoral, raunchy, male idea. But Xerxes jumped on it like somebody offered him 10 million dollars. But don't forget:

3. what the purpose was: to drown regret with pleasure (4b) Mankind has been trying this idea for centuries. Drown your sorrows with something. Drown your sadness with alcohol. Drown your regrets with pleasure. Have great times, enjoy yourself and you'll forget all about your pain. And Xerxes had such a callous heart that it seems to have worked as it often does for a while. But it doesn't really, not finally. To find relief, you've got to face your pain squarely, face your sins, look honestly at what you've done and bring it to Jesus Christ where you can find forgiveness and healing that last. But here at last we are introduced to our main character:

II. The Chief Contestant Introduced: Esther (5-7) There was a beautiful young lady who lived right there near the palace in the city of Susa named Hadassah in Hebrew or Esther in Persian which means *star*. And through the great Persian beauty contest this star was about to rise and shine. We are told:

1. her family heritage Esther had lost both her parents early in life and had been adopted and raised by her older cousin Mordecai as his own daughter. Again, that's important, because if her parents had lived, Mordecai would not have been there to influence her and maybe she would not have saved her people. God knew what He was doing with this little orphan! But note:

2. her spiritual heritage She and her cousin were Jews of the tribe of Benjamin. Mordecai's great-grandfather Kish had been carried as a captive from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 BC, 100 years earlier. In that century, the family had made a choice. Instead of returning to the land when Cyrus decreed it in 538, they liked their life among the Gentiles and migrated eastward, settling in Susa in Persia. They did not choose to go back with that struggling band and build the Temple from its ruins. In fact, they seem to have lost all contact with the Jews back home, unlike Nehemiah who also later lived at the Persian court but whose heart was in Jerusalem. I'm reminded of what God says about Moses, an adopted orphan who grew up in Egypt. Compare Heb. 11:24-26, *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.* But Esther's family chose to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season rather than to endure affliction with the people of God. Think about it. Kish or Shimei or Jair or likely all three, had made a decision to disobey God which affected generations of their offspring! It always does. Esther had the heritage of a family gone worldly and it, of course, affected her. And so:

III. Esther Enters The Contest (8-11) Esther was among those entered in the royal contest. She was taken to the palace. We are not told by whom. She may have been seen by some official and forced to come or it may be that Mordecai himself brought her there, hoping to provide a future for her. At any rate, we do not read that there was any objection on either her part or his, nor any attempt to prevent it. And there are some things that tells us about Esther which may hurt your image of her just a bit. First, in her life:

1. there was disregard of the Law (8) To allow herself to be taken into the harem of a Gentile king showed total disregard of the Law of Moses. First, she was forbidden to have sexual relations with a man who was not her husband. And secondly, she was clearly forbidden as a Jew to marry a Gentile! Either she was ignorant of these things (which seems unlikely because Mordecai seems to have refused to bow down to Haman for religious reasons later plus, he kept a pretty exact family tree) or the Law had lost all importance to her. This seems to be the case because there is

no mention at all of worship or sacrifice or prayers or anything else pertaining to the law in her life. We might excuse her by saying she was forced, except:

2. there was defilement of herself (9) I'm reminded of Daniel, who as a young man found himself in the exact same situation, taken captive to serve in the court of the King of Babylon. But the Scripture says in Daniel 1:8, *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.* He refused to defile himself with the idol-dedicated food of the king and asked for vegetables. He was willing to trust God and risk death. So were his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were thrown into the fire because they wouldn't bow to the king's idol. Esther could have chosen to die rather than be defiled and disobey God, but she didn't. And further:

3. there was denial of her people and God (10-11) She was very obedient to her "dad", but it meant denying her people and thereby her God. She told no one she was a Jew, a worshipper of Jehovah, the God of Israel. So, everyone assumed she was a Persian from Susa and a worshipper of the gods of Persia, in whose worship she would have had to have freely participate as part of the court. In short, while Esther may have had some elemental faith in God that seems to have blossomed later, at this point she seems to be a very uncommitted young lady. And, sad to say, there are a whole lot more young people that are just like her, young people with Christian heritage and background but who have developed disregard for God's Word and are willing to defile themselves with all kinds of things including, like Esther, marrying unbelievers, premarital sex, or so many of the other things our culture does, all the while being careful to hide the fact that down there somewhere they do believe in God! What a shame! But there's hope. Esther's story later on shows us how God has a way of bringing us to a moment of decision and fanning those dying embers of faith back to life. Now we're given:

IV. The Rules Of The Contest (12-14) First we're shown:

1. the preparation for winning (12-13) Each girl had to wait a full year from the time she came to the palace. During that time, she was prepared for the king in every way. She was given special treatments which were not just beauty treatments but literally, purification treatments. After all, the Persian king was practically a god and his purity could not be defiled. Ha! So, these women were given all the mud packs and face rubs of their day, made as perfect and suitable as they could be and, I'm sure, taught much about the King himself and his likes and dislikes. All in preparation for what would be for them the ultimate one-night stand with the king. But note:

2. the danger of losing (14) If you lost this contest, there were no runners up. You were now property of the king, his concubine. You could not go home nor be given to another. There was no hope of a return to normal life and marriage and family. You were kept as part of the royal "stable" and many, many of these women probably never saw the face of the king or even stepped outside the palace again! It was all or nothing. If Esther lost this, she would be provided for, of course, but her life was basically forfeit to a sort of pleasant misery, reduced to being a kind of well-kept slave and an object! But she didn't lose. In fact, we read next how:

V. Esther Wins The Contest (15-18) I want you to notice two things:

1. the poise of Esther (15) She was calm and assured. She did not demand any special clothing or jewelry but took what the steward laid out. Instead of relying on artificial things to make her seem better than she really was, she was content to rest in the natural beauty that God had given her. That's an aside, about the folly of trying to impress people by looking like someone we're not. However, the really important thing here is:

2. the providence of God Look how God was at work controlling and engineering this whole thing for His purpose. First look at:

a. the timing of events (16) This was winter of the year 479 BC. The big banquet of chapter 1 had taken place in 483 BC when the King was at the height of planning his big conquest of Greece. As I told you, he won the first battle in 481 but then lost the next one in 480 which began his sadness and sparked the contest. 479 was the year of his final defeat in that war and he was forced to return home a depressed man, defeated, deflated, humiliated. He was ready for something to brighten his life, someone bright and kind, someone who could make him look good again in the eyes of his subjects. And at that very time, Esther's year of preparation ended and he met her just at that moment of his greatest need. Had that battle gone otherwise or had Esther come a year or even a few months earlier or later, it is very possible that he would never have chosen her. God's timing was perfectly controlled. But what's most remarkable in itself is simply:

b. the choosing of Esther (17-18) How remarkable that, of all the hundreds of women in the contest, the King chose Esther, a Jewess, the exact person that God had planned to use, and that to use her in spite of herself and her spiritual condition! The odds of all of these events coming together and happening in just this exact time and place and order are nothing short of phenomenal.

My friend, there is a God in heaven, working, working, always working. Even when we're not listening, when we're back-slidden, when we don't care what His plan really is, He's moving in us, moving among unbelievers, moving in hearts, moving in history, somehow making all things come together in a grand design that accomplishes His purpose. From Esther's perspective she couldn't afford to lose. From God's perspective she just plain couldn't lose! She was caught up in His grand plan and so are you and I. *Heather Loewen wrote in Decision magazine about her family's noisy, exciting time of exchanging gifts at Christmas: "We had drawn names so each person would receive one gift. Paper and bows were flying in a frenzy when Daniel, our four-year-old, suddenly felt neglected. While everyone else was unwrapping, he realized that he hadn't been given a gift. We scoured under the tree, but no packages remained. After a quick conference we concluded that because of an oversight two people had purchased gifts for another child and no one had brought a gift for Daniel. Quickly, a gift given by mistake to Daniel's cousin was presented to Daniel. He was not thrilled. It didn't escape his pre-school intellect that the video he had acquired had not been intended for him. Four-year-olds aren't noted for their grace under pressure--Daniel felt snubbed and excluded. Several months passed. After many viewings of his video that featured a 'blue singing songbook,' Daniel ... proudly told us at supper one evening that he had asked Jesus into his heart. We prodded a bit, and Daniel explained that at the end of his video he had prayed along with the cast [to receive Jesus into his heart]. His conviction was real. At first, I overlooked what God had orchestrated through that Christmas shopping error. Then the next holiday season as I checked my list twice in order to avoid a repeat of the previous year's mistake, I [suddenly] realized what God had done. Some might doubt that God had planned the 'mistake.' I don't. He sent His Son for my son; wouldn't He also provide the message of salvation in a way Daniel could understand?" [Decision, Dec 1995. Page 25.]* God makes no mistakes; He only plans to accomplish important things in our lives in ways we would never dream of. What can we do but accept His sovereignty and praise Him!

God's Control In A Secular World: The Book Of Esther

The Prince Who Couldn't Be Satisfied - 2:19-3:15

At chapter 3 enters the villain of this story, and a good one he is! His name is Haman and he is someone you'll love to hate! He is the typical proud man who through his earthly lust for power and position tries to shake his fist at God. He has a long list of forerunners already in Scripture. There was Pharaoh, Balak, the Philistine kings, Ahab and Jezebel, Athaliah, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, to name but a few. All of these rose up to tell God they did not regard Him and they were going to do what they pleased, just like Haman. And where was God? Ps. 2:2-4 says (NASB, *The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the Lord and against His Anointed: "Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us!" He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.* God was sitting enthroned in heaven laughing! You see, He is the King who is over the kings of earth and the Lord who is over the lords of earth. And Haman's story just proves it all over again. But before we meet him, we have to take note of another important event that sets the stage:

I. The Advancement of Mordecai (2:19-23) There is a little thing here that we seldom notice about Mordecai which is that:

1. he becomes a judge (19-20) A little bit of time has passed since Esther became queen (which of course, ended the great beauty contest of chapter 2). But somehow sleazy old King Xerxes must have decided that he liked the idea and needed some fresh fillies in his harem so it seems he had another search and gathering of virgins for himself sometime later. But by this time, we are told that Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate and that's repeated in verse 21. Now that's a technical expression. In the eastern world, the city gate or in this case the palace gate was an important place. It is where court was held, where the elders sat for judgment and witness. Plain peasants and servants were not allowed to loiter around the palace gate all day and watch the traffic. Somehow, after her becoming queen, Esther must have found a discreet way to get Mordecai a job as a palace official or judge of some sort without telling he was her cousin so that the two of them could remain in contact. By the way, some of us young people would do well to have the kind of respect for our parents' instructions that Esther had for Mordecai's, even though she was the Queen! But all of this was no accident. This job saved his life because it is from that position that:

2. he foils an assassination (21-23) Two of Xerxes' close servants decided to do away with him. Bigthana could be the guy we met in 1:10 as one of his top seven officials. Anyway, he and Teresh had a very important job. They guarded the king's doorway, that is, his personal apartment and sleeping chamber. They could get him at night alone and unprotected and asleep. In fact, that's how Xerxes actually died years later, at the hand of an officer who conspired with one of his chamberlains or doorkeepers! No wonder he was worried when he heard this rumor and checked it out. Somehow, in Mordecai's position at the gate he got wind of this; perhaps he overheard a conversation, or something. At any rate he immediately told Esther who immediately told the king privately and named Mordecai as her source, still not telling that he was related to her. Sure enough, the plot was immediately uncovered and the two men executed, not by being hanged like we think of it, but by being impaled on a stake or post, the Persian method! But the most important thing to note is the last line. Though no reward was given Mordecai, perhaps through bureaucratic oversight, his name was written down by the royal scribes in the official court record. And that small fact saved his life. If credit had not been given to his name, he would soon have been the one impaled on a stake by Haman. An accident? A

chance happening? No, there is a God in heaven who watches over his people, backslidden or not and works out His will! Now in chapter 3 we come to:

II. The Advancement of Haman (3:1-2a) While all this was going on, about 4 years have passed since Esther became queen. But another thing was also going on. A man named Haman fell into the good graces of King Xerxes and eventually was elevated above all the other nobles and officials of the kingdom, making him, in effect, the prime minister, the #2 man in the kingdom like Joseph had been in Egypt. Not only did the other officials have to then kiss up to him naturally, but the king even issued an almost unnecessary decree that everyone had to bow down in his presence. This position, of course, brought great advantage to Haman. He became filthy rich; just listen to him brag in **5:11**. Such a man is dangerous, especially when he is right hand man to a king who seems to care only about personal pleasure and one who is cut off from the real happenings of his kingdom. That's what Mordecai is about to find out as he incurs:

III. The Anger of Haman (2b-6) In the process of time, Mordecai did the unpardonable; he crossed Haman. Here is:

1. the occasion of his anger (2b-4) Now at first Haman didn't even notice Mordecai and had to be informed about his behavior but after he was told, he observed it himself and became totally enraged. There are several factors that contributed to his anger:

a. Mordecai's refusal to kneel Of all the minor officials in the palace, Mordecai alone would not bow. Now I'm not so sure this was a real statement of religion. It doesn't say he refused to bow down to the king when he passed by. Bowing was a part of expected behavior toward royalty in Persia, not an act of worship like that which Nebuchadnezzar commanded of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Mordecai probably just saw through all of Haman's pomp and circumstance to the jerk he really was underneath and refused to honor such a man. But it's complicated by the fact of:

b. Mordecai's refusal of the King's command It was a royal decree to bow down before Haman. So now it's not personal anymore. He's defying the law of the Medes and Persians and if he defies this law, what other law will he also choose to disregard when it's convenient. Then take note of:

c. Mordecai's refusal of repeated warning He wasn't caught the first time. His fellow officials noticed his behavior and explained the situation to him to make sure he understood, not once but repeatedly. At last, whether it was out of dislike for Mordecai or out of jealousy that he could get away with what they could not get away with, they told Haman. And I'm sure they reported their repeated attempts to Haman. But the problem was:

d. Mordecai's example This was sort of a test case. They wanted to see whether his disobedience would be tolerated. If it would, that opened a whole new Pandora's box to them. It became a precedent and an example to others and I'm sure that got Haman's goat, too. If he gets away with this disrespect, others are going to show me disrespect also! And finally, there is the clincher:

e. Mordecai's religion At length Mordecai finally told that he was a Jew and evidently used that as an excuse not to bow. It really isn't. All kinds of Jews bowed down to kings and leaders in the history of Israel as part of normal process. He was using his religion as an excuse to get him off this hook. And so, Haman got angry but note:

2. the objects of his anger (5-6) First there was:

a. Mordecai personally (5) That's obvious. When Haman heard about it, I'm sure he quickly walked through the gate to test it and sure enough it was true. And every day as he went in and out, his eyes were on Mordecai who didn't bow and he got madder and madder. Compare 5:9. So he wanted to kill Mordecai. But that wasn't enough; that didn't satisfy him! He also determined to kill:

b. Mordecai's people (6) If one Jew did not bow down because he was a Jew, then obviously no Jew would bow down anywhere in the kingdom. Wherever he went throughout the kingdom, there would always be that handful that scorned his presence and Mordecai would live on! So kill them all! Why not? Rid the land of these insolent Jews, once and for all, forever. And so it is that you now have:

IV. The Attack of Haman upon the Jewish people (7-15) Haman was not the first one. Pharaoh had ordered all male Jewish babies thrown into the Nile in Egypt centuries before. Haman was also not the last. There would be Antiochus Epiphanes just before the time of Christ. The pages of history are filled with anti-Semitism, hatred of the Jews. In the last century alone, there were the Russian pogroms, organized massacres of entire towns. There was Hitler's holocaust which sent 6 million Jews to their graves! And even today the Arab nations would love nothing better than to wipe Israel off the face of the earth if the US would just step out of the way! Haman is just one in a long line of those who have held the same theory: let's wipe every Jew off the face of the earth. And so, in verse 7 we see:

1. the attack planned (7) Persians including King Xerxes, we know from history, were Zoroastrians, worshipping the supreme god Ahura Mazda and a pantheon of other gods along with him. They also had their equivalent of the devil and demons who opposed the good gods. So, it was vitally important for success in any matter to consult the gods,

especially before an important undertaking. This Haman sought to do by means of casting lots or *purim* to find out which month and day was the one on which he would most likely have success. Haman must have been pretty disappointed when he found out how long he had to wait. It was the first day of the first month (our April-May) in the year 474 BC. And the day chosen was the 13th day of the 12th month, almost a full year later! But you don't argue with the gods! So, Haman waited and connived. However, there was one thing he forgot: Prov. 16:33, *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD*. Our God, the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ, controls how the lots fall in this world! God was setting the time, preparing for the deliverance of His people! Now Haman had a plan but he still lacked approval so we have:

2. the attack proposed (8-11) Such a startling plan, to destroy a whole people in one day might even offend the king, so Haman ties it immediately to something else. Haman offers to pay 10,000 talents of silver into the royal treasury. You and I have no idea how much that is. Millions of dollars to us, a vast fortune! Now to a king who had just exhausted his treasury in the Greek wars, that sounded like a mighty good offer! The NIV has Xerxes say, "Keep the silver". But the NAS translates the Hebrew literally, "The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please." That sounds like a gentleman's way of saying, "I'll take it, if you want to do that; I'll accept your gracious gesture. Go and do what you want." In any event, I'm quite positive the silver ended up in the royal treasury! And so:

3. the attack prepared (12-15) By the way, did you know that America did not invent the pony express? The Persians had it 400 years BC. They had way stations with fresh horses and men throughout the whole empire so that royal messages could be transmitted over hundreds of miles, to the very ends of the empire in days or weeks. But what I want you to notice is:

a. the universality of it This went to every one of the 127 provinces. That would include Palestine. It was translated into every language and given to every government official. No place in the kingdom would be safe. And look who dies: men, women, even children and the elderly. Not a single Jew would be spared. And look at:

b. the certainty of it It was sealed with the king's own ring. It was issued as law, the law of the Medes and Persians which could not be changed, not even by the King himself. As far as Haman was concerned, he had his object in the bag. And that's where we'll pause in the story for today, but before we stop, let's pause to think a bit more deeply about what is happening:

4. the attack explained That devil-god that the Persians believed in really does exist. He is Satan, the prince of this world. This is not merely Haman's attack on the Jews. This is in reality Satan's attack on them. Satan is an anti-Semite. That's why the world has had such a long history of anti-Semitism. No other people have been more pursued and hated than the Jews. This is a spiritual battle and it has three purposes:

a. it would eliminate all of God's people The Persian Empire went from India to Greece. It included all of known civilization east of Rome which had not yet risen to power. When the Jews dispersed from Palestine, it was always to the East. This kingdom contained nearly every Jew on earth and if they were all slain, literally, not a Jew would be left alive in the world. The faithful few back in the land of Palestine trying to worship God would have been killed. There would be virtually nobody left that worshipped the true God in the whole world and Satan would have his day complete. The whole world would lie in the grip of the Evil One. But there's another object:

b. it would eliminate the fulfilling of God's promises If all the Jews die, God has failed for He promised Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that their seed would become a great nation and that it would never cease to be a nation. Jeremiah wrote: *Jer. 31:35 (NIV), This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-- the LORD Almighty is his name: "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the LORD, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me."* It would be easier to stop the sun from ever shining than to make Israel cease, God promised. And Satan could rub God's nose in that; He could boast victory and superiority; He could say God is too weak to keep His promises and God lies when He makes them. But most importantly this attack:

c. it would eliminate the coming of God's Son With no Jews, there would be no Son of the line of David to be the Savior. Paul said it was of the Jews that according to the flesh Christ came. No Jews, no Christ. Simple as that. No Savior, no salvation, and the whole world goes to hell forever and ever.

You see the story of the Book of Esther is not just the story of the saving of the Jews. It is the story of the saving of the world. It is the story of the saving of you! If the Jews died, there would have been no Christ, no Church, and you would have been lost forever! This is your story, another part of how God saved you! Haman is not the only prince who couldn't be satisfied. He didn't want one man; he wanted an entire people. Satan didn't want just one people; he wanted the whole world. And he almost got it, except for one thing. Nobody beats God. God loves to choose the weak things of this world to shame the strong and the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him. Not Haman. Not even Satan. *Since football is so important these weeks, let me read you what Charles Lowery wrote: "One game I sat beside a man who had already made Milwaukee famous. He was drunk before the kick-off, but he knew his football. He figured out that when our team was in a particular formation,*

the halfback would always get the ball. So, whenever they came out of that formation, he would holler that the halfback was going to get it. The more he was right, the louder he got. Finally, the first quarter ended. The coach had probably heard the drunk hollering, so I figured they probably wouldn't run that formation again. When the second quarter started, they came out in the same formation. I couldn't believe it, and neither could the drunk. He hollered, 'You idiot, the halfback is going to get it,' and he almost did. This time the quarterback faked it to the halfback, dropped back and threw a touch-down pass. The crowd went wild. Then I did something stupid and decided to rub it in a little bit. I told the drunk that the coach was smarter than he was and maybe now he would shut up. Then he got right in my face. I started to stagger just smelling his breath. The drunk's face turned red, his veins started popping out, and his fists clenched. I thought he was going to hit me, but he just said, 'How was I to know what that blankety-blank coach was planning?' and he sat down. Well, the more I thought about that drunk, the more I realized he was right. He didn't know what the coach was planning. The coach wanted the defense to think that the halfback was always going to get the ball in that formation. Finally, when the defense was absolutely sure, he threw the touchdown pass. You see, the coach didn't want to just win the first quarter, he wanted to win the whole game." [SBC Life, Jan 1996. Page 15.] God is the ultimate coach! So many times he lets Satan think he knows what the play is, that he has the game all sown up and in the bag. And then God does something so amazing that the world sits back in amazement. In Moses' day he thought it was all over, God's people were in the desert with nowhere to run and nothing to fight with. And then God parted the Red Sea! In Haman's day he thought it was all over, in the bag. And so, what does God do? He takes a little backslidden Jewish girl and the insomnia of a pagan king and literally changes the course of history! At last, on Golgotha there was a cross where the Son of God hung limp and dead between heaven and earth. It is finished. It is over, the enemy thought. And just when all hope was buried with Him on that third day God changed the play and threw the longest touchdown pass in history by raising Him from the dead!

That, my friend, is the God who is in heaven who controls your life! You never know what He's planning next. So don't give up; don't despair when circumstances overwhelm you, when it looks like there is no way forward, when it looks as though the enemy has won and you're going down for the third time. There is still a God in heaven and He loves you!

God's Control In A Secular World: The Book Of Esther

The Queen Who Couldn't Be Silent - Ch. 4

I think all of us have been in situations from time to time where we had to make a decision as to whether or not to get involved, whether to speak up or stay silent and let it pass, whether to do the thing that would help somebody else or do what would save our own neck to one degree or another. It may be as simple as sticking up for a friend in school who's getting bullied or reporting the wrong-doing of a fellow employee. Most of the time the only danger to us is the loss of a friendship or at most, a job. But in the situation before us in chapter 4 it was a matter of life and death, and not just Esther's own life, but the lives of thousands of her people the Jews. First, we see:

I. Mordecai's Consternation (1-3) When Mordecai heard about the decree Haman signed in King Xerxes' name to kill all the Jews, it hit him like a ton of bricks. You can see here:

1. his personal grief (1-2) He did what Easterners did when they were in great grief and sorrow. He tore his clothes and then put on sackcloth and dumped ashes on his head. He used every cultural sign of mourning they had. He ran out into the city streets moaning and wailing. Now I want you to notice two things about this. First, notice that now:

a. he identified himself publicly as a Jew For years he had worked to keep his nationality a secret, but he could do so no longer. Now the time had come and he realized that he could not pretend any more. It was time to get serious and admit who he really was. I'm sure he was sad and convicted now about his unwillingness to admit who his God was and probably felt that God was repaying him for his sin. And that guilt was amplified by the fact that:

b. he held himself personally responsible Surely he realized that this was all his fault. Thousands of Jews, an entire people, would die, men and women and children, all of them, because he was too proud to bow his knee to an obnoxious prince. Their blood would be on his head. That's enough to make you sober up and turn back to God, which it seems that he did! For the first time thoughts about God and His purpose and His plan and His covenant began to stir in Mordecai's heart once again after years of silence, years of trying to make it by himself in the world. Oh God always has a way of breaking us, when we're out there in self-land, doesn't He? But Mordecai did not mourn alone. Note:

2. his people's grief (3) The same thing was going on all over the Persian Empire. Jews everywhere were weeping and wailing and mourning. They were fasting. And no doubt many of them were praying too! Their hearts were turning back to thoughts of the God of their fathers and crying out to Him for help. And let me inject a thought here. Maybe this decree was a thing God really used. Maybe He was setting the stage for what He was about to do. Maybe this was why just 15 years later Ezra found 4000-5000 Jews who were willing to follow him back to the Promised Land from Babylon. Maybe this was why 14 more years after that Nehemiah was prepared to leave from his position in the very court of the King of Persia in Susa with his party to go rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Maybe through this time of grief and sorrow and then deliverance God was calling the hearts of many of His people back to His purpose and plan which had to do with the land of Israel!

Just as an aside, isn't it about time something like this happens in our land too? Isn't it about time that the hearts of His people all across America would be awakened from their immersion in pursuing self and success and the American dream to understand His plan and purpose in the world, the building of His church, the expansion of His Kingdom until every last person has heard the Good News? What will it take for us to rise up and pray and fast and seek His face? God usually has to use the threat of suffering to move His people to seek His face. Sadly, the threat of war or persecution, of personal suffering, is often what moves us to seek His face instead of the desire for His glory. At any rate, we move at verse 4 from Mordecai's consternation to:

II. Esther's Information (4-8) It seems that from her sheltered position inside the palace, Esther never even heard about the King's decree concerning the Jews. So, when she was told about Mordecai's mourning and wailing, she didn't understand it and wanted to do something about it. She made an:

1. the attempt to cover up grief (4) She assumed his grief was over some trivial matter. She wanted to show him that everything would be alright. After all, wasn't she the queen? She would not forget him and whatever he needed she would see to. So she sent him some new clothes to cheer him up. And I'm sure they weren't rags; they were royal finery. You know, a lot of people try to deal with problems that way; they try to cover up grief with pleasure or with money or something else. They try to forget that their problems exist, to pretend they'll go away, but they never do somehow. Fortunately, Mordecai had the sense to know that and simply refused the clothes. So now Esther was really upset and sent a servant to find out exactly what was wrong and she got:

2. the explanation of certain disaster (5-8a) Mordecai told it all. He told how he refused to bow to Haman and how that had angered him and how he was the one responsible for the wholesale slaughter of the Jewish people. He had made a copy of the King's decree to give to her. There were two things that bothered him which he made clear to her. One was:

a. the incomparable price He and she both knew this king's greed. Haman put millions of dollars into the king's treasury. I'm sure the King could probably have been bought off by a counter-offer but who could top it! No Jew had that kind of money. It would take something immensely more important to change the king's disposition and there was very little that was more important to him than several million dollars! But there was also:

b. the irrevocable decree This was a royal decree. It was the Law of the Medes and Persians. It could not be changed, not even by the King himself. Nothing really could be done about it. And yet Mordecai seems to have had hope because he made:

3. the suggestion of personal intervention (8b) "Esther, you're his queen, his wife. Go in and beg for mercy; go in and plead with him for the lives of your people. You're the only ray of hope there is on the entire horizon; the only person who has a shot at having greater influence on the king than Haman is you." Don't you hate being in that position where you know it's you or nobody, that spot where it all hangs on your shoulders because you're the only one who can really do something about the problem?! I think sometimes God puts us there to prove what we're really made of. But from our point of view, we often feel like Esther did:

III. Esther's Hesitation (9-14) Do you say, "Boy, I love putting myself on the line; I can't wait to do it!"? No, you and I both do like Esther; we hesitate, we start thinking of 99 reasons why we shouldn't do it, why we should keep our big mouth shut or keep our big nose out of it. And they're very good and rational reasons! Look at:

1. Esther's fear (9-11) She has two fears:

a. the great risk involved in going This king is really paranoid about getting assassinated. He has a rule that nobody comes into his inner court without being asked under pain of death. No would-be Ehud was going to run in and shake his hand with a dagger up his sleeve! Even the queen was subject to this rule. She came in only by invitation. To go in without invitation was to risk death and she remembered Vashti and what happened to her for ignoring the king's wishes! The king hadn't called for her in a month; maybe he wasn't so pleased with her anymore. But there was also:

b. the great risk involved in waiting She was thinking, "Well, the next time the king sends for me, I can tell him." But there was one problem with that. Remember 2:19; the King had recently garnered another lot of beautiful virgins to try out one at a time who were probably just now ending their 12 months preparation time. The king hadn't wanted her in 30 days. He might not want her for a year! And if she waits, her people die! So, if she goes, she might die and if she waits, they might die and it would be on her head. What should I choose, what's best for me or what's best for the other person? That's always our dilemma, isn't it? And you know what Jesus would say! Maybe what Mordecai said:

2. Mordecai's rebuke (12-14) He was pretty straight with her. He said:

a. you will die anyway This decree is irrevocable. It applies to every Jew. Your only hope is to keep your identity a secret and I just let that out of the bag by sending this message by your servant. It will come out. You may die if you go but you WILL die if you don't. And:

b. your family will die Maybe Esther's parents had other children we're not told about or at least there were aunts and uncles and cousins, other family that she loved. You will be killing your own family if you don't act. But further, think about this:

c. God will deliver His people another way Now I know God's name isn't mentioned, but if Esther won't do it, who else is left? Mordecai has awakened. He remembers God's promise to the fathers; he remembers that Israel shall never cease being a people. God will just have to do it some other way but you and your family here in Susa will die! But here's the clincher; if you don't stand up:

d. you will miss God's purpose for your life Maybe God put you where you are at this moment just to do this very thing! I can begin to see it now. We were not even thinking of Him, not even worshipping Him. But He was there all the time standing in the shadows watching over us and it was He who put you in as Queen. And maybe this is why! You'll miss God's will! What a powerful plea! And it worked! Look at:

IV. Esther's Decision (15-17) "I will go. And if I perish, I perish!" Now that's the Esther we know and love! Whether she came to really love God or not we don't know. But she did come to love her people and to be willing to sacrifice herself for their good if necessary. She did what was right! Now quickly before we leave the chapter let's make:

V. Our Application Read again verse (14). Esther is not the only one who came to be where she was for such a time as this!

1. God put you where you are Prince or pauper, king or commoner, God put you there. Your position may not be royal but it is still the king's position. Where you live, where you work, where you go to school, the class you're in, the people you know, the family you are in. Those things are not accidents. They are acts of God's providence just as much as Esther's being chosen queen. And if they are, it follows then that:

2. God put you there for a purpose God never does anything just for the fun of it or to see what will happen. He has a purpose and a plan. That uncomfortable situation you may be in where you have to choose whether to get involved or not, God engineered it; He planned it. You see, history is really "His story". He put you there to obey Him and serve His purpose in it. And you have a choice to make to stand up and do the right thing, to stand up and speak for Him, to stand up and help the one who needs it, to stand up and let the presence of God shine through you. But remember this:

3. God will see His purpose fulfilled with or without you. If you choose wrong; if you choose to try to deliver yourself rather than do the right, that won't stop God. He'll get His purpose accomplished another way. But you'll miss out on being a part of it! You'll miss out on being used of God.

Just remember what we shared last week. If Esther had been silent, there would be no Jews and no Christ and no salvation and you would probably not be here this morning, except that there is a God in heaven who would have had to do it another way! He would not have let His salvation plan be stopped. But still, Esther's choice would have affected whole generations and history itself. So, bank on it; your choices to get involved or not will have consequences beyond your wildest dreams. *The story is told of a philosophy professor at the University of Southern California. He was a committed atheist and used every opportunity in his introductory course to disprove the existence of God. Because of his flawless logic, students were afraid to contradict him. He had taught this class for 20 years, and every semester on the final day of class he would issue a challenge. He would stand at the front of the large lecture hall and say to the 300 or so students: "If anyone here still believes in God, stand up!" In all those years, no one had ever dared to stand up. Then he would say, "If you still believe in God, you're a fool. If God did exist, He could keep this piece of chalk from hitting the floor and breaking into pieces. A very simple task for an almighty God, wouldn't you say? Yet He can't do it!" His voice dripped with sarcasm and scorn. Every year he would drop the chalk, and it would shatter on the hard tile floor. The students would just stare, many of them convinced that he had proved God didn't exist. Surely, there had been Christian students in these classes, but none of them had had the courage to stand up. A few years ago, however, a freshman enrolled in the class because it was required for his major. This young man was terrified of the professor because he had heard the stories, but he prayed every morning during the semester that when the day came, he would have the courage to stand up for his faith. Finally, on the last day, the prof issued his usual challenge: "If there's anybody here who still believes in God, stand up!" The freshman got to his feet. Everyone in the hall turned to look at him as the professor shouted, "You fool! If God is real, He can keep this piece of chalk from shattering when it hits the floor." As he said it, the piece of chalk slipped out of his hand, bounced off his sleeve, hit his shoe, and rolled across the floor unbroken. The professor looked at the young man and then angrily stomped out the door. In the stunned silence that followed, the student made his way to the front of the room and began to share his testimony with 300 very attentive classmates. Would you have stood up? [From the Internet.]* Let's have Esther's resolve to really play our part in God's plan, to stand up, to speak up, to do the right thing, no matter what the personal cost.

God's Control In A Secular World: The Book Of Esther

The Plan That Couldn't Fail - Ch. 5

Have you ever had to approach somebody in a difficult situation and been at a loss as to how to do it? Maybe it was to tell the teacher he was wrong, or to tell your parents that you wanted to quit school and get married or maybe that you had wrecked the car. But there are a lot of times in life when approaching somebody is even more serious, when there is some danger involved, maybe when you approach someone about the salvation of their soul or when you approach someone that's involved in a serious sin. In chapter 4 Esther had made the decision to risk her very life and approach King Xerxes on behalf of the Jews to make a desperate attempt to save their lives from destruction. But she was not the only one who planned to approach the king. In chapter 5, the wicked prince Haman, the enemy of the Jews, decided at almost the same time to approach the king for permission to kill Esther's cousin Mordecai. Both of them had a plan to approach the king. The one ultimately succeeded; the other failed. Esther's plan didn't look like it had much chance of succeeding, yet it couldn't fail. Haman's plan looked like it absolutely couldn't fail, yet it had no chance of success. And why? *Prov. 19:21 says, Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.* If the plan in your heart isn't God's plan, it's doomed to failure. If you've listened to Him and your plan is His plan, it can't fail. Now let's begin by looking at:

I. Esther's Plan to Expose Haman (1-8) On the third day after she and Mordecai and all the Jews had fasted and prayed, she made:

1. her approach to the king (1-4) Now remember that there was a law that no one could approach the king in his inner court without being invited, under pain of death. Esther was taking her life into her very hands so she did not do this thing haphazardly. She planned it out carefully. Notice her approach:

a. in entering the court (1-2) Did you notice how she didn't run in screaming and angry about the law the king had made? She stood quietly in the outer court in a position where the king could look through the doorway and see her. And did you notice she didn't come in her bathrobe with her hair in curlers? Rather, she put on her finest, her royal robes. She made herself look splendid and beautiful. This king hadn't given her a thought in 30 days but you know what happened? When he saw her in her quiet humility and gentle beauty it touched his heart. He was pleased with her, both with her appearance and with her humble behavior. And he knows instantly that something is wrong. She would not take this risk unless it were important. He knows something is troubling her heart and his heart goes out to her. The first words out of his mouth are "What is your request; consider it done!" Now let me take this opportunity to make an application. You know, very often the way you approach somebody makes all the difference in the world. When you approach somebody in an angry or judgmental fashion and make yourself unattractive in their eyes, you stand a good chance of failure before you start. But when you approach somebody in humility, maybe preparing the way with a gesture of love, that will make you attractive in their eyes and the request might just be granted before the words are out of your mouth. If there is one thing I've had to do in the ministry, it's to approach people in all kinds of serious situations. I've brought bad news; I've approached people about serious problems; I've even had to apologize to people I'd offended. Let me tell you, the humbleness and graciousness of your approach is so important that I cannot emphasize it enough! Notice how Esther continues:

b. in presenting her request (3-4) She didn't just blurt out what she wanted right away. Why not? Well, one commentary felt she was just afraid. There's no question about her fear, but I think this was thought through and planned intentionally. After all she had a banquet already prepared. She wanted to let the request wait and present it at just the right time and occasion. Timing is the other key factor in approaching anyone. *Prov. 27:14, If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.* If you call me at 6 AM and say, "Hey I just wanted to encourage you and wish you a good day!", I'm liable to hang the phone up. Ask me to help you when I'm up to my ears in work and I'm liable to say no! Wise timing in your approach is important. So, Esther invited the King to a banquet she'd prepared and she included Haman. Then we read next about:

2. her entertainment of the king (5-8) The king can't wait. He loves parties. So he sends word to Haman and the two of them go to their own private banquet. And they have the best of food in the palace and they have the best of wine. And still Esther does not present her case. Eventually the king remembers, "Oh, yes, there must have been something you wanted; nobody takes their life into their hands to invite the person to dinner. What is it?" But still she does not tell. We can only speculate why. But she invites them back to another banquet tomorrow at which time she promises to tell all her heart. You may say she was scared and put it off as long as possible. You may say she was buttering him up. You may say she was trying to gain stature in his eyes or follow cultural custom. All I can say is that God certainly put it in her mind because if she would have given her request that day things might have ended quite differently. It was on the night in between the two banquets that God dealt with this king concerning his relationship with Mordecai and the result was that instead of being executed the next morning, Mordecai was exalted and honored. Maybe Esther herself didn't know why she held the two banquets, but we do. God was at work in her circumstances working them out according to His perfect will. Now let's think about:

3. her example to us I don't think we can fully appreciate:

a. the great difficulty she faced It was not simply a matter of getting an audience with the king. She was in the difficult position as a woman who traditionally would have nothing to do with affairs of state except serving hors d'oeuvres, of having to convince the king that his favorite prime minister, his right-hand bosom buddy, was a creep in sheep's clothing, that he was trying to murder thousands of innocent people unjustly for personal gratification. That was no easy task when the king himself was pretty much inclined to do the same thing, so why should he care! And she had to do it without arousing Haman's suspicion and letting him get wind of what she wanted and give him opportunity to influence the king first. And then she had to ask the king to undo the undoable, to break his own law, the law of the Medes and Persians which could not be changed. That was a tall order, tall enough to keep you from approaching someone and giving up in fear. But it shows that God is able to change even the king's heart and if you feel God's direction to approach someone, no matter how difficult or unlikely it may seem, be encouraged. There is still a God in heaven. Then notice:

b. the great selflessness she displayed She was willing to risk her own life if need be. But this was not for her. Nobody even knew she was a Jew except one eunuch who could probably be easily silenced. Yet she laid her life on the line for the benefit of others. So many times, our most difficult approaches are not for ourselves, they are for the good of others or for the person's own good and it would be so much easier to stay out of it and not take the risks involved of offending them or being hurt. But we need to do what is right, not what is safe! And then note:

c. the great wisdom she used in laying out her plan She obviously thought a great deal about how to best approach the King. That's wise. When we approach someone, we need to think and to pray about them, to think about the things that turn them off, the things that they tend to listen to, and make our approach accordingly. And that applies whether the person is the king or our spouse or our son or our friend. Well now let's move on to:

II. Haman's Plan to Execute Mordecai (9-14) All this time Haman is in the dark. He has no idea what Esther is up to. But he likes it. See:

1. his elation: because he was **self-centered (9a)** This guy has an ego big enough to choke a hippopotamus anyway, and Esther's party blew it up more. He'd spent the whole day fulfilling his life's ambition: getting close to the king and Esther had helped him in the process, it seemed. He was elated but it was all self-centered. And, you know, if what makes you happy is self-centered, then you can be sure that it won't last long. Then see:

2. his agitation: because of **non-recognition (9b)** On his way out of the palace, there was Mordecai at his post, evidently seated at the gate and he wouldn't get up and bow or even give any sign of reverence or recognition. And that grated on Haman's ego and lit his fire. When you're self-centered, it really bothers you when other people can't see how great you are! Have you noticed that? Well, here's:

3. his solution: boasting (10-12) He went home and got his captive audience, his wife and his friends, the people who had to agree with him, and he boasted to them. He laid it on thick. And the more he talked, he started to feel better. He bragged about the very things self-centered people brag about today. He bragged:

a. about his possessions, the vast wealth he'd accumulated in the king's service, the nice things he had. He bragged:

b. about his posterity, his children. He had 10 sons, it says in 9:7-10, and according to him there were no finer boys in all the land. And he bragged:

c. about his privileges, all the ways the king had honored him, all the things he had been allowed to do, all the power he had been given. And:

d. about his position, how he was placed above all the other princes and nobody was better than he was, nobody was greater than he was, how he was the best. And finally, he bragged:

e. about his personal invitation The icing on the cake was today's invitation to the banquet. Nobody, no man, ever dined with the queen. For her to invite only him with the king was the absolute highest of honors. Does any of this stuff sound familiar? Self-centered people brag and it makes them feel great, but it's just a soap bubble and the next person who sees them for what they really are pops it. Verse 13. Even bragging can't make you feel good as long as there's someone who's pointing out how full of hot air you are. So you have:

4. his resolution: to take **revenge (13-14)** His wife and friends were helpful. They said, "Well silly, Mordecai is only an insignificant little judge at the gate. You're the big cheese. All you have to do is ask the king to hang him; he'll do it for you! He wouldn't refuse you! In fact, why not build the gallows tonight so you can hang him quickly in the morning so it doesn't ruin your party tomorrow!" And so, Haman bought that plan which had two elements. First:

a. the execution of Mordecai Self-centered people love vengeance and sometimes go to great lengths to get it. They are not satisfied until that person who is opposing them is totally out of the way. But that's not the only thought here. There is also:

b. the example to the public Haman could have arranged a quiet little disappearance in the night for Mordecai. But instead, he built a gallows 75 feet high. This was actually a stake to be impaled on, not a hanging gallows as we think of. He'd take Mordecai's body and stick it way up there in the air above all the buildings where everybody could see it and they would get the message: "Oppose me and this is what happens to you!" That would soon bend the knee of any future "Mordecais" that might be lurking in the wings! So, he set his dastardly plan in motion. It couldn't miss.

However, while the carpenters were busy hammering the last nails into Haman's gallows that night, over in the palace God was at work hammering the last coffin nails into Haman's plan. That very night God changed things in such an incredible way that in the morning instead of hanging Mordecai, Haman found himself leading Mordecai around the whole city on a horse, publicly crying, "This is the man the King desires to honor!" You see, self-centered plans with an evil intent always go down to defeat. Sometimes before they are carried out; sometimes after. But they never really succeed in the long run. Why not? Because the God of the universe is a just God who has committed Himself to oversee the path of His people. *In 1772 in a dismal flat in London, a man stood gazing into the fireplace overcome by discouragement and depression. In his mind he had a plan. He walked out into the fog to a horse-drawn cab and ordered the driver, "To the Thames, Sir!" because he had decided to jump from the bridge and take his own life. But something in his plan went awry. The cab became hopelessly lost in the thick fog and after 1-1/2 hrs. of wandering it suddenly and surprisingly ended up in right in front of his own home. So impressed was he that he climbed the stairs to his flat, lit the lamp, and knelt to ask God to forgive him for what he had planned to do. His name was William Cowper and he wrote this hymn:*

*"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm.
"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break In blessings on your head.
"His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste But sweet will be the flower.
"Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain."*

Prov. 19:21 says, *Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.* Find His plan for you in your situation. Seek His will, no matter how crazy or ludicrous or impossible it may seem. Choose to join Him in what He is doing. Give up all thought of doing things your own self-centered way. With His plan you can't fail but if you follow your own, you can't win. Ever.

ESTHER: THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Chs. 6-7 The King Who Couldn't Sleep

Today in our study we come to the most exciting section of the Book of Esther. It is the climax. It is the night between Esther's two banquets. The tension has built to a peak. The powerful villain Haman is headed for the king's doorway first thing in the morning to come in and request permission to hang the good guy, Mordecai; in fact, the gallows is already built. The heroine Esther is ready on the morrow to take a long shot and risk her life to expose Haman as the villain he really is before the king. I am reminded of the last verse. of James Russell Lowell's famous hymn, "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above His own!" There is no place in this book where you can see the hand of God at work superintending the events of men any more clearly than right here. It is as though God is sitting up in heaven pulling a string here and flipping a switch there so that somehow, even though men are doing their best to pursue their own ends, His will ends up being done. And, of all things, it begins with:

I. The Insomnia of the King (6:1-3) What an important night this is. The fate of the entire Jewish nation and therefore of the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the whole world is hanging by a slender thread. In the morning Haman is going to get Mordecai executed and without him, Esther may be too frightened to say anything to the king. The whole kingdom is sound asleep, all except one person, the king. Clearly you can see here:

1. God's hand of providence: First in the simple fact of:

♦ **the king's inability to sleep** This is a God-given insomnia. If the King had slept normally, Haman would have made his request early in the morning and Mordecai would have dangled at dawn! But he didn't sleep; God kept him awake. And not having any Sominex to take, he decided to try another method, to have his clerk come in and bore him to sleep by reading the court chronicles, but that is also providential because of:

♦ **the clerk's choice of reading** Xerxes had been king now for 12 years. The clerk could have started at year one and had the king asleep by the time he'd read through 6 months. Esther had been queen now for 5 years. Mordecai's deed of exposing the assassination plot back in 2:21-23 should have been at least 3 or 4 years earlier. Sup-

pose the clerk had picked the current year's records or last year's records? But he didn't; of all that he could have chosen to read, he picked the exact time period God wanted him to read! And one more thing is providential:

♦ **the oversight in rewarding Mordecai** What if Mordecai had been properly rewarded at that time? What if he'd gotten a sum of money or a royal award or something right then? The king might have passed right by it in the reading without noticing! But as it was, he felt remorse! He hadn't rewarded the man who saved his life! Maybe that was why he couldn't sleep! And he set out to do something about it immediately! And so, what we have here is a:

2. the Divine reversal: the forgotten is remembered That which had been forgotten and buried is brought to mind. That which would have been lost forever in the erosion of time, that which Satan never wanted to be remembered again, that which had no chance of survival, was indeed remembered. Why? Because of this fact which is our:

3. application: God does not forget Maybe Mordecai had begun to wonder about that, to wonder whether the good he had done had just gone unnoticed and was all for naught. Maybe you feel like that sometimes. Here you are serving God, giving your all, maybe doing something really wonderful that nobody sees and nobody cares about and which the person you did it for doesn't even remember. But listen, God remembers! *Compare Mt. 10:42 ...if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.* Not even the smallest detail, not the cup of cold water, does God forget. Be encouraged! Now in the rest of the chapter we read about:

II. The Humiliation of Haman (6:4-14) The long restless night has passed before the king makes his discovery. And already early in the morning you can see:

1. God's hand of providence: at work in:

♦ **Haman's timely entrance (4-5)** Isn't God's timing wonderful? It has taken until early morning for God to put Mordecai on his mind. And not a moment too soon, for Haman has just entered the gate. Consequently, the king bush-whacks Haman with what's on his mind before Haman has a chance to bring up what's on his own! If Haman had slept in and some other prince had showed up in the court first, Haman might have missed out on being humiliated! But God ordained it so. He was not satisfied to destroy Haman. He wanted to humble his pride first and designed a tremendous way of doing so. But he really did have it coming. Look at:

♦ **Haman's selfish answer (6-9)** What an ego! Haman's whole answer is intended to honor himself but it is the perfect answer that God has in mind to humiliate him. Yet he doesn't know it! If he had given any other answer, he would have missed out on public humiliation. So once again you have here:

2. the Divine reversal: the haughty honors the humble (10-11) Can you imagine Haman running around the city square leading Mordecai and having to act like a common paige and crier for a man he despises, for a man who wouldn't even bow down to him! And now he's bowing! He's humiliated before Mordecai. What that must have done to his heart! In fact, you can see:

♦ **its effect (12-14)** He's ashamed. His head is covered and he's in grief. He blurts out the story of his shocking humiliation expecting some pity and commiseration and somebody to tell him, "That's OK Haman dear; everything'll be alright." But instead, they say something that's almost incredible. "Since Mordecai is a Jew, you can't win; he'll ruin you!" How in the world did they know that and where were they when he was plotting to kill Mordecai and the Jews in the first place! I don't have a real answer except that maybe it indicates that somehow, despite the ungodliness of the Jews in that place and day, God had maintained some smidgeon of a reputation for Himself and His people that was remembered vaguely. Maybe God had not left Himself without witness after all in the vast Persian Empire! But the thing I want you to notice is an:

3. application: God humbles the proud - Prov. 16:18-19 That's a principle. It's always true. Think of all the proud men throughout history, all the ones you've known. Nine times out of ten they fall! The Hitlers and the Mussolinis and the Alexander the Greats and the Napoleons all have a Waterloo somewhere. And the ones that miss falling here still have a rude awakening on the other side of the grave. God's in the business of humbling the proud. Prov. 3:34 says, *He mocks proud mockers [He opposes the proud] but gives grace to the humble.* So, you're far better off to be among the lowly and oppressed! Dale and Lori Taylor began missionary work among the Tarahumara people of Mexico about 15 years ago. The president of the township where they were living was a tribal man who was strongly opposed to the Gospel and to evangelical missionaries living in tribal lands. One morning he met Dale and said, "Who gave you permission to live here?" "The tribal assembly," Dale responded. "Well, we'll be taking care of that today!" he said. At noon that same day, Dale had to attend a meeting of the general community. He gathered his papers and went to the meeting. A doctor who had just come to the community was also present. Just before the issue of whether the Taylors should be allowed to continue to live there was to be discussed, the doctor asked to say a few words. "I'd like to acknowledge those in the community who have served as health promoters," he said. He called each person to the front and gave them a certificate of recognition. When he came to Lori Taylor's name, he said, "I don't know this person but I'm told she and her husband Dale have done a great service to the community in helping the sick, even when

there hasn't been a doctor." Since Lori wasn't present, Dale went forward in her place. The doctor then turned to the president of the assembly and said, "Would you please be the one to give this certificate of appreciation?" In front of the whole assembly the president had to acknowledge the Taylors' value and esteem in the community. From then until the end of his time in office that man was unable to petition to have the Taylors removed from the village!
 [NTM@Work, March 2001, p. 7] Oh, God has a way of cutting even the proud Hamans of today down to size! And it continues as we move into the seventh chapter where we see:

III. The Exposure of Haman (7:1-6) Now, the stage having been set by God, the time has come for Esther's second banquet and her attempt to expose Haman for the villain he really is. Again, you can see:

1. God's hand of providence: Esther's secrecy (1-5) Up to this point Esther has kept it a secret from everyone that she is a Jew. That was not good in one sense and was a denial of her God in many ways. But God uses even the sins of men sometimes and this very secrecy is what proved to be Haman's undoing. He didn't know in seeking the lives of the Jews that he was seeking the life of the Queen! Had he known, he'd have found another, more subtle way to carry out his plot, leaving her totally out of it. And, of course, the thought of an attempt on the life of his queen touches the king's heart. He is moved; in fact, he is furious! Who would dare do such a thing? And Esther simply turns and points at Haman and says "HIM!" And in that moment, there is another:

2. the Divine reversal: the favored becomes the enemy (6) Haman, the king's right-hand man, his most trusted prince, the most favored and beloved confidant of the king is suddenly his enemy and adversary and is groveling in terror! How the mighty have fallen! Why? Because the truth has become known. The political play-acting and manipulation Haman was using failed. And here is an application to remember:

3. application: God exposes the truth - Lk. 12:1-3 God is a just God. He knows what is true. And He doesn't tolerate the triumph of deceit and lies. Hypocrisy doesn't work. Play acting and pretending doesn't work. The most well-hidden secret, the smallest whisper of wrong will come out eventually. And if it doesn't come out here on earth (which it almost always does sooner or later), it will come out when you have to stand before God and everybody watching in that day will know it! God is in the business of exposing the truth. It is imperative to know that and live accordingly! Now finally at the conclusion of the chapter we see:

IV. The Execution of Haman (7-10) Somehow a simple apology wouldn't be enough. God's justice was not finished by ruining Haman. Here again is:

1. God's hand of providence: the king's timely return (7-8) The king was so angry that he got up and walked out into the palace garden to think and calm down. Haman knew his neck was already in the noose and he only has one hope. It is Esther he has offended, though unknowingly, and it is only her at this point who has enough influence with the king to save his life. In those days they didn't sit in chairs but reclined on little couch-things along the table. So, he falls before her and probably grasps her arms or legs begging and pleading for his life as she is trying to push him away. And it is at that very moment the king walks back in and sees him with his hands on the queen and takes it for an attempt to molest her! And, of course, now there will be no pardon. Instead, there is another:

2. the Divine reversal: the hangman becomes the hanged (9-10) Haman was going to impale Mordecai on a 75 ft. stake for the whole city to see. But instead, he himself was impaled on a stake for the whole city to see. God turned the whole situation around and left him hanging there as His Divine warning sign to all those who would touch His chosen ones, to all the Jew-haters and anti-Semites of the world. "He that touches a Jew touches the apple of My eye and here's what happens." So, there is one last:

3. application: God brings justice - Gal. 6:7-8 God is a God of justice and He will bring it to pass. You can't mock at God and think you've gotten away with something. You will reap what you sow. If you sow to the flesh, you will reap destruction in this life or if not, then in the next. But if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap life! It's God's law of the harvest.

What confidence and assurance these chapters should give to us. God is still on the throne and no matter how black and dark the night may look for us, He can reverse and change it and often does. And no matter who is on the throne of the Kingdom, He is controlling what happens all the way along and working it together for His purpose so that in the end there will be true justice for all! And listen, if His watchcare for the Jew was so great, how much more for us who are His children through faith in Jesus Christ! Mao Tse Tung came to power in China in 1949 and thought he would destroy the church of Jesus Christ and wipe out belief in God in China. Instead, Mao became God's instrument to multiply the church until it is the fastest growing church on earth, nearly 100 million strong today, some say, while Mao's body lies cold in a tomb! The Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in Iran and swept it into the fanaticism of Islamic law, persecuting believers horribly. Today he too lies dead and buried and the effect of his reign of terror is a once again a church growing faster than ever and Muslims drawn to Christ by reaction against him and his awful ideas! The Soviet Union made every effort to stamp out belief in God for 70 years and today, while it lies in ruins, the Church of Jesus Christ is growing by leaps and bounds all across that huge region of the earth! Oh, my friend, God keeps watch above His own and that means you too.

He's in control of your life as well as empires and nations. Trust Him and keep on being obedient. Wait patiently for Him. His purpose will not fail. The wheels of God's justice may turn slowly but they grind exceedingly sure. What a mighty God we serve!

God's Control In A Secular World: The Book Of Esther

The Decree That Couldn't Be Changed - Ch. 8

God has now turned the tide in this story of Esther. The wicked villain Haman is dead and hanging on a stake for all to see. His evil plot to destroy Mordecai and all the Jewish people has been revealed. And yet the story is far from over. That was only the beginning. The goal that Esther and Mordecai set out to accomplish was the deliverance of their people, the Jews, from the death decreed for them by Haman. There still stood a decree against them, the king's decree, that on the 13th day of the 12th month every Jew in the kingdom, and therefore in the world, would die. Somehow that decree has to be changed, reversed. And now we read that it is. In fact, we can actually see 3 reversals in this 8th chapter. First:

I. The Reversal of Mordecai's Position (1-2) Up until the night before, the King has not even known who Mordecai is. He's just a little nobody official at the Palace gate. But last night the king was reminded from the court records that Mordecai the nobody had saved his life. Now imagine his surprise to hear his wife Queen Esther tell him that Mordecai is her cousin who raised her and cared for her and that he is a Jew just as she is! The Persians were great believers in fate and surely Xerxes saw this as no accident! And so, in a moment of time, even though they have probably not met personally before, the King is ready to put Mordecai in Haman's place! What an ironic twist this is:

1. Mordecai receives Haman's authority Haman once carried the king's signet ring, his seal. There was only one of those. That meant he had virtually the full authority of the king. He could make laws and sign decrees with the King's name! And the king gave the ring to Mordecai so he is now in effect what Haman was, the #1 man in the kingdom, the King's prime minister, his right-hand trusted man, while Haman is hanging on the gallows he built for Mordecai! And what's more:

2. Mordecai rules Haman's estate All Haman's vast wealth, millions of dollars, plus his house and property and all that he had become forfeited to the king when he was executed. And the king gave it to his wife Esther as a present and she appointed Mordecai to be in charge of it. So, here's Mordecai now living in Haman's house, spending Haman's money and receiving Haman's income! An impossible thing and yet with God nothing shall be impossible!

But even this wonderful reversal, is not the thing their hearts desire. Esther and Mordecai are not interested in their personal gain. They didn't risk their lives to get riches or power, but to save their people. So, the first thing on their hearts is:

II. The Reversal of the King's Decree (3-14) They need to do something about the King's awful decree against the Jews. And so, we read next:

1. the plea of Esther (3-6) She falls at the King's feet mourning and weeping and pleading with him to do something to reverse the decree. She thought that surely somehow an order could be written and sent out by the king to cancel the previous decree. She thought since it was Haman who invented it and wrote it and sent it out that the king could undo it with his royal power. But she didn't understand the Persian system very well. A law cannot be repealed. That she couldn't have. But what she did get was:

2. the permission of the King (7-8) He made it very clear to her that:

a. the previous decree could not be revoked In any other kingdom in the world it might have been repealed but the Persians had a law that even the king was subject to: no decree given by the king can be reversed. Even the king had to bow down to his own decrees! That's why I'm sure Haman thought he had it in the bag once the king signed it. And Satan thought the same thing! He thought "Haman or no Haman, I still have the Jews; they are as good as dead and there is nothing the king can do about it!" That's why the wise men of Babylon thought they had Daniel in King Darius' day 60 years earlier. They knew the king couldn't change the law about throwing him into the lions' den. But they didn't figure on God shutting the lions' mouths once he was thrown in! King Xerxes couldn't stop the Jews' enemies from legally attacking them on the appointed day; that decree stood but:

b. a new decree could supersede it The king says, "You invent another decree that will counteract the effect of the first one, one that will give the Jews rights and protections against the first decree so that in effect it will be nullified." So the king cast it back in Mordecai's lap and it is not long before he comes up with a plan:

3. the plan of Mordecai Mordecai would write a brand new decree and sign it with the king's ring just like the first one was signed. But before we read what the decree said, we read about:

a. the distribution of the decree (9-10) It was the 23rd of Sivan which is about our June. The decree was written and signed. Then it was translated into all the languages of the various areas and provinces and sent out by the royal pony express messengers so that in just weeks the whole empire knew. Mordecai made sure that this decree was in every way published as much as the last one was to be sure undo its effect. And now we read the actual:

b. the content of the decree (11) You see, before the Jews were merely helpless victims who were allowed to be slaughtered by anyone who wanted to on the appointed day. They were to be destroyed without any opportunity to defend themselves. Compare 3:13. The king still could not prevent them from being attacked. But now he gave them the right to assemble and to defend themselves against their enemies on that same day and to kill their enemies and their families and seize their property. Everything their enemies would seek to do to the Jews, the Jews could now legally do to them. And the kicker is this: along with this royal decree came the news that a Jew was the new Prime Minister and the man favored of the king and that in itself spoke volumes about which side was going to win on that day! But notice one more thing:

c. the timing of the decree (12-14) It was to be done on the same day. And the couriers were sent quickly so that the Jews would have time to prepare. And they did; they had 8-9 months to get ready! The first decree was sent out in the middle of the first month, only 2 months earlier. So essentially the Jews would have just as much time to prepare as their enemies would and would have the support of the king as well!

And so, the decree that was unchangeable was in effect changed. Though it continued to stand on the books, it was essentially reversed. And the effect of the reversal is this: instead of every last Jew in the Kingdom being annihilated, every last Jew-hater, every Haman in the kingdom would be annihilated and thus the future of the Jews would be made secure. And with this reversal comes the third one:

III. The Reversal of the Jews' Mourning (15-17) For 2 months the Jews everywhere in the world had been mourning and fasting and praying, ever since the royal couriers had come to their towns with the decree. Can you imagine them when the royal couriers came the second time? Can you see them listening to the decree and hearing that now a Jew was in authority and that they were encouraged to defend themselves and kill their enemies? Look at:

1. the great joy they experienced Their sorrow had been turned into joy. They held a holiday and feasted and danced and celebrated. It started right there in Susa at the palace. Can you imagine those Jews who knew what was really going on now seeing Haman on the stake and Mordecai wearing the royal colors and the prince's crown? And wherever the message spread, even back to the struggling Jews in the land of Palestine, the reaction was the same. God had protected and spared His people. What great confidence and assurance it must have given them that God had once more revealed Himself in their behalf! But that was not the only reason they were happy. Notice:

2. the great respect they enjoyed Now instead of being despised and ill-treated, many of the people around them began to treat them with favor and respect. Some, and the text actually says many, even went so far as to become proselytes and convert from the worship of the idols of Persia to the worship of the God of Israel! God not only got glory for the Jews but also glory for His great Name as well! I want to save the full impact of this thought in verse 17 and return to it next time when we conclude the book, but before we leave this chapter I want to talk about:

IV. The Beautiful Pictures In The Story Of Esther Of course, the reversal of this decree gives us great joy for it means there will be a Jewish people and therefore there will indeed be a Savior of the line of David to save us from our sins. Strictly speaking, we are reading the record of how God preserved our salvation for us and Satan was defeated in his plan to ruin it. And so, like the Jews, we give glory to God for His greatness once again. But let's look even deeper than that. The Old Testament is filled with beautiful pictures or types that illustrate our redemption. Everything in it points to Christ. And this story is no exception. Let's be daring enough to see in this whole story a picture, a type, an Old Testament foreshadowing of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. It is not a perfect picture and not all of the details fit, but I think it's worth considering. First of all, in the decree of death against all the Jews we can see:

1. a picture of the decree that stood against us - Col. 2:13-15 The fate of the Jewish people was held in the hand of the king who ruled their world. Life or death was theirs at his decree. So, it is for us. God is the great King and our eternal destiny lay from the very beginning is in His hand. Thank goodness He is not the kind of king that Xerxes was, fickle and selfish and uncaring. Our King is a just and a righteous king. But nevertheless, the fate of the entire human race lay in His hand. And by Xerxes' first decree we are reminded of:

a. the decree of death that stood against us Just as every Jew stood under the sentence and decree of death, so every one of us stood there by decree of our King. There was a written record against us. The Bible is full of it: "The soul that sins, it shall die.", "There is none righteous...the wages of sin is death." We, like the Jews, stood under the sentence of universal death, every last one of us, man and woman, young and old because of our sins. Only unlike Xerxes' decree, ours was a just one; we deserved it! But then, just like in this story there came a:

b. the new decree of life that saved us Jesus Christ our Savior reversed that decree by dying for our sins. He nailed it to the cross and made it of no effect. Like Xerxes' decree, it still stands but it has been superseded by a new decree that all who believe will now not die but live eternally. We who were dead, not only in our sinful nature but in our eternal destiny, have been made alive through what Jesus Christ did. And all we have to do to receive it is just what the Jews had to do: believe the decree! If they didn't believe it, they would just stand there and let their enemies slaughter them. But if they believed the decree, then they would live (through preparation, etc.) So too we believe the new decree: "whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" and we have life! And so then, in the great joy of the Jews we see a picture of:

c. the great joy we have in our salvation We were on death row and the days were ticking away one by one. But we were pardoned and forgiven by the intervention of the Savior on our behalf. Life itself has been given to us. That's why our whole Christian life is to be one of joy, rejoicing in the Lord. So what if we have troubles and difficulties. We have been given LIFE itself, real life, eternal life. The Jews' story is really our story too. And then in Esther herself we have:

2. a picture of the Savior who rescued us from that decree I never noticed this before, probably because Esther is a woman, yet there are so many things about her that remind us of what Jesus did for us. Like Him

a. Esther laid down her life to save her people in figure. **(3:3)** She recognized that the reason she had come into the Persian Court was not for herself and she decided to forfeit her life, if necessary, to save the lives of all her people. Jesus said in **Mt. 20:28** *...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* She came to the kingdom to give up the right to her own life in order to save her people; He came into the world to lay down His life on the cross for our sins in order to save us all. And then notice that on:

b. the third day she was accepted in the King's presence (5:1-2) And it was on the third day that our God gave proof to all men that He was pleased with the offering of His Son by raising Him from the dead! Hebrews pictures the Son as entering into the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle in heaven and sitting down on the throne beside the Father. And just as the King asked Esther, "What is your petition, what is your request?", and she asked for the lives of her people; Ps. 110 declares that the Father said to the Son, "Ask of Me! Ask of Me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance!" That's what Jesus did! In the story:

c. the lives of all her people were granted to her (7:3) The lives of all the Jews were given to her, were spared through her. And Jesus said in **Jn. 17:2-3**, *For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.* All the lives of all His people, not just Jews but believers from every people, were granted to Him. They were given His own eternal life. And finally notice that in the story:

d. her enemy was destroyed along with his plan (9:25) Haman is a picture of the devil. He had an evil scheme to kill and destroy all those who would belong to God. But Esther's act of self-sacrifice destroyed both him and his plan. Listen to this: **Heb. 2:14-15**, *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.* Today the Devil is put out of business; his plan to kill us and to control us by keeping us all our lives living in the fear of death is down the tubes. We have life and we know it! And just as Haman ended up hanging on a stake for all to see, the Devil himself will one day before the eyes of the whole universe be cast into a lake of eternal fire to suffer forever and ever with all his followers.

Oh, sometimes it's so hard for us to appreciate the joy that should be ours because Jesus has saved us. It's hard to imagine us just dancing and laughing and celebrating with joy like the Jews over their deliverance. We take it for granted. It's so familiar, so matter-of-fact. *One Sunday evening the pastor of a church slowly stood up, walked over to the pulpit, and gave a very brief introduction of his childhood friend. With that, an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit to speak, "A father, his son, and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific Coast," he began, "when a fast-approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to shore. The waves were so high, that even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright, and the three were swept into the ocean." The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who were, for the first time since the service began, looking somewhat interested in his story. He continued, "Grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life....to which boy he would throw the other end of the line. He only had seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian, and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The decision was agonizing. As the father yelled out, 'I love you, son!' he threw the line to his son's friend. By the time he pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beyond the raging swells into the black of night. His body was never recovered." By this time, the two teenagers were sitting straighter in the pew, waiting for the next words to come out of the old man's mouth. "The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus, and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son. How great is the love of God that He should do the same for us."?* With that, the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room. Within minutes after the service ended, the two teenagers were at the old man's side. "That was a nice story," politely started one of the boys, "but I don't think it was very realistic for a father to give up his son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian. "Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing down at his worn Bible. A big smile broadened his narrow face, and he once again looked up at the boys and said, "It sure isn't very realistic, is it? But I'm standing here today to tell you that THAT story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His Son for me. You see... I was the son's friend." Hey, I was the Son's friend; YOU were the Son's friend. You and I were drowning. We were sinking in the waves with no hope. There was a decree against us that said we would die. But God let His own Son die so that He

could save us! Every Jew whose life Esther saved took it personally and celebrated it with all their hearts because he knew he had passed from death to life. So have we. Let's learn to celebrate!

God's Control In A Secular World: The Book Of Esther

The People That Couldn't Be Destroyed - Chs. 9-10

We come at last in the story of Esther to that fateful day that had been decreed, the thirteenth day of the 12th month, the month of Adar in the year 473 BC, the day when all the Jews in the world were to be destroyed. However, by using Mordecai and Esther, the Eternal God changed what happened on that day to suit His purpose. We are left then today in our final study, to consider what His purpose in all this really was. In previous studies we've already pointed out how God used these events to bring spiritual renewal among His people. That's one purpose. Another one that is most obvious as we enter chapter 9 is:

I. God's Immediate Purpose: The Protection Of His People When God's people were in danger, He protected them. How?

1. He eliminated their foes (9:1-16) On that day the Jews destroyed all their enemies. Now let's look first at:

a. the manner of this destruction (1-4) The first thing you may be thinking is: "Here we are celebrating the sanctity of life and reading about the death of thousands of people! If life is sacred, and it is, then shouldn't it be that life is never taken? Isn't all taking of life, all war, wrong? How it can be right for the Jews to destroy their enemies in this fashion? How can God be party to and even command the taking of life in Scripture?" Well, all life is of God and He has the right not only to give it but also to take it in His holy purposes. And the hard truth of the matter is that no sinner, no rebel against God has an inherent right to live on God's earth. That is the message of the Genesis flood! The fact that God allows any to live at all is simply God's grace. But God has a definite right to destroy the wicked. He had a right to destroy the Egyptians who oppressed His people and mocked His Name. He had a right to destroy the Canaanites who were engaged in the grossest forms of immorality and debauchery and He used Israel to do it! He had a right to destroy the Philistines who mocked and opposed the God of Israel and He used Saul and David to do it. And in Esther's day, He had a right to destroy those who hated Him and His people the Jews and He used the Jews themselves as His instruments of judgment. But in fairness to God and to the Jews let me point out that:

(1) they only attacked their attackers They did not just go through the populace seeking those who didn't like Jews. They gathered to defend themselves against those who had legal permission to attack them wholesale on that day and kill their families and take their property. So, all their enemies had to do was stay home that day! But instead, thousands of them, in spite of Mordecai's new position, did see this as an opportunity to either gain wealth or to kill those they hated. So they attacked the Jews and were themselves killed instead. What a shame! All God's enemies ever have to do is give up and bow the knee with a repentant heart. Listen to His words: *Ezek. 33:11 ... 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die...?' The Egyptians could have spared their firstborn by simply obeying and letting Israel go. The Canaanites could have simply moved instead of fighting Israel, but they persisted to their own destruction. So it is today. God has made every provision for His own enemies to be saved. All they have to do is to bow the knee and trust Christ. Yet they stubbornly persist in their own ways and in essence send themselves to hell, to their own destruction! And then note:*

(2) they took no personal gain (10,15,16) It is said three times. Though they had legal right to plunder their enemies' goods (8:11), they did not do so either in Susa or in the provinces. This was not for personal gain and wealth as it was for many of their enemies. They made it clear that they were purely defending their right to live and exist in the Empire without molestation. Now look at:

b. the effect of this destruction (5-10) See the phrase in verse 5? All their enemies! The result of this day's destruction was that at least the outwardly active enemies of the Jews were eliminated all over the world, including Haman himself and his 10 sons who had surely waited for this day as a day to avenge their father's death and were leaders of the attack against the Jews! (By the way, don't think these were poor little kids; they were grown men with a vendetta of their own; they had lost their father and their own status as princes as well as their inheritance! It seems they had been able to raise an army of about 500 men to attack the Jews in Susa). But all such were removed for good. This guaranteed the peace and security of the Jews for years to come. Then note:

c. the message of this destruction (11-15) Now why would Esther ask to have Haman's sons hanged, or literally impaled on stakes? They were already dead. Is she just morbid or what? No, she wants to send a message. The Romans sent the same message by nailing people to crosses along the road. The Persians did it by impaling people on stakes and letting their bodies hang in public. It sends a message: this is the fate of all who will oppose the Jews! All who would pass by would see and be afraid to hate the Jews and attack them. In fact, this is still the message of the book of Esther to all anti-Semites everywhere in all times, to all the would-be Hitlers of history. God's

promise to Abraham still stands. Those who bless the Jew will be blessed. Those who curse him will be cursed. God says in Ps. 105:15, "*Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.*" When you touch Israel, you touch the apple of God's eye. Every enemy Israel ever had has found that to be so, from Pharaoh through Rome and down to the present day! They are a people which cannot be destroyed! Then notice:

d. the magnitude of this destruction (16) In all some 75,000 people died all over the Persian Empire on that day. From India to Asia Minor every enemy was eliminated. Instead of every Jew in the world dying, practically every Jew-hater in the world died. This event of the book of Esther is no small thing. 75,000 deaths are like a small war! It is relatively unnoticed by us yet it should rank right up there in importance with events like the Exodus or the Captivity. It was a mighty act of God that shook the whole world! But Mordecai and Esther recognized that fact and so you have in chapter 9 the record of how:

2. His people established a Feast (9:17-32) They began the concept of celebrating this deliverance of the Jews by an annual feast called Purim that has continued through the centuries and is still celebrated by orthodox Jews today. In fact, our Jewish friends just celebrated it this past Friday! I didn't plan this message to coincide with it, but God must have! The Book of Esther is read in their synagogue and the day is a day of feasting, merry-making and wearing costumes to celebrate God's deliverance of the Jewish people in the days of Esther and on many occasions since. Right here we have:

a. the date of the feast of Purim (17-19) After all those months of waiting for the fateful day to come and then fighting hard on it, the Jews everywhere took the next day as a day of celebration to feast and be joyful and thankful. The day of fighting was the 13th. The Jews in the provinces celebrated on the 14th. The Jews in Susa were granted an extra day of fighting their enemies so they celebrated a day later on the 15th. Mordecai saw in this day of feasting a great opportunity and made:

b. the suggestion of the feast of Purim (20-22) Wisely he did not issue a formal decree immediately but only wrote to suggest the idea that this celebration be added to the annual calendar of Jewish celebrations much as the feast of the dedication of the Temple was. He also wisely suggested that rather than trying to pick which day, the 14th or 15th to celebrate, that they celebrate on both and do so, not with great parades and prideful type things or by stirring up hate for their enemies, but by doing what their enemies had failed to do, the thing that is really on God's heart, loving the poor among them, taking time to love and care for the uncared for.

c. the meaning of the feast of Purim (23-28) This is the declaration of what they celebrated. Now we are not Jews and do not actually celebrate this feast, but the feast does have great meaning for us. First:

(1) it reminds us of the sovereignty of God The word *Pur* is the Persian word for "the lot" which Haman had cast to find out when to destroy Israel. But this feast reminds us that the lot does not control the events of our lives; God does. It reminds us that God is always superintending the lives and futures of His people, Old Testament or New, working things together in His plan for them. He's in control!

(2) it reminds us of the deliverance of God It reminds us that once, some 2400 years ago God turned things around to deliver His people and thereby to deliver us. It is a reminder that a decree was written against us that would have kept us from ever having a Messiah, a Savior, from ever knowing God and having eternal life. But God delivered, not only them, but us from that horrible fate. We have salvation today because of God's deliverance in the time of Esther. And thirdly:

(3) it reminds us of God's relationship to Israel even today. In the time of Esther, God watched over and cared for His erring people, even though they were out of the land of promise, not keeping the covenant, and generally backslidden. He is still doing that. Israel today is in much the same shape she was then. She is back in the land but is not back in walking with the Lord. The day will come for her, the Bible says, when her heart will be turned and she will cry, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!" But that is not the case now. She is a people living by her own strength and wits, denying the very Messiah God sent to her. Yet though she is cut off from her place of spiritual privilege, she is not cast away. God is still watching over those natural branches and one day is going to graft them back in again. God is still at work as He was long ago in their behalf. The promise to Abraham still stands.

d. the decree of the feast of Purim (29-32) After the Jews everywhere agreed, it was made official by the decree of the Queen and put down in the official records. And so, the Book of Esther is included in Scripture as the record of how the permanent feast of Purim began among the Jewish people and it was meant to ensure that celebration would continue through future generations.

But there is another purpose in what God was doing here, a greater purpose, a purpose that pervades all the pages of Scripture. It is:

II. God's Eternal Purpose: To Gather Worshippers From The Nations Paul asked an important question. *Rom. 3:29, Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too!* The whole time God was doing something to protect Israel, He was doing something for the Persians also! He was declaring His reality as the true and living God among them and calling them to worship Him. In fact, every one of the Gentile empires that ever fought or conquered Israel were powerfully influenced by God toward salvation in that very process! For instance:

1. He influenced the Assyrian Empire through Jonah He sent Jonah to the city of Nineveh to preach. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, the very enemies of Israel and look what happened - **Jon. 3:4-5**. They repented! And for a very brief time they actually worshipped Him before turning back to idols and becoming so proud against God that He slew 185,000 of them in one night. After the Assyrians came the Babylonians who carried off His people into captivity. But in that very process of taking His people there:

2. He influenced the Babylonian Empire through Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who stood as firm witnesses to the royal court. In the end, because of God's working, look what King Nebuchadnezzar said - **Dan. 4:1-3**. The end result is that the name of God was declared across the whole of the Babylonian Empire because of Daniel so that they might be drawn to Him and worship Him. Then the Babylonians became proud and arrogant and the Persians conquered them and immediately God:

3. He began to influence the Persian Empire through Daniel Even though he was an old man, Daniel's enemies tried getting Daniel thrown into a den of lions and killed but God miraculously shut the lions' mouths. And look at the result: - **Dan. 6:25-27** What a testimony! Here is God drawing worshippers to Himself all over the world, using a Persian king to require it! But another generation goes by and Daniel is forgotten. The empire sinks back into its pride and self-absorption. It was time for another lesson and so God:

4. He influenced the entire Persian Empire through Esther and Mordecai This event of saving the Jewish people had tremendous impact for God on the Persian Empire. Look at:

a. Mordecai's continuing influence (10:1-3) He became second in rank to King Xerxes and remained that way the rest of Xerxes' life. And as such he was able to not only work for and be a blessing to his people the Jews for years to come, but also to be a testimony of the God of Israel to every area of the Empire. The Jews loved him. They did not take what he had done lightly; they honored him all over the world. But the Gentiles didn't take it lightly either. Look at:

b. the depth of the impact God made Go back and look again at **(8:17)**. Put in Old Testament language, that's what God was about. The Persian Empire was full of peoples, 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. How could God impact them with a witness to His reality? The Jews had already spread to many of them but their testimony was pretty dead. So, God brought it to life by a miracle of deliverance that touched every people in the entire Empire where they had gone. And thousands of people were drawn to join them, to become Jews, to give up the worship of their idols and learn to worship the God of Israel! That's what the Father is seeking, some from every people to worship Him. We read the Old Testament as though God only cared for Israel but it's not so! He is the God of all peoples and has always in all ages sought to draw worshippers to Himself from among all peoples. The biggest problem He has is that His people have blinders on and can't see that and think that He only loves and cares about them! But as we close, think about this concept:

c. the strategic window of opportunity for God to work in each of these cases was short. In Esther and Mordecai's case it was **9 years**. Just 9 years later Xerxes was dead; His son Artaxerxes who was not Esther's son took the throne so Esther wasn't queen or queen mother anymore and Mordecai's position was passed to another. One of Artaxerxes' first acts was to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The window of opportunity for this empire-wide witness closed. But God had His people there at just the right time for the harvest He had planned.

My friends, God's eternal purpose is still the same. He is calling out a people for His Name from among every people to be His assembly, His church. We are living today in an unprecedented window of opportunity. For centuries upon centuries whole regions of the earth were locked away from the Gospel by physical barriers of remoteness and inaccessibility, by political barriers that kept outsiders out. Today through technology the world has shrunk to where there is virtually no place I cannot be in 24-48 hours, nowhere I can't communicate in a matter of moments or hours through telephone or internet. I can sit at my desk and witness to a student in China live or get a supply list or prayer request from a worker in Paraguay. If God leads me to go, the iron curtain has fallen all across Eastern Europe and the USSR. China has opened its doors to the world. Today there is not one political nation on earth where Americans cannot and do not go regularly! God has thrown the window of opportunity to declare His glory to the nations wide open in our day and an unprecedented harvest of worshippers is coming into the Kingdom. And just like Mordecai and Esther, today Glenside Bible Church can and is doing things that touch the very ends of the earth. You and I right here can and do have a direct impact, a direct role in a multitude of ways. But the opportunities we have are a window. We have no guarantee that they will not close and close soon. We have no guarantee that our nation and the world will continue to enjoy peace and cooperation. So, the time to bring in the harvest is now while the window is open. We can't afford like God's people of old to sink into deca-

dence and uncaring while the peoples of the world are lost. Let's dedicate ourselves to God's eternal purpose through prayer, through practical participation, through giving and even through going as God leads us. *Some years ago, a young man who had volunteered to serve as a missionary in Africa reported with his wife to New York City, prepared to get on a ship. Further examination, however, revealed that his wife was not healthy enough to stand the climate. The man was greatly disappointed but prayed as they returned home. He determined that instead of going himself he would make as much money as he could in order to support the cause of missions around the world. His father was a dentist but had started a little business on the side. He produced unfermented wine for churches to use in communion services. The young man took over that business and worked hard to develop it. It became tremendously successful. His name was Welch, and his family still manufactures grape juice. During his lifetime, Mr. Welch contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the work of the Kingdom. [Pulpit Helps, Dec 1995. Page 8.]* Why? Because he dedicated his life to God's eternal purpose and as a businessman, he touched the world. Through Esther and Mordecai God touched the world. Will we allow Him to touch the world today through us?

Job: When Bad Things Happen... Why Do They Happen? - 1:1-12

Within our little congregation we have experienced an awful lot of suffering in recent times. This very moment we sit among some people who have been suffering physically, among others who are suffering financially through job loss or other changes, among some who are enduring suffering in relationships with a difficult spouse or children, and certainly among some who are suffering emotionally because of loss or stress or anxiety or some other circumstance. It seems to me there is more of it than usual just now and that has prompted me to want to look with you at the one book in our Bibles that is wholly dedicated to that issue, the Old Testament Book of Job. Yes, I AM aware that it has 42 chapters, so we do plan to summarize and skip (a lot) in order to condense our study into eight weeks! Now please turn there and let me introduce to you:

I. The Book's Main Character: A Man Named Job (1a) And this may seem obvious, but since so many look at this book as simply a made-up dialogue on suffering using a fictional character, I need to say first that:

1. he was a real person He was a man who actually *LIVED* on earth, probably, about the time that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did. God was making a point to the prophet Ezekiel a thousand years later and He said, *...even if these three men--Noah, Daniel and Job--were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD.* - Ez. 14:14. Evidently, God regards Job to be just as real a man as Noah and Daniel! This is not some pie-in-the-sky treatise about suffering; it is the story of a real tragedy that happened to a real person just like you, who lived a real life in a real place. The land of Uz is probably either the land of Edom in modern southern Jordan or in northern Arabia; in fact, last Christmas we may have unknowingly driven past the very place this story happened! *[...although the city of Salt in northern Jordan claims to have Job's tomb as do places in Lebanon, Oman and Turkey, so I wouldn't want to be too certain about it!]*. The second thing that we're told is that:

2. he loved his family dearly (2) Ten children was a huge family but it was a great blessing in that culture and look how tenderly Job felt toward them **(4-5)**. Think what joy Job must have had in seeing his children now grown and loving each other and enjoying relationship with each other and see how he worried about their hearts. We're about at that stage of life now where our children are grown and they go to each other's homes and do things with each other and I can testify what a joy it is to see the fruit of years of family life coming to full fruition. As the Apostle John wrote, *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* - 3 Jn. 1:4. It was a wonderful season in Job's life. Third, we're told that:

3. he was extremely wealthy (3) He was a herdsman like Abraham and, like him, had vast flocks of sheep and herds of camels, oxen and donkeys. Yet he also seems to have lived in a city, in houses, not tents, and also to have cultivated fields. The comment is that he was the richest man in the region and yet he was not greedy. He gave freely. He didn't live to accumulate wealth or make an idol out of it. In fact, he seems to have been very generous with it! **(31:16-20)**. And that also shows the most important thing about him, which is that:

4. he was a truly spiritual man Look again at verse **(5)**; see how concerned he is about the spiritual welfare of his children! He was even astute enough to be concerned about the secret sins of their hearts, as well as his own, no doubt! He was a man who genuinely loved God and was humbly submitted to Him. His first response when suffering came into his life, in verse 20, was to fall to the ground in worship! He was the genuine item, a man of faith like Noah or Abraham! And that brings us to:

II. The Book's Main Issue: Bad Things Happen To Good People Like Job! Next time we'll read the second half of the chapter in detail, but, to summarize, in one day a band of marauding Sabeans stole all his oxen and donkeys, a multiple lightning strike started a fire that destroyed all his sheep. Three more raiding parties attacked and ran off with his camel herd and to top it off, all his children were gathered in one house when a tornado hit and collapsed it and killed them all. Sitting in his house that day as the messengers came in one after the other, Job found himself penniless and worse, childless. And the next day he found himself with a painful disease that left him sitting in an ash heap scratching himself with a piece of broken pottery! His life was utterly destroyed! This kind of stuff happens to people who have no idea who God is or to people who disregard God and are very evil, but it also happens to people who love God very much and make Him the center of their lives. This week a young mother we know with 3 young boys passed away after a three year battle with cancer. They love the Lord dearly; the husband works in ministry and now their lives are shattered. Well-known Christian musician Steven Curtis Chapman and his wife adopted 3 little girls from China and one day in May 2008 his older son, Will, was pulling the family's SUV into their driveway, didn't see 5 year old Maria Sue who was running to meet him and hit her, killing her. The family was utterly devastated. You know, we don't think much about it when a drug dealer gets killed in a police shoot-out or when a foolish young man from Elkins park is hiking in Iraq right at the Iranian border and he gets

arrested by Iranian soldiers and held over a year as a spy. We think, "Well, they had it coming! Bad things SHOULD happen to people who do bad things! And people who don't use common sense and ignore danger deserve whatever happens!" But when terrible things happen to GOOD people, to innocent children, to God's servants who love Him, to men of integrity like Job, our minds and hearts naturally cry out:

III. The Book's Big Question: WHY Do They Happen? "Why, Lord? I just want to know WHY?" But when we say that, we are really not asking an academic question. For instance, the Psalmist cried out: *Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (10:1)*. When we say, "WHY?" we are asking it in light of core beliefs that we hold, like the fact that God loves me so He should have been around when this happened and done something to stop it! In the story of Job, we are forced to wrestle with three of these deeper level questions. The first one is:

1. what role does our own behavior play? We have this sense that the world ought to be just, that bad things should happen to bad people, so we assume when we see bad things that someone did something bad to cause them. Just look with me at **Lk. 13:1-5**. You see, Jesus knows that's how we think. We watch the news and hear of somebody getting murdered or a building collapsing on them and we immediately wonder whether this is punishment for something they've done. He says it's not necessarily so! Listen to His disciples in **John 9:1-3a**. Sin had nothing to do with it! On the island of Malta after being shipwrecked, Paul got bit by a snake and ... *When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live."* - Acts 28:4. This is the same logic that you'll hear Job's three friends use against him in chapters 4-31. "Bad things happened to you so YOU must have sinned; you're just hiding it! Things this bad don't happen to you unless you deserve it." There's a bit of that kind of thinking in all of us. Now:

a. it is true that evil behavior brings bad consequences - **Gal. 6:7** says *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows*. If you steal, sooner or later somebody will catch you and bad things will happen to you. If you drink and drive sooner or later, you'll have an accident or maybe kill somebody or yourself. Doing evil ALWAYS brings some form of bad consequences; that's the way God has set up the universe to work. But NOT the reverse:

b. it is not true that your suffering proves evil behavior If bad things happen to you, it does NOT mean you've sinned. How do I know? Look at Job (**1b**). And listen to what God says about him (**8**). He was *blameless*; nobody could find anything to blame him for! He was *upright*, straight as an arrow in the way he lived in God's eyes. He *feared God*; his heart was full of reverence and respect for God. He lived right out of the right motives. And he *shunned evil*; he hated sin. He wasn't enticed to it; he wanted to run away from it! In fact, God says there was not another man like him on earth! God is telling us up front that he had absolutely no part in causing the bad things that happened to him! You see, when I ask why, sometimes I am really asking, "Did I cause this? Did I do something to deserve this? Is this my fault?" And the wrong answer is disastrous. If I'm thinking this way about somebody else:

c. the result of this false assumption will be accusation. I'll be like Job's friends who say to their suffering friend, "Stop hiding your sin!" I'll be the person who tells the woman that's been raped, "It's your fault; you were dressed too immodestly." or tells the poor man, "You're lazy! Why don't you just get a job like the rest of us!" But if I'm thinking this about myself, the result will be **false guilt**. "It's my fault". That's what young Will Chapman's mind was fixed on. When he got out of the car and saw his sister lying there, he just took off running. His older brother Caleb had to chase him and tackle him down and hold him and tell him over and over, "It's not your fault. It was an accident. We all love you."

Listen, there are some of you here this morning who have been beating yourself up for years blaming yourself for something awful that happened in your life. You don't really know why; you can't put your finger on what you've done, or maybe you've scrutinized your life to find cause and actually found something that seems to fit the bill. Somehow you just know it's your fault. And this morning God is saying to you through His servant Job, "It wasn't your fault. It didn't happen because you messed up, because you made a mistake, because you were less than perfect! I love you! I never told you that; an enemy did!" And that brings us to consider the second deeper level question about suffering:

2. what role does Satan play? If I didn't cause this suffering, is it an attack of Satan on me because I love God? Well, in this prologue, God lifts the veil on the scene in heaven and shows us directly how Satan was involved. Look at (**6-11**). Of course:

a. it is true that Satan bitterly opposes us - **1 Pet. 5:8** says we must always be alert because he is always roaming about like a roaring lion looking for some way to devour us. And for some reason, God seems to grant him some continued level of access to Himself for the present time. You see here that:

(1) he tries to accuse us before God, just as **Rev. 12:10** says, *...the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night*. Satan continually tries, always unsuccessfully, to turn God against us by pointing out evil things about us, both true and untrue. In this case he accuses Job of being selfish, of following God for what he gets out of it. "Who wouldn't follow someone who has given them so many wonderful things. Take the things away and see. He isn't genuine!" I think even Satan knows his accusations won't work; I think he's just looking for permission to do what he loves to do:

(2) he tries to turn us against God ...*he'll curse you to your face*. That's exactly his goal, to use whatever he can about our circumstances to cause us to turn on God. That's a victory to him. And, of course:

(3) he loves to actually do us harm He's pure evil. He loves to make human beings suffer. He watches children starve with delight and laughs as lepers see their flesh rot away. Disease and destruction are his favorite sports. To kill all Job's children in one day and watch his misery was pure entertainment to him. He'd do the same to you in a minute. He does attack us in any way he can. However:

b. it is *not* true that your suffering is all Satan's doing When a bad thing happens, you can't simply blame him. Look in v. 8 WHO brought Job's name up! Notice in v. 10 that Satan complains, "You put a hedge around him, a fence I can't get through. You protect him with your power Just open the gate and let me in and I'll show you!" And look at the reply in **(12)**. Who is in charge of this thing? Satan can't do one thing that God doesn't LET him do! It is not like there are two equally powerful forces battling for control of the earth. It is not like you're living in a war zone where Satan is like Al Qaeda and may show up to strike you at any moment with anything he chooses. If that's how you see it:

c. the result of this false assumption will be fear. You'll live in constant fear. Your life will feel like that of a hunted fugitive instead of a victorious child of God. God is absolutely in control; NOTHING happens to you without His permission. In fact, God USES Satan to accomplish His purposes against his will! What we have to watch out for is deception! He will lie to us to turn us away from God! And that brings us to consider the deepest question of all:

3. what role does GOD play in my suffering? We just read it in verse **(12)**.

a. it is true that God is responsible for all that happens, even bad things So often we want to defend God, to get Him off the hook, to keep Him from being accused of evil, but at the bottom line, by definition, as GOD He is in control of all things and that makes Him in one sense responsible for everything from the holocaust to your traffic accident. He chooses NOT to prevent bad things from happening. However:

b. it is *not* true that your suffering indicates a flaw in God It does not prove that He is absent, that He just wasn't around or didn't notice what happened to you. It does not prove that He is impotent, that He tried but He was just too weak to prevent it. And it does not prove that He is uncaring, that He just lets stuff happen to you to serve His purposes and doesn't care about your pain. You see, that's where Job went. Eventually he began to accuse God of not doing right in letting these things happen to him. He assumed that he was right and God was wrong and:

c. the result of this false assumption is pride Look what God says to him in the end - **38:1-2, 40:1-2**. We do not have enough knowledge to make those accusations! When we creatures, assume that we know more than our perfect, infinite, loving Creator, that is the ultimate in pride. To think that I, a sinful, weak, limited, self-oriented human being, can pass judgment on God, that is pride of the highest degree, and it is certainly what Satan wants to use our suffering to produce in us.

So then, why DO bad things happen to us who love God like Job? Well:

IV. The Book's Ultimate Answer is simply this: **WHY Is Not Ours To Ask! - 42:1-3**. In the end God never does tell Job why He let Satan do all those bad things. When Job finally sees God for who He really is, he simply admits, "YOU are in absolute control and Your reasons are beyond my ability to know. I trust You!" And THAT's where God wants to bring us to when we suffer. Why is simply the wrong question; it is not ours to know. Our lot is to trust. The New Testament gives us two facts that help us gain this perspective. The first is in **Rom. 8:28**:

1. we know God causes all things to serve His GOOD purpose, even violence and tragedies and natural disasters. ALL things, not some, not most, but ALL. That's what Him being God means. He controls them all and since He is good, He controls them to accomplish His good purpose whether we can see that or not. Second:

2. we know God uses all things to increase His glory Going back to the man born blind in **Jn. 9:3**, "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned,*" said Jesus, "*but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life*. The same can be said of the awful tragedy Job experienced: this happened so that the work of God would be displayed in his life. And it was. The fact that we're sitting here nearly 4,000 years later talking about it and learning from it is living proof. What a major yield of blessing has come into millions of lives through this book with the story of Job's tragedy. It was not in vain.

And the same can be said about every bad thing that God allows into your life: ...this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in your life. God has work to do through it. He will make it work together with all other things to produce good. But His glory will only be displayed if you choose to trust Him and keep following Him. *Steven Curtis Chapman has given many interviews about the struggle their family has endured since little Maria's death. Her passing was an emotional earthquake and in the immediate aftermath Steven doubted he would want to write and sing again. He cringed at*

the suggestion that he write songs about Maria. Her death was such a deeper level of sadness than he had felt before that he thought he would never be able to share that pain through music, he said. But he always testifies of how his faith has sustained his family as they navigate what he calls "the new normal." "Scripture hasn't just become more precious, but it's become the air that I breathe. There have been some mornings where I'm not sure if I'll be able to get out of bed, but now when I read the Bible, it's become my oxygen. There's so much I didn't understand until I walked through this...The Psalms have become so much more real to me because I understand so much more now of the struggle David was going through in writing those. All the verses that have always been in my brain, this experience has made me take them into my heart." Last Christmas Steven said, "God had a plan for this little girl. His plan included giving us this incredible gift and also being entrusted with an incredible grief and sadness that would, in many ways, redefine who we are." At last, he did write songs about it and if you want to hear what their journey to healing was like in song and be encouraged in your own, I would encourage you to buy his CD, Beauty Will Rise, or listen to some of the songs from it on the internet. Friend, God is in control. As you walk through your valley of sorrow, hold His hand and trust Him.

Job: When Bad Things Happen...

What About My Pain? - 1:13-20

Last week we saw very clearly that when bad things happen, God bears the ultimate responsibility. He chooses to allow them to come into our lives and uses them to accomplish His purposes. But that knowledge does not make them hurt any less, does it? And there's the big problem:

I. When Bad Things Happen We Experience Pain and oh, it can hurt really bad. It seems that in Job's case God allowed him to experience many of the types of pain that a person can experience, or at least all of the most common ones. If we look at his story, we can clearly identify:

1. some of the types of pain we experience in our own lives. First there is:

a. the pain of loss (13-17) As we saw last week, Job was a rich man, the richest in his entire region. His herds and flocks were his investments, his savings, his insurance and his source of income. The sheep provided his clothing by their wool, the camels and donkeys his transportation and the oxen his food supply through the fields they were used to cultivate. And there was a whole corps of servants who took care of them all who were killed in the process. Imagine how it would hurt if some thief cleaned out ALL your bank accounts, all your investments and retirement money, if you lost your job and there was no unemployment or social security, no source of income at all. This is not so far-fetched. It happened in Haiti when the earthquake struck. People's homes collapsed, their possessions were gone, their jobs disappeared; there was no food, no water, no shelter and nowhere to go. I saw one of the pictures last week which was of a simple signpost on which someone had smeared, "We need some help. Please help us!" In Osh, Kyrgyzstan, in 3 days of ethnic violence last June, 2000 people lost their homes. Everything closed down; their jobs all went away. The bazaar closed and food couldn't be found. And some of the people who experienced these losses were believers! In one day, Job was reduced to the status of a refugee! And that hurts on two levels. First there's:

(1) the emotional pain created by the loss Some of you know what it feels like to lose a job you worked in for years, maybe a job you did well in but they downsized and you're out. You've lost something in that and it hurts. The Lyons family lost their home in a fire. Fortunately, it's being rebuilt and a lot of their possessions were salvaged, but think how it feels to watch your house burn and your possessions go up in smoke. You've lost things you were attached to, your home and all that means and it hurts. Maybe you've totaled your favorite car that you just loved driving. Yes, it was only a car, but now all you can afford is a little Hyundai and you miss it and that hurts, but then there's:

(2) the pain created by the circumstances of the loss A friend of mine in Kyrgyzstan borrowed money to invest in a business opportunity that seemed to be a really sure thing brought to him by a trusted person. The person took the money and left the country and he is left to pay the bank and someone else back \$50,000 on his tiny salary. When I talked to him a couple weeks ago, his wife had just come to him to ask when they were ever going to be able to be out from under this terrible burden. His loss is taking away from his ability to buy his children things they need and that hurts! Job had to start all over again from nothing. Yesterday he was generous and always helping people; today he has to ask for help just to survive. Yesterday you were able to do all these things you enjoyed; today you can barely afford food and sometimes not enough of that. Loss produces serious pain. And when that loss is a person instead of a thing, then we experience:

b. the pain of grief (18-19) First, Job had gotten the news of the death of his servants and that must have been bad enough, but then came the news that the house had collapsed and all ten of his children were dead. There can hardly be any deeper hurt than that. Job's life was wrapped up in them; he prayed for them every day. Nothing hurts like the death or disappearance of someone you love. The daughter of a family from our home area came to PBU to school. After graduating, she got a job teaching in York and was starting her career. One Sunday afternoon a year or two back she left her parents' home to go hiking at a familiar spot along the Susquehanna River. The next day they found her car and a couple days later her body, all bruised and broken; they never did figure out what

happened. Oh, the grief of losing a dear child whom you loved and watched grow all the way up and now you have lost her. Imagine our military families whose sons and daughters are serving over in Afghanistan and that dreaded knock comes at their door. Think about the grief of never seeing them again in this world. And sometimes you lose a person without death, through divorce or desertion or simply through moving far away. Grief is an awful hurt, but one of the most common types of pain is:

c. physical pain in our bodies (2:7-8) Job got sick. He was covered with festering boils. It was serious; the same two words are used of the plague of boils in Egypt. There would have been little point for Satan to think that the flu would turn Job against God. Of course, we can't tell exactly what disease he had but its symptoms which show in dialogue throughout the book include running sores, worms in the boils, darkness under the eyes, foul breath, loss of weight, continual pain, blackened skin, peeling skin and fever, among others [*Bible Knowledge Commentary*]. Some of us have experienced the agony of being really sick. Sometimes the pain is intense like a kidney stone; other times it gnaws at you like a toothache that won't go away or in some cases it nearly doubles you over when you try to walk or move. Physical pain is exhausting; it saps all your energy; it takes all your concentration to endure and it clouds the way you think.

Again, these are just some of the types of pain we commonly endure. There's also betrayal, imprisonment, torture and a host of others that godly people experience around the world, but you may not have to here. On the other hand, there are also:

2. some other factors that intensify our pain when it occurs. Like:

a. suddenness or unexpectedness All this happened to Job in one day. There was no warning! It is one thing when you watch somebody's health deteriorate slowly over time and you know they're dying. There's time to prepare. But it's another when it comes suddenly, unexpectedly. You heard last week the story of the orphanage in Haiti that we're going to help at Christmas time. The director had just completed their new building 3 weeks earlier and it collapsed in the quake, killing his wife and several of his own children. Yesterday he had a happy family; today most of it is gone! Years ago, the son-in-law of our pastor, husband of their daughter and father to a newborn son, (age 25) was driving to work one day when he was in a wreck and was thrown from the car and killed instantly. In one moment, this young lady is a widow and now has to support herself. The quicker something happens, the more unexpected it is, the more it hurts. Then there's:

b. feeling responsible All Job's servants got killed because they were tending HIS flocks. I'm sure there's a sense in which he felt responsible for that. Certainly he felt responsible for his children's well-being; you can tell by his offering sacrifices for them in verse 5, "just in case..." When David was running away from Saul, he stopped at the town of Nob to ask Ahimelech the priest for food. He gave it to him, but a servant of Saul reported it and David killed all the priests of the Lord there. And David said, "It's my fault..." If you feel in any sense responsible for what has happened, it hurts ten times worse. There's also:

c. feeling helpless, standing by watching but not being able to do a single thing about it. Who could stop the fire from heaven that burned up the sheep? Being able to do nothing to alleviate or prevent the suffering makes it worse and so does:

d. prior fear Look at **3:25**. Job had always been afraid of something like this happening. He was no dummy. He knew that the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula have raided each other from the beginning. Or maybe he always feared losing his children. There are certain things that somehow get a hold on us, things that we view as "our worst nightmare" and if that very thing actually happens to us, it can truly terrorize us. Then there's the disappointment of:

e. seemingly "unanswered" prayer Job prayed for his children every single day. For years he'd been thanking God for protecting and keeping and growing them and asking Him to keep them safe. But on this day that prayer went "unanswered". God didn't "hear", didn't do what he expected. When a loved one is sick and we pray and pray for healing, trying to believe it into happening, but they die, oh that can hurt so much worse! It has shaken the faith of many. And, of course, there is here the factor of:

f. multiple difficulties at once One bad thing hurts enough, but when you get a whole string of them together like this at the same time, the hurt is multiplied. It can seem like your entire world is falling apart and life is simply not worth living any longer. It is understandable that some people, even believers, contemplate suicide as a way of escape. And one last thing is really common:

g. lack of support Listen to Job's wife - **2:9**. Even those who know us best and love us most, sometimes just don't get that we still want to love and be faithful to God in our suffering. They may blame us or maybe avoid us because it's too awkward to talk to us or even encourage us to drown our sorrows in ungodly ways.

All of these things are real. All of us experience them at different times in varying degrees. Our pain is real and it's an awful thing. So let me make just a couple of suggestions about:

II. What We Should Do When We Experience Pain (20) First of all:

1. we should not suppress or deny the pain Pasting on a smile and pretending you don't hurt is not spiritual. In our culture for some reason, we will do almost anything NOT to cry, especially men. We'll hold our emotions inside and "tough it out" and simply continue on with life, just gritting our teeth and living as though it doesn't really matter. That's just not biblical. Paul told us to *...mourn with those who mourn. [Rom. 12:15]*. Weep with those who weep. Christians should mourn; they should weep. They should grieve, just not like others who have no hope. If we try to suppress our feelings and hide them and act like they're not there - and you know people who do this - it can have disastrous consequences like depression or like a later explosion or a heart attack or some other physical or mental consequence. Rather:

2. we should freely express our pain Oriental peoples often have mourning customs to help them do this. Job got up and shaved his head and tore open his robe and eventually put ashes all over himself. It was a way of expressing sadness. In Israel, to tear the robes, to put on sackcloth and ashes, these were expressions of deep sorrow. Wailing was common practice in Jesus' day. Listen, if you hurt, you can cry, you can wail or scream if you need to, you can go out and chop on a tree, or punch punching bag for all you're worth. Or you can talk or cling to somebody. You should do whatever will help you express your pain in a healthy way; there is no shame in that. And likewise:

3. we may do things that relieve our pain I know this appears trite, but in **2:8** Job did the only thing he could find that made him feel any better. He scratched himself. It's OK to scratch yourself, to take a pill when you're in pain, to take something to help you sleep when you're traumatized and can't get your mind calmed down or an antidepressant when you just can't get motivated to get up and keep going, if your doctor recommends it. Maybe you can scratch by getting away for a while, or taking off work and spending time with loved ones, or talking to a pastor or a counselor. It is not wrong or unspiritual to do the natural, normal things that help relieve some of the pain, if we have those means available to us.

Relief is good; however, it is not the goal. You see, when we hurt it is the pain that tends to dominate our lives and our reactions. It is the pain that Satan wants to use to create doubt or anger and turn us against God. That was his whole strategy, to use the pain in Job's life to get him to blame God and curse Him and to keep turning up the heat until it worked. He's a torturer. He counts on the fact that if you are in enough pain, he can break your resolve to love and follow God and get you to do whatever he wants. But you can withstand him if you are convinced with your whole heart and soul of a couple of simple truths ahead of time. Here's:

III. What We Must Understand When We Experience Pain Three simple, but profound things. They will make all the difference. First, understand this:

1. God knows the pain we feel The Israelites were groaning in their slavery and crying out and God heard their groaning. Look at **Ex. 2:25** and listen to it in (YLT) *...and God seeth the sons of Israel, and God knoweth*. When you are in pain, in suffering, God sees you and God KNOWS! He doesn't just "take notice" or "feel concerned", HE KNOWS! The Hebrew means to know by experience; it is the same word used when Adam *knew* his wife in the KJV, the term for the most intimate, complete, deep kind of knowledge there is. When you hurt, remember, God KNOWS the pain you feel. So often when we're suffering, we feel like nobody really understands, nobody really knows what we're going through. People say, "I know, I understand..." But you want to scream, "No you don't! Not until you've been here!" Listen, God KNOWS! He understands fully, completely, everything you're feeling and experiencing inside and out. It is not academic to Him and He has not allowed it into our lives in some unfeeling, uncaring fashion. He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief! He knows exactly what you're going through. Then remember this:

2. God experiences the pain we feel Look at **Is. 63:9a**. When Israel was afflicted, when she suffered, HE too was afflicted. He suffered with them! When you feel pain, God feels it with you! Think how Mary must have felt there by the cross. Simeon had told her when he was just a babe, *And a sword shall pierce through your own soul...* Her son's agony was her agony. She felt it as acutely as though it was happening to her. But listen, God takes it one step further. His very Spirit lives right inside you. Wherever you go, He is. Whatever your eyes see, He sees. Whatever your heart feels, He feels. He is joined to you, Spirit to spirit as one. He cannot allow suffering and pain into your life without experiencing it Himself with you! Rest assured He does not do it lightly! And then remember this:

3. God endured pain for us - Rom. 8:32 says, *He...did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all...* He knows what it is to lose a child, an only Son whom He loved! He spared Abraham the knife, but He Himself used Roman hands to drive the nails through the hands of His own Son and hang Him upon a cross to save us! Look with me at **Heb. 2:10**. That says that to save you and bring you to glory as His son, God had to do it through the suffering of His Son. It was necessary; there was no other way. Look at Jesus in **4:15**. He was tempted to sin in every way that we are but He was also tested in suffering every way that we are. He knows what it is to be despised and rejected by people. He knows what it is to weep at the grave of a friend. He knows what it is to be struck and to bleed. He knows what it is

to fall under the weight of something you can't lift. He knows what it is to be blamed for something you didn't do, to be mocked by cruel enemies while you die. He knows the agony of thirst and the exhaustion of pain. He endured them all. There is not a thing He sends into your life that He Himself did not endure for you first!

If you want to be faithful when you are in pain, remember the CROSS! Look to CALVARY and you will find His strength to endure! *Bruce Olson was raised in a strict Lutheran home but in his mid-teens he had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. His family rejected him. He heard God's call to be a missionary to the Indians on the Venezuela-Colombia border. As a 19 yr. old he went there with no training, no money, no mission board and no way home. He was shunned by the missionaries who were already there. His heart was drawn to the most savage and feared tribe of all, the Motilones. His body was wracked with disease and injury many times. After being nearly killed by arrows, he spent a year with a nearby tribe, the Yukos. Then he was eventually captured and nearly killed by the Motilone people he longed to reach. Yet in God's time he was accepted by them and after years most of the tribe were transformed by faith in Jesus Christ. Health clinics were established to fight disease. Agricultural reform fed them. The New Testament was translated. Eventually they came to have more than 30 missionary teams reaching other unevangelized peoples. But the process was painful. Disease claimed lives of those he loved. His fiancé Gloria was killed in an auto accident before she could come to the jungle to join him. Immediately after that His best and closest friend in the world, his "pact brother", a Motilone he called Bobby, was nearly drowned in a whirlpool and shortly after that was actually shot and killed by outlaw settlers who wanted to drive the Indians off their land. His grief was almost more than he could bear. As he sifted through the meaning of it all he wrote: "So life has to be like this." I thought. It has to be struggling and crying, even dying. Suddenly I saw my parents and all the pain we had gone through... I saw the Yukos and the faces of the settlers... I saw the faces of the Motilones, for whom the rest of the New Testament still had to be translated. There was so much to do...so many things that Christ had called me to do. It would take more pain, more loneliness, Maybe death. Why was it so hard? Why? Then I saw Jesus. He was struggling up a hill with a great burden. His face was lined with grief, His back bent.... "I think I see", I said, "It's the cross....it's for this cross." [Bruchko, p. 194-195] The Message loosely paraphrases Heb. 12:1-3 like this: Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!*

Job: When Bad Things Happen...

How Do I React? - 1:21-22, 2:10

In our first study in Job 1, we pondered the question of WHY bad things happen to people who really love God. The answer was simply that God is responsible for them happening and He lets them happen for His purposes. Then last week we talked about the fact that those bad things cause us a great deal of pain. And we saw that God does not forget that; rather He knows our pain, feels our pain and, in fact, has Himself endured an unimaginable amount of pain for us. So today I want to ask the question, "How do I react?" I want us to look together primarily at just 3 verses, at what Job said and did in reaction to the bad things that happened to him. Now keep this in mind: in chapters 1-2 Job is pretty much a model of reaction for us. He reacts in a way that seems absolutely perfect, and it is! Unfortunately, as a few days wore on and his friends began to stir him up with their accusations, he began to react differently. So, I guess it is possible to conclude that his initial reactions were not completely sincere, that he was acting well outwardly but feeling differently inside. However, I don't think so; twice the Spirit comments, *In all this, Job did not sin...* I think God is intending us to realize that Job was standing true to Him wholeheartedly, that there really was nobody else on earth like him, as He informed Satan. But sadly, he let himself be moved away from that position and therein lies a warning for me. When bad things happen to me, it is a time of spiritual danger and I must be careful. And the first area I must guard is my mind. That is what Satan is after. If he gets hold of that, he can get me to do his will. So above all else:

I. I Must Be Careful To Think With Clarity Look carefully at the Spirit's comment in **(1:22)** There is Satan's goal for all the tragedy he brought into Job's life; it is all about one simple thing: to get him to charge God with wrongdoing, to get him to think that God did something wrong, something unjust, something evil, in what happened to him and thereby to turn his heart against God. He said that straight to God in verse 11, *...he will surely curse you to your face!* and he repeated it in 2:5. There's his plan: to get Job, to get you, to get me, to be in enough pain that we'll be angry with God and rail against God and tell God off! It's to take a heart that loves God and turn it against God by causing pain and suffering. That is the sin of rebellion against God and Satan works so hard to get us to do it because he knows it breaks God's heart and denies Him the thing He values above all else, our love! Now because God has pulled back the veil for us and let us see what is really going on behind the scenes in the spiritual realm and has also let us see Job's model reaction, we can see what thinking clearly about our suffering really means. When something bad happens to me, three things are always true. First:

1. God is in control of this event Look at **(1:10)**. Do you realize what that is? That is Satan complaining to God about how unfair God is being to him, about how much God has curtailed and controlled his activity in Job's life! But look carefully at those words and you'll see something very wonderful:

a. the extent of that control is complete It extended to Job himself, that is, to Job's own body which got sick. It extended to his household, to his family and his servants who were killed. And it extended to all his possessions, all his flocks and herds which were stolen or destroyed. God had complete control of every part and particle of Job's life. His protection surrounded every bit of it and Satan couldn't touch a single thing until God LET him! And that same thing is true of your life! Nothing is outside of God's control, nothing! When something bad happens to you, you can always rest assured that God was not asleep at the wheel or on vacation. He controlled whatever happened totally. He allowed it to be the way that it was. Satan thought he was being given freedom but notice that he ended up doing only and exactly what God wanted done! And you're thinking, "So this is supposed to make me feel better?" Well, actually, YES! If you will just think about it for a moment:

b. the effect of that control is comfort There's an old story about *some biologists who were touring the Swiss alps when one of them spied a very rare flower growing on a ledge deep in a rock crevasse. They tried to think of a way to get down to it and finally asked the young village boy who was guiding them whether he would be willing to let them lower him down on a rope to pick the flower. He said "Wait here" and ran off down the path back to the village. In a little while he returned with an older gentleman and introduced him to the group in these words "This is my father; HE will hold the rope!"* You see, it always matters to us who holds the rope! When you were little and your parents took you to the doctor, they did things you didn't like very much. They stuck needles in you and hurt you! If some stranger had dragged you there, you'd have thought you were being horribly tortured, but since it was your parents, who you were convinced loved you and cared for you, somehow you instinctively knew that they weren't trying to hurt you and you clung to them and were comforted! You were comforted by their love and understood that whatever they did, they loved you! When something bad happens, the first thing to remember is that the world has not gone crazy; the same loving Heavenly Father still holds the reins! Everything in and about and beyond this situation is absolutely in His hands.

The second thing that is always true is very similar. When a bad thing happens:

2. God has acted in this event Look at Job's words (1:21). Notice he didn't say, *...the Lord has given but SATAN has taken away!* God has acted here! He brought this into my life! The first part of the verse sounds depressing; it sounds like a complaint, but it's not. It's a statement of truth, "I came into this world with nothing and I can carry nothing out. Everything I have the Lord has given to me, my family, my possessions, even my own body, it is all His gift but all of it is only temporary. I cannot take it with me. The Lord gave it and now He has taken it away just as He would have to when I leave this world, even though it seems to be before the time. He is the One who has done it and His Name is to be praised. Whether I like it or not, in what happened to me, GOD has acted. But here's the kicker:

a. He CANNOT fully reveal why Look at (42:1-3) He can't reveal why because **we couldn't understand!** There are things that are too wonderful, too intricate and amazing for us to know, things we can't possibly comprehend. There is no way that an infinite and omniscient God can possibly reveal fully to our finite mind how He has woven all things together in our life and the lives of all other people both in and outside of our lives so that they accomplish His good purpose. We can't comprehend it. Plus, we can't see the future like He can. Of course, He may, and probably will, reveal to us SOME of the purposes this thing has in our life as time goes on. There will be lessons we can learn. But He cannot fully tell us why something happened any more than you can explain to a 2 year old why he has to have a tonsillectomy! But the good news is that:

b. He doesn't need to reveal why, because we know His motives. Listen to Job in one of his clearer thinking moments later on in (23:10). There's what Job's confident of. In this moment when he's thinking clearly, he doesn't have to know why; he doesn't have to understand. Because what He does know is that God knows what happened to him, that God sent this thing into his life, that God is refining him through it and when He's all done, Job will not perish but end up like the purest gold! As I shared last week, we KNOW His love. We KNOW His care when we look at the cross. And that's enough! A child doesn't understand most of the things his parents have to do. He doesn't understand getting woken up out of bed early in the morning and dropped off at a sitter or being dragged someplace in the car that he doesn't want to be when he's tired. But he knows his parents love him and he trusts them and that's enough! In another moment of clarity in 13:15 Job said, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him...*

When bad things happen, God controls them, He has sent them and is at work through them and we choose to trust Him. But the deepest truth is the third one:

3. God has a right to act in this event Listen to Job as he responds to his wife who has told him to give in and do what Satan wants and curse God: (2:10) Now there is a profound thought. So often we are willing to freely accept all the good that God can dish out to us in life, often without so much as a "thank you". But let one bad or even unpleasant thing come and we complain without a second thought! We think, "What right does God have to mess with my life in this way? What right does He have to choose for me that I have to through suffering and endure such pain?" Job is saying God has the right to do this and we need to accept that right! And He has that right for at least three reasons. First of all:

a. it is His right by creation Listen to what God told Moses in Ex. 4:11. God created each of us exactly as we are for His purpose. He is our Creator. He caused us to come into existence, designed and built us and brought us into

the world. A thing created cannot say to its creator, "You have no right over me!" Because He created us, God has the right to do with us whatever He wills, whether we like it or not, including allowing suffering into our lives! But His right is greater than that:

b. it is His right by redemption Look at **1 Cor. 6:19-20**. God bought us! He bought us at the cross and He paid an infinite price for us, the precious blood of His only Son! We belong to Him; we are His possession; He OWNS us and He has the right to do with us what He wills! He has the right to mold us and to shape us and to change us and even to send hurt into our lives if He chooses. He paid dearly for that right! But there is still more to it:

c. it is His right by motive - 2 Cor. 4:16-18 Whatever He sends is for our eternal good! It is achieving for us an eternal amount of glory beyond anything that we can imagine. God always acts for our good; He is not a parent who abuses His child, but rather One who is always doing good for His child whether His child can comprehend it or not!

So, when I am in pain, when I am suffering, I must be careful to STAND on these truths: God is in control, God acted in my life by sending this thing and God has the right to do it. He is good all the time. He never does anything wrong. He never makes a mistake. And that attitude of mind is exactly what allowed Job to do what he did in 1:19. When all this bad news came, he fell to the ground and worshipped! He prostrated himself before God, saying by his actions, "God You sent this and I acknowledge Your right to send it. I trust you and I praise Your Name!" That's how to react to suffering; be careful to keep your thinking clear; don't let pain muddle it all up. Then secondly, when bad things happen:

II. I Must Be Careful To Behave With Integrity (2:9) In all his suffering Job clung to his integrity. You see, if Satan can't use pain to get us to turn against God, he will at least try to get us to act wrongly and mess up our lives. God's goal, of course, is that we react like Job and cling with everything we've got to our integrity, our righteousness, our godly behavior. Right away when something bad happens:

1. I must guard my attitude against sin Let's look ahead and see how Job's attitude changed later on. Let me paraphrase some things he says like in 3:1, "I wish I'd never been born; I'd be better off dead!", in 6:1-2 "My suffering is the greatest in the world", in 6:8-9 "I want to die.", in 6:11 "There is no hope for me", in 10:1 "I hate living!". Wow, that's a really different attitude than he used to have! When the prophet Elijah's life was threatened by Jezebel, he got scared and ran away to Mt. Sinai to seek God and when God asked, *What are you doing here, Elijah?* His reply was ...*"I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."* -1 Kings 19:10. Paul comments in Rom. 11:2 that he was actually praying against Israel, asking for God to punish them instead of saving them! When you hurt, it's easy to start praying to die, to give up on life, to start hating people who hurt you and praying for bad things to happen to them or to wallow forever in self-pity. Remember Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law? Her husband and her two sons died in Moab but when she got home, she went around telling everybody, *"Don't call me Naomi [i.e., pleasant]... Call me Mara, [i.e., bitter] because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."* - Ruth 1:20-21. I wonder how many Moabites came to believe in Jehovah through her testimony?! If I am not careful to guard my attitude and let it become sinful, I become useless for what God is trying to accomplish through me. Secondly:

2. I must guard my words against sin (2:10b) That is a major accomplishment! And, of course, Job wasn't able to continue in that regard. When we hurt it is SO easy to say things we don't mean, things we'd never say any other time, things that hurt others, things that we know in our heart are wrong. When something bad happens, one of the first and most useful things that we can do is to ask the Holy Spirit to guard our mouth and keep us from saying things that will dishonor the Lord and ruin our testimony. And, of course:

3. I must guard my behavior against sin When we hurt it is awfully tempting to do things we know are wrong in an effort to get relief from or drown out the pain. When you hurt, the enemy would love nothing more than for you to explode in anger at or try to get even with someone because of what they did or to quit going to church because of what someone said or to have an affair because things are painful in your marriage or to drown your sorrows in alcohol or overeating because you can't take it anymore.

Our integrity is SO important. It's what allows God to work through us during bad times and we have to guard it so very carefully. In closing today, I would like to read you some excerpts from an old tract that I first saw when I was 20 or so. I don't know where you can buy one, but the full text is out there on the web. Listen to the words of Laura A. Barter Snow writing as though God is speaking directly to our hearts:

"MY CHILD, I have a message for you today; let me whisper it in your ear, that it may gild with glory any storm clouds which may arise, and smooth the rough places upon which you may have to tread. It is short— only five words— but let them sink into your inmost soul; use them as a pillow upon which to rest your weary head: "THIS THING IS FROM ME."

I would have you learn, when temptations assail you, and the "enemy comes in like a flood," that this thing is from Me; that your weakness needs My might, and your safety lies in letting Me fight for you.

Are you in money difficulties? Is it hard to make both ends meet? This thing is from Me, for I am your purse-bearer, and would have you draw from and depend upon Me. My supplies are limitless.

Are you in difficult circumstances, surrounded by people who do not understand you, who never consult your taste, who put you in the background? This thing is from Me. I am the God of circumstances. "Thou camest not to thy place by accident; it is the very place God meant for thee."

Are you passing through a night of sorrow? This thing is from Me. I am the "Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief." I have let earthly comforters fail you, that, by turning to Me, you may obtain everlasting consolation.

Has some friend disappointed you? One to whom you opened out your heart? This thing is from Me. I have allowed this disappointment to come, that you may learn that: "The best friend to have is Jesus..."

Has someone repeated things about you that are untrue? Leave them to Me, and draw closer to Me, thy shelter out of reach of "the strife of tongues"...

Have your plans been upset? Are you bowed down and weary? This thing is from Me....I would have you let Me plan for you, and then I take the responsibility;

Have you longed to do some great work for Me, and instead been laid aside on a bed of pain and weakness? This thing is from Me... Some of My greatest workers are those shut out from active service...

Are you suddenly called upon to occupy a difficult and responsible position? Launch out on Me.

This day I place in your hands this pot of holy oil; make use of it freely, my child. Let every circumstance as it arises, every word that pains you, every interruption that would make you impatient, every revelation of your own weakness, be anointed with it!...The sting will go as you learn to see Me in all things. [Full text at www.breadonthewaters.com/0139_newsletter_clippings.html]

The choice of how you react when bad things happen is up to you. I hope that you will always be careful to choose acceptance, trust and integrity.

Job: When Bad Things Happen...

How Can I Be Comforted? - 2:11-13

So far in our study of Job we've looked three things: 1) the fact that God allows bad things to happen to good people for His glory, 2) the fact that God enters deeply into our pain with us, and 3) the fact that I must be careful to react by thinking clearly and continuing to behave in a godly fashion. Today I'd like to address the question, "How can I be comforted?" Comfort is an interesting word. The English comes from the Latin *confortare* which means to *strengthen* but dictionary.com says that's now an obsolete meaning, that today its primary sense is to *bring relief*. You see, there has been a drastic shift in our thinking. Earlier generations knew that suffering comes into everyone's life; they expected suffering and they accepted it as part of life and what they longed for was someone to stand with them and help them through it. Today our culture has bought into the delusion that suffering should be and can be eliminated and what we really want is something or somebody to take our pain away. But it's a false hope. In this world we all have suffering and always will. In the New Testament, the Greek word *comfort* means to call someone alongside you to help you or to be that one called alongside to help someone else. We are comforted when others come alongside us in our suffering and stand with us in it and strengthen us to endure it. In his time of tragic suffering Job had three friends who immediately set out to be comforters to Him, to come alongside him to help him (**2:11-13**). Now there is:

I. The Kind Of Comfort We Need from people. I know that when they're in grief or misery, some people say, "I just need to be alone!" And maybe they do. Maybe they genuinely need space and time to ponder the depth of what has happened to them and to seek God and let Him minister to them, and that's OK, but too often "let me alone!" means "I don't want you to see me cry" or "I'm too angry to be around anyone" or "I just want to put this out of my mind and pretend it didn't really happen and don't want you there to remind me of it!" But the truth is that when we suffer:

1. we need people to be with us, whether we think so or not. God has built us that way; in His own words, it is simply *not good for a man to be alone*. Job's three friends knew that and though they all lived in different towns, when news of Job's tragedy reached them, they immediately made plans to meet each other and go to visit him. Going, in verse 11, is the first step! And they didn't just stop by quickly to pay their respects. They came and stayed with him a whole week. As nice as it is to get a card or a phone call or a brief visit from someone, what truly comforts us when we suffer is someone, not just anyone of course, but someone with whom we have deep relationship, who will be there alongside us for the long haul. Secondly:

2. we need people to share our pain These friends came to *sympathize* with Job; the KJV translates it to *mourn with him*. The English word *sympathize* comes from Greek and means to *suffer with*. They came to suffer alongside him, to be there to feel his suffering and to share in it along with him. Comforting is not saying some words to make a person feel better. Comforting is coming to them to help carry the load together, to walk through what they are experiencing right alongside them and feel it with them and share the load of it. It is too much for us to handle alone, but together we can lend our strength to one another and shoulder it together. Thirdly:

3. we need people to identify with us Look at these guys in verse 12. They reacted exactly like Job reacted! They wept, they tore their robes, they sprinkled ashes on their foreheads and sat on the ash heap with him! They did not stand aloof to offer comfort; they entered right in and felt Job's pain and grieved with him the way he was grieving. Maybe that's what Paul was talking about when he encouraged us to *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* [Rom. 12:15] When people are weeping in their suffering, weep right along with them. Cry together! Oh, there's great comfort in that, in knowing that people feel our pain and share it, that they are not just looking at us with pity and then going on their way. And finally:

4. we need people to respect our grief These three friends did an amazing thing in verse 13. They sat there, not for an hour or a night but for seven whole days. And not one of them said a word. Why? Because they saw how great his suffering was. Instead of instructing him or trying to tell him it wasn't so bad, or saying "I know how you feel" or "here's why I think this happened", they just respected his grief by sitting and grieving with him. That kind of respect is so rare. When we hurt, we need people to simply say, "I love you" and sit and hurt with us until we're ready to talk! In short, let me give you what you might call the golden rule for sufferers found in:

5. Heb. 13:3 Put simply that says **we must treat sufferers as we would want to be treated** if we were suffering. We must give them the kind of support that we would want if we were in their shoes. The true goal of ministry is always to stop and see what the person really needs first and then do your best to meet that need.

Job's friends did a great job and were a great example to us for 7 days - and about 3 verses! But as soon as Job started talking and he said some things that they thought were out of line, their being comforters ended and they became critics in a long running argument with Job that goes through chapter 31! They felt obligated to set Job straight and undid 7 days of true comfort in a few hours. The kind of comfort they displayed at first is what we really need, but unfortunately it is not:

II. The Kind Of "Comfort" We Often Receive And Give Just think about:

1. how people often react to our suffering Of course, you'll discover that:

a. some may avoid us altogether You know, Job was a really well-known man in his town and region. He was kind and generous and always helping people. I'm sure at least a number of his 10 children were married which meant he had extended family connections. You'd think that there would be a line of people around the block waiting to see him, but only three show up and they're probably each from separate towns further away. Some people that you think would show up to comfort you just don't show. Sometimes it actually is **because they don't care**, because they really were fair-weather friends, if you know what that means. But many times, it is simply because they **feel awkward**. They don't know what to say, they don't want to cry, can't deal with their own emotions, don't want to upset you, feel like they're intruding, or what have you. It is more comfortable for them to not have to deal with it, so they simply don't. Of course, we'd never make it about ourselves like that, right? Right. Then others:

b. some may encourage us toward ungodly thinking or behavior, like Job's wife did in (2:9). "Give up your faith; forget it! God's not real! Or if He is, He doesn't care! You're wasting your time with all this faith stuff; it's time to try some good old-fashioned relief! Here, get drunk, you'll feel better! [*Now there's an oxymoron!*]. Drown your sorrows; try some pot - it's not addictive! Get a divorce and get away from that pain! Why not meet somebody else who makes you feel good! Or you might try suicide, after all, not feeling anything is better than this! [*Wanna bet?*]" Comforters like that are all over the place. You can find them at work; you can meet them in any bar or on the internet. But it's not them I'm worried about so much; you have enough spiritual horse sense to see the folly of their suggestions. It's the RELIGIOUS people who try to comfort you who can often do the most damage. Why?

c. religious people may give us "long winded speeches" that explain our suffering and usually end up blaming us Job's three friends were religious men like Job, men who feared God and served Him, men who were trying their best to do their "religious duty", but look at how it came across to Job (16:1-5). When Job began to complain about his situation and accuse God, they argued with him for hours and basically accused him of causing all his own suffering through sin that he had hidden! That's actually a common human viewpoint. Hindus and Buddhists call it *karma*, the belief that the bad things we do cling to us and produce all the negative things in our life, but it's everywhere. Previously we looked at **Jn. 9:1** where Jesus' disciples saw a man born blind and said, *Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* It was in Jewish culture too, and it's also in Christian culture. Do you know:

2. where we get this view that we cause our own suffering? I think that *it stems from the need to "defend" God*. We look at evil or at tragedy and we know it must have a cause, it must be somebody's fault, but we can't let it be God's fault. When Abraham was interceding with God to spare Lot down in Sodom, he argues in Gen. 18:25, *Far be it from you to do such a thing--to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* We can't imagine a God who is not just, who allows good people to experience what bad people deserve. We have to defend His character and stick up for Him. So we say, since God did this and He is ALWAYS right, YOU must deserve it. It's your fault. So, we find reasons to blame people for their own ills. "If you would have done this..., if you had done a better job of that... And we do this to ourselves. It shows in the

typical question we ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" That implies that I believe that my behavior is always the cause of what happens to me. We often think just like Job's three friends and if we look at where they got it, we can see where we get it. Listen to Eliphaz (4:7-9). First of all, Eliphaz shows us that:

a. we may get it from experience: we've seen it He says, *I have observed this...* "I've watched evil people get what they deserve. Good guys always finish first, or at least well." Testimonies abound of Christian businessmen like John Wanamaker who honor God and have great success. On the other hand, you've heard of plenty of people who get lung cancer from smoking or get AIDS from immorality. Afterwhile, it seems like that's just the way the world works; you reap what you sow! So, if you're reaping it, you must have sowed it! Bad conclusion! But then Eliphaz goes even further (4:12-19). Now Eliphaz shows us, secondly, that:

b. we may get it from "revelation" "I had a dream! God showed me what is going on. I even heard the angel say, 'God is never wrong, no human is righteous, we all deserve what happens to us!' So, it has to be Job's fault!" Little did Eliphaz know that shadowy form wasn't an angel; it was a demon! Satan engineered a little sideshow to plant that wrong conclusion in his head by telling him things that were true! You'd be amazed at the things people say God has shown them, at the things they feel are "signs from God" and they come to lay them on us without having tested the spirit from which they got them or considering the devastating impact their words are going to have! I've been guilty of this myself; I remember telling a lady many, many years ago that I thought God had shown me why her estranged husband was unexpectedly killed. That was the last I ever saw of her and I won't ever say anything like that again lightly! Then Job's friend Bildad steps up to the plate (8:8-10). Bildad shows us, thirdly, that:

c. we may get it from tradition: we've been taught it "This is what the elders said, the ancient ones, the wise ones..." It's the spiritual version of "My dear old daddy used to say..." How many times have YOU heard it, "You have to be good if you want God to bless you!" "If you're a good girl, I'll get you an ice cream cone!" We seldom say, "I love you and I think I'll get you an ice cream cone!" Most of us have had the concept of performance pretty well ground into us growing up to one degree or another: "I have to perform to please!" So, it's pretty easy to conclude that if suffering is my reward, my performance must be pretty lousy!" And then Zophar throws in his two cents (20:3-5). And through Zophar we see that:

d. we may get it from logic: we've figured it out Zophar is a thinker, a philosopher. "This is a natural law of the universe; every effect always has a cause, you know! Good always triumphs over evil." Today we have a name for it; we call it the "Just-World Phenomenon", *the tendency for people to want to believe that the world has supernatural justice so when they witness an otherwise unexplainable injustice, they will rationalize it by searching for things that the victim might have done to deserve it.* Everything always turns out the way it's supposed to in the end, so look at Job's end and you'll naturally conclude he must have caused it! We just can't accept a world where awful evil happens apparently at random and for no good reason; we don't feel safe in that world, so we blame.

In the end Job's comforters became his critics; in fact, the phrase "Job's comforter" has made it into proper English usage to refer to a person who tries to help but only makes a person feel worse. That's what this kind of religious and moral thinking does to us:

3. it makes us miserable comforters who are really critics We make people feel worse instead of better. We heap a load of guilt on top of the pain they're already suffering. In today's parlance we call it "blaming the victim". In its worst form, it may be telling the rape victim that it's her fault because of the way she was dressed or telling the abused child that he deserved to be beaten because talked back. In lesser forms it may be as subtle as saying, "If you'd only practiced harder, you wouldn't have lost the match." Or, "If you'd only studied harder, you wouldn't have gotten that bad grade." "Or if you'd only been paying attention, you wouldn't have wrecked the car or lost the dog or let your child run into the street..." We say stuff like this all the time and heap loads of false guilt on people who are already feeling sad enough about what has happened to them. The Book of Job itself is God's protest against that kind of thinking which He began almost 4,000 years ago.

Job's comforters will always be with us. And sadly, sometimes they will BE us! Let's determine to be true comforters who come alongside others to help, but the best news I have for you today is that there IS always a source of comfort for you when you suffer, no matter how poor a job the rest of us are doing.

III. The True Source Of Our Comfort Is God Himself Listen to what He promises: *Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.* - Ps. 27:10:

1. He will always be there in our darkest moments Even if nobody else stands with us to strengthen us and help us, even if our own parents turn their backs on us, He will always be right there with us, *because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."* - Heb. 13:5. And even though it seems as though He is not there, He is for He promised, *surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* - Mt. 28:20. *If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night—but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day.* - Ps. 139:8-12. Listen, when you hurt, GOD IS ALWAYS THERE! And:

2. He is the God of ALL Comfort Look with me at: **2 Cor. 1:3-4** Oh listen:

a. He is filled with compassion for our suffering He is the Father of Compassion! He feels our pain; He enters into it; His heart is touched with it. He is deeply moved. And he is the God of ALL comfort, the true source of it all!

b. He will comfort us in ALL our troubles if we let Him If we turn to Him and cry out to Him and lean on Him, He will bring us that comfort that only He can give. How? Look at Paul - **2 Cor. 7:5-7**. In Macedonia he was full of fear and conflict and suffering and God knew just what to do! He sent Titus at just the right moment with a bunch of good news that filled His heart with joy! God knows just what to do and how to do it. He knows how to give you peace and rest in the midst of your sorrow, if you will simply turn to him and rest in Him. He will give you peace, His peace, a peace that the world does not understand. And by the gentle way He comforts us:

c. He will show us how to be a true comforter to others

In the beginning of this series, I told you about how singer Stephen Curtis Chapman's daughter was killed in a tragic accident in their driveway. I'd like to close today by letting you to listen to his words. *[Readers can play the video clip located on this page: www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?ArticleID=1872].*

Job: When Bad Things Happen... Sometimes I React By Complaining! - 7:11

We've already seen that Job's initial reaction to the terrible suffering that came into his life was first-rate, an unbelievable model and example for us. He fell on his face in worship, acknowledged His right to take everything from him, stressed his willingness to accept the difficult things as from His hand and blessed His Name. In all this maintained his integrity and did not sin with his lips. But as he sat on the ash heap scratching for 7 days in silence with his 3 friends around him and his thoughts and emotions swirling all around inside him, his pain got the best of him and he began to do what we human beings normally do. We complain (**7:11**)! Listen, when our spirit is in complete anguish inside over what has happened in our lives and the bitter taste of it has filled our souls, it is NORMAL that a whole bunch of crazy and conflicting stuff comes out of our mouths! When you're badly hurt, you often say things you don't really mean or believe, things you'd never say if you were in a right frame of mind. We need to give people space when they hurt and not expect perfection from them. We need to keep on loving them even if they're talking crazy or saying things that are irrational and simply respect their pain and give God time and opportunity to comfort their hearts. Job's friends couldn't do that. As soon as he opened his mouth to lament and complain, they immediately embarked on a mission to "fix" him, to set him straight, to argue him into saying the right things. Well, you know what that did! It emboldened him to go further in the wrong direction he was already going, which in turn made them bolder and it became a cycle of retorts that went back and forth between them. Bad idea! Last time we listened to some of the things the friends had to say and where they got them. Today I'd just like to listen to some of what Job had to say in chapters 3-31, because in it we clearly see:

I. Some Common Human Reactions To Suffering that tend to occur in all of us. For instance, when something hurts me badly:

1. I may be filled with regret (3:11-13) Regret comes in a lot of forms but it seems to start with "***If only I...***". If only I had died at birth, then I wouldn't have lived to experience this! If only I had never married, if only I had never had children, if only I had never taken this job, if only I had gone to the doctor sooner.... The list is endless. When we start regretting, it can progress to the point of absurdity. It is based on the desperate thought that somehow I could have done something to prevent or change what happened and it is driven by a feeling of guilt. The problem with regret is that there are no "if's"; there are no do-overs. What has happened has happened and it can't be changed after the fact, so living with a load of guilt, whether it is real or imagined, serves only to make the pain worse. If there's real guilt where you intentionally did something wrong, it's much better to go straight to God and get His forgiveness. It's full and free and has no limits! And if you only "feel" guilty, like you could have or should have done something... it's still better to go straight to God and listen to Him tell you the truth that it's not your fault! He will! You don't have to live with regret, but so many people do. Second, when something hurts me badly:

2. I may become desperate to escape (3:20-23) "I want to die; I can't stand feeling like this anymore!" Job says, "***Let me out...***" Sometimes our feelings go on overload and we just want to escape, to run away, to get away from the pain somehow. Suicidal thoughts may come and, in a few people, they become so powerful that they actually follow through and try. Just the other day, our brother David in India told me that his niece, a 17 yr. old student who wants to be a doctor and is a believer, felt such rejection at school that she took poison and he spent the whole night at the hospital getting her stomach pumped! Others try to escape with a bottle or a needle or a pill; some try to drown it with an affair or throw themselves into working feverishly so they don't have time to feel or some simply move somewhere else and start over, trying to not have to think about it ever again. Escape is a normal human reaction, but trust me, it is not the answer that it feels like it would be because the hurt is in our minds and hearts and it goes wherever we go. It won't go away until Jesus heals it, so you might as well go to Him! Third, when something hurts me badly:

3. I may wallow in self-pity (6:1-3) Job says, **“Poor me...”** “My problem is bigger than anybody else’s, it’s the biggest in the world, nobody knows what it’s like to be me!” What really happens is that we become so engrossed in our suffering and in our problem that we can’t see anything outside of it any more. We lose sight of the bigger picture and of other people. The suffering becomes our life; it becomes our identity. You’ve all met a person who just goes on and on telling you about all their problems in massive detail every time you see them. Self-pity is feeling pity for yourself and what has happened to you, but it usually requires constant feeding with the pity of others, so you keep soliciting pity for what has happened instead of moving on past it to what comes next. And then finally, when something hurts me badly:

4. I may fall into despair (7:1-10) **“I have no hope...”** means “I give up. There’s nothing left for me, nothing to look forward to. Life is simply a meaningless round of eating and working and sleeping and then you die! I will never be happy again.” I’m sure you’ve met people like this too; their spouse dies and they go into a depression and never come out of it and don’t want to try. They have believed a lie that is reinforced by their feelings and they are thoroughly committed to it. These reactions which are coming out of Job’s mouth are some of the most common types that we see. There are others. But did you notice the one word that I just used more than any other in these four descriptions? *I or me:*

5. the common characteristic of most human reactions is self-focus. Pain makes me like *the woman who was enthusiastically telling her friends the value of her first aid class that she had just completed. She said, “Why just yesterday I was driving down the street and heard this awful crash in back of me. So, I pulled over and ran back to find a car wrapped around a telephone pole. When I got to the injured driver, he was a horribly bloody mess. My knees went limp and I didn’t know what to do. Then I remembered my first-aid training so I bent down and put my head between my knees, and it worked! I didn’t even faint!”* We laugh because it’s so ridiculous to think about yourself first to that degree, but that’s exactly what suffering can do to us. Pain causes me to think about myself and focus on myself to the exclusion of others, to see the world through self-colored lenses. But it has an even more devastating effect. Complaining evolves into anger. Let’s look at:

II. The Anger At God Which Satan Creates Through Self-Focus When I am thinking that the world revolves around me and what happened to me, as soon as I think about God, I very naturally get angry at Him and that’s Satan’s goal. There He is, sitting out there with all the power to have done something about this and He didn’t. When I’m focused on me, I begin to make:

1. the false assumption that circumstances indicate God’s attitude toward me, that what He let happen to me is a measure of how He feels about me! And so, I wind up doing two things that Job went on to do. Right away:

a. I end up defending my own righteousness (13:23-26) “I don’t deserve this! I haven’t done anything bad enough to merit this suffering in my life! Things like this shouldn’t be happening to me; I’m being treated like an enemy, not a friend or child!” And so naturally:

b. I end up accusing God of being unfair (19:6-11) “God is making me suffer like this. He’s unfair; He’s unjust! In fact, He’s a bit evil! How can He be the just God He claims to be and let this happen to me!”

That’s the logic of anger! And you would be amazed at how many people seated in this very room, have that very anger buried deep inside themselves somewhere. We find it time and time again in the counseling room, that though I would never admit it, when I allow myself to press down to the deepest levels of my memory and pain, somewhere back there I got really hurt and at the core of my thinking I’m still mad at God for letting it happen to me! You see, that’s the work of Satan! In that most painful moment, he simply plants the seed thought, “God let this happen to you” and the pain does the rest! He turns your heart against God and you find yourself railing, like Job, with your mind if not with your mouth, against the very One who saved your soul and changed your life and whom you love! Well, listen, here’s:

2. the real truth: Turn with me to **Rom. 8:35-39**. We’ve read that a thousand times. What does that mean? It’s simple: **NO circumstance changes God’s love!** Even if people are hunting us all day long and killing us, like happened to our brothers and sisters in Jos, Nigeria last March, God still loves us! Even if we’re starving and have lost everything, God still loves us! Even if we’re terminally ill or get our leg blown off fighting in Iraq, or languish in a prison like so many of our brothers in China did, God still loves us! Circumstances do not change His love for us and they are not an indicator of His love for us. He allows all these things to happen in the lives of His children whom He loves dearly and not for one second does He stop loving us! He loved us once for all forever in Jesus Christ, who became a human being, experienced all that we feel in life, took our place in suffering the agony of the crucifixion and died our death to save us! Then He rose from the dead to guarantee our eternal life and promised that He will absolutely take us to be with Him and reign with Him forever! It doesn’t matter WHAT happens to me here, it doesn’t change ANY of all of that! When I look at the Cross, how can I be angry with the Man of Sorrows who was tortured and died in my place? Self-focus makes me angry, but if I lift my eyes and look away to Jesus, it all melts away! But here’s:

3. the true tragedy: If I stay stuck in that self-focused mode, I end up **missing God’s true purpose in what is happening**. God is wanting to do something through this pain and suffering. He’s wanting to do something **IN** you and He’s wanting to do something **THROUGH** you in the lives of others. You waste it by focusing on yourself! Paul Bill-

heimer wrote a book years ago called *Don't Waste Your Sorrows: Finding God's Purpose In The Midst Of Pain*. God has an eternal purpose for you in the midst of the greatest adversities of your life and if you're looking at you and not Him, you'll miss it; you'll waste the tremendous opportunity God has given you to glorify Him and learn from Him! Job nearly did; throughout this whole dialogue he was stuck there until God appeared to him and pulled him out of it. But that's the end of the story. In the meantime, something else happens. A fourth friend of Job's has also shown up sometime along the way. **(32:1-3)** Elihu is a younger man he has a balanced approach to the issue. He sees that Job's self-focused anger at God is wrong but he also sees that all the others have done is condemn Job for things he didn't do. So, he steps up and gives a six chapter long monologue in chapters 32-37 before God takes over and speaks to Job personally. And if we look closely at what he says, we can find five:

III. Truths That Will Guard Our Minds Against Self-Focus The first is:

1. God IS speaking and at work, though we don't see Him (33:8-14) He goes on to say that God speaks in dreams, He speaks through pain and suffering and sickness and distress and dying and in all of these things you can still come to God, see His face and experience joy! He is speaking to us all the time, in all kinds of ways, even though we don't perceive it. And most of the time we don't perceive it because we're not listening for it! We're too wrapped up in ourselves. When suffering comes, listen for God! Say, "Father, what are You saying, what are You doing, what are You wanting me to do?" He's at work; believe it ahead of time and look for Him! Second, we need to realize that:

2. our complaining is rebellion against God (34:5-9) When I say that I am sinless as we just heard Job say in 33:8-9, and I accuse God of doing wrong, I keep company with evil-doers; I associate myself with wicked men, not because I'm doing the same exact things they're doing, but rather because I am joining in their attitude of rebellion against God. "It doesn't profit me to serve God; why should I serve Him?" Look at **(36-37)**. Job's sin was not some secret horrendous act that he had hidden from his friends; his sin was answering like a wicked man, rebelling against God, accusing Him of evil and unfairness in what happened. That's where the sin lies! It's not in what caused the suffering; it's in how Job reacted to the suffering! Listen, when you complain against God, when you get mad at Him and yell at Him and tell Him He's not fair and all the rest of it, He's got big enough shoulders to take it. He will STILL love you. He will put up with it like any good father; He remembers that we are dust! But in the long run, you're sinning against Him and you'll need to repent of it like Job did in the end of the book! Complaining against God is rebellion as serious as any other sin. Third:

3. God NEVER does wrong (34:9-12) It is unthinkable that God would do wrong. He is GOOD. That is one of the core characteristics of His being. It is impossible for God to lie. It is impossible for God to be unjust. It is impossible for God to do evil. He simply cannot! In fact, it is by His very character that we know and understand what good and evil are! He is our eternal standard of right and good and truth and He cannot change like shifting shadows! So even when He is choosing to allow pain and suffering and even awful evil to happen in your life, He is still good and still doing good, even though you and I can't see it! Fix that in your mind now! Grind it in there and imprint it ahead of time so that when suffering comes, you will be predisposed to react properly! Fourth:

4. God does not OWE us an explanation of what He's doing (35:3-8, 14-16) When you try to tell God how to run the universe, who do you think you are? You have no idea what you're talking about. You're like a little kid trying to explain to a master mechanic how the engine in your car works! When you try to make God accountable and tell Him He has to explain Himself to you, you're being preposterous. He doesn't owe us anything! He doesn't have to tell us what He's doing. He is GOD! Ours is but to love and obey Him. He never does tell Job why He let all those horrible things happen to him. I'm guessing Job figured out some really big lessons on his own and we certainly can see a few of the reasons, but God does not stoop to explain Himself. He doesn't have to! Self-focus says that God at least owes me an explanation!! But it's not true. God is free to do with my life what He wills and I simply have to trust that, because He is good, He is causing all things, even my suffering, to work together for His good purpose. And lastly:

5. God is great beyond understanding; therefore our true response is praise (36:22-26) He is so great, so far beyond our understanding. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are *[His]* ways higher than *[our]* ways and *[His]* thoughts than *[our]* thoughts. [Is. 55:9]. Remember to extol His work, to magnify His Name, to praise Him in song like Paul and Silas did with their feet in the stocks in jail at midnight, to praise Him like the Apostles did after they were flogged and beaten, going on their way *rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name*. If you can grasp this, the very fact that God is going to bring good out of the awful thing happening in your life is the evidence of just how great He is! And our true response, the one that He deserves always, is praise! And that's the reaction you will have when your mind is fixed on Him, not yourself.

The late well-known Bible teacher Wendell P. Loveless described the suffering of a woman he met in Illinois: "She is 64 years old and has been shut in for more than 16 years. Confined to her bed and in constant pain, she is unable to move a limb, but she's one of the most thankful people you will ever meet. She rejoices that God has left her a great blessing--the use of the thumb on her right hand! The other hand is clenched and stiff and is utterly useless. With a two-pronged fork fastened to a stick she can put on her glasses and remove them again, but all with great effort. By the same method she can feed herself and sip her tea through a tube. She does all this, using only her one thumb. She can also turn over the

leaves of a large Bible when it is placed within her reach. A visitor once heard her say joyfully, 'I have so much to be thankful for.' When asked the source of this happiness, she answered, 'Now that my sins are all forgiven, I can just lay back and daily drink in the great love of Jesus my Savior.' Asked if at times her restricted way of life made her fretful and despondent, she replied, 'I'm perfectly content to lie here as long as it pleases the Lord to let me stay in this world, and I'm also ready to leave whenever He calls me.'" When bad things happen, when suffering comes into your life, you have a choice. You can focus on yourself and your pain and complain and get mad or you can look at Jesus, accept your circumstance and rejoice in His love for you. I pray that even if you do get overwhelmed and choose to complain for a while, that eventually God will help you see the situation through His eyes and choose the better path.

Job: When Bad Things Happen... Sometimes I React In Confidence! - 23:10

The Book of Job is a lot like the Book of Ecclesiastes. Much of what's in the book from chapters 3-31 is simply a lot of human observation about the way life is and, frankly, it's depressing. It's not meant to be read as God's instructive truth, but rather as honest human feeling and thinking. In most of it, as we saw last week, Job is complaining about his suffering and sometimes we do that too. We blame God, we rail at God, and we get angry at God. But then in the midst of all the complaining, there are these brilliant shining nuggets of truth that come out of Job's mouth, pieces of Divine truth that I'm sure God doesn't want us to miss, so today we're going to go back and consider those. And to me, the very fact that Job occasionally spurts out wonderful things like these, is evidence that deep down inside of him Job had a core of faith that was unshaken, even though you wouldn't know it by listening to what was coming out of his mouth most of the time! We're like that, aren't we? When bad things happen, so often we complain; all kinds of crazy things come out of our mouths, things that maybe we don't really mean but we say, just because we hurt so bad. But if our faith is genuine, we also have shining moments of confidence when the faith that's really deep in our hearts comes pouring out. Moments like Job had in **13:15a**. "Even if He kills me, I'll still trust in Him!" And the reason I'm willing to trust God even when I'm hurting or mad at Him is that's who I really am at the core of my being. Now from what Job blurts out in his dialogue with his friends we can see three things. First of all:

I. Deep Down Job Had A Core Confidence Concerning God that goes way beyond what he could possibly have known at that time. Early on in his speeches as he tried to accuse God of treating him unfairly, he could see how futile that really was:

1. he saw his need for a mediator - 9:32-34 What he was feeling is actually a very profound thing:

a. God is so great that we can't "approach" Him Listen to Job's words (**9:2-4, 14-15, 19-20**). Even as he says, "God is not treating me right", he knows he can't say that. God is so great, so big, so powerful, so righteous, so holy, so perfect. Even if he could stand before God in heaven and voice the awful travesty that occurred in his life and the deep pain it was causing him, it would pale before God. How can you accuse a perfect being of wrong, even if you feel like it? How can you even bring it up? In His presence you can only be overwhelmed and fall on your face and beg for mercy! God is so far above and beyond us that:

b. we need someone who knows us both to bring us together "I need a mediator, an intermediary, an umpire, somebody who knows all about me and the depths of what I'm experiencing and cares about it but who also knows all about God and all that He is thinking and doing and can bring me before Him on His own level. I need a helper, an advocate, someone to come alongside me and help." And the amazing thing is:

2. he was confident there was such a one, though his concept was unclear Job lived in the days of Abraham. He had NO written Scriptures. He did not know of all the great promises of the Psalms or Isaiah the prophet. The only promise he could possibly have known was the concept in Gen. 3:15 of a promised Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head. And, of course, the promises to Abraham talked about his SEED, singular, who would bless all the nations of the earth. Even the patriarchs had the faint concept of a Promised One, an Anointed One, a Messiah, someone sent of God and yet of man. Job said:

a. he was sure his redeemer lived and he would see Him - 19:25a, 27 Here he used the Hebrew word *go'el*, a kinsman-redeemer, a close relative who would help you when you were in trouble. If you were enslaved for debt, he would ransom you out. If you lost your property, he would buy it back for you. If you died without children, he would care for your wife and have a child who would carry on your name, not his. Job didn't have one of those on earth. If you look back to verse 13 and following, his relatives had all forsaken him, his close friends had deserted him, his servants were not there for him and his own wife wanted nothing to do with him. And yet He was confident that he had a living Redeemer, one not of this world, and that one day he would see him with his own eyes. And not only that:

b. he was sure his advocate was on high pleading for him - 16:19-21 For you serious students, I know there are some real difficulties in interpreting the Hebrew here, but the NIV does seem to make the most sense! "I have an advocate, a comforter, a helper, a redeemer, and He's already in heaven and bringing my case before God! He is my friend and He's interceding for me there, pleading with God for me!"

Oh, look at the faith of Job! In the midst of all his pain, he was confident that he was not totally forgotten, that Somebody was out there helping him, pleading his case, standing before the Throne for him. I have no idea how he knew that, but how blessed we are because:

3. we know that the One he was confident of is Jesus! Look at 1 Tim. 2:5-6. Jesus:

a. He is the true mediator between God and man He is fully and completely God. He is one with the Father. But He left heaven and took to Himself a human body. He became a human being like us so He knows first-hand what everything we're experiencing feels like, how it hurts, how unfair it seems and so on. He is the true Mediator who intimately knows both sides, who bridges the great gulf between God and man; He is the God-Man. But more than that, He is the real kinsman-redeemer, the true brother of ours who paid the ransom for our sins with His own blood! There is no question of His love for us! And now:

b. He is the advocate who appears in God's presence for us - Heb. 9:24 He is my witness and my record-keeper. He knows exactly what the case concerning me is because His Spirit lives right inside of me. His presence there is a constant guarantee, both that God KNOWS me and what's happening in my life and that wherein I have sinned, it has been covered with His blood already! The gap is bridged! There is no longer a separation between me and God! You see:

c. when we suffer we are confident of our relationship through Christ We may moan and complain about the things He has allowed into our life, we may scream about how much these things hurt, but down deep at the core of our being, we KNOW that we KNOW Him, that through Jesus we have a relationship with God that cannot be severed by any earthly circumstance!

In an evangelistic meeting in Ireland a speaker was explaining what it means to abide in Christ and at the conclusion of his message, he repeated several times, "It means that in every circumstance you can keep on saying, 'For this I have Jesus.'" The meeting was then opened for testimonies. The young lady who had been at the piano stood up and said, "I have to leave shortly so I'd like to be the first to testify. Just a few minutes ago I was handed this telegram. It reads, 'Mother is very ill; take train home immediately.' When I saw those words, I knew that tonight's message was meant just for me. My heart looked up and said, 'For this I have Jesus.' Instantly a peace and strength flooded my soul." After pausing a moment, she continued, "I have never traveled very far alone, but for this I have Jesus. And for all the strain and suspense that goes with the thought of Mother's severe illness, I praise God that for this too I have Jesus." Three or four weeks later the evangelist received a letter from the same woman. It read, "Thank you again for the message you gave that day. Life has become an uninterrupted psalm of victory, for I have come to realize that no matter what life brings, for this I have Jesus." This is OUR confidence: no matter what life throws at us, we have Jesus! Now secondly, you might be surprised to notice that:

II. Deep Down Job Had A Core Confidence Concerning Death You find him talking about death quite a bit in the book, "I should have died, I want to die, I'm going to die, I can't die even though I want to, die, die die!" *Die* and related words occur 38 times in the book; it's a theme, especially with Job because:

1. his suffering underscored the inevitability and finality of death His children all died. He himself was in seriously ill health. His experience impressed upon him that they weren't coming back and that inevitably he would die too. Listen to his gloomy musing in **14:14a**. "If you cut down a tree, it sprouts again! There's hope! But when a man dies, that's it! There's no coming back! It's all over with and you can't do anything about it." Our popular quote is, [excuse the language] "Life sucks and then you die!" (which was actually the title of an album released by a British heavy metal band in 1988!). But suffering does produce that gloom and doom attitude in us; it brings the reality of death really close to us, just like it did for Job and:

2. yet, if you read on, he was looking forward to a "change" after death - 14:14b-15. He knew there would be a *renewal*, a *release*, literally a *change*, as in a "change of garments". He knew that he would still be alive and that God would call and he would answer and God would want him to be with Him! In fact, if you read what is probably the most well-known passage in the book, you can see that:

3. he was absolutely confident about what would happen after he died - 19:25-27 Hymnwriters through the centuries have turned that first line into one hymn after another; it points so clearly to Jesus! But look what Job says that he knew; it's amazing:

a. he knew his body would be raised from the dead Yes, he would die and the worms would eat his body and destroy it, but still he knew he would see God from his flesh! He would get a new body. He would be raised! Death was not the end for him! Further:

b. he knew he would see God personally and be with Him "After I die, I will see Him - not somebody else, but ME! I'LL see Him! That's what I yearn for! That's what I'm waiting for!" And thirdly:

c. he knew his Redeemer would stand upon the earth That sounds almost like **Zech. 14:3-4** which says, *Then the LORD will go out and fight... On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem...* Somehow Job knew that there was a Redeemer who was coming to rule the world and transform it! The world won't always be like this, full of suffering! It wasn't a thorough, detailed knowledge, but it was something he was confident of and it was always there, no matter how melancholy and depressed he felt! Listen:

4. when we suffer, we are confident of Christ's return and our resurrection Turn with me to **Phil. 3:20-21**. Doesn't that say exactly the same thing Job said! "I don't really belong here! I am a citizen of heaven and I'm waiting for the Lord Jesus to come to transform this decaying dying body of mine into a glorious resurrection body like He has and transform this whole world into His Kingdom so that there will be an end to things like I've had to suffer!!

Greg Fisher was teaching a room full of West African Bible College Students when one asked, "Reverend, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from heaven with a loud command. What will he say when he shouts?" Greg says, "I wanted to leave the question unanswered, to tell him that we must not go past what Scripture has revealed, but my mind wandered to an encounter I had earlier in the day with a refugee from the Liberian civil war. The man, a high school principal, told me how he was apprehended by a two-man death squad. After several hours of terror, as the men described how they would torture and kill him, he narrowly escaped. After hiding in the bush for two days, he was able to find his family and escape to a neighboring country. The escape cost him dearly: two of his children lost their lives. The stark cruelty unleashed on an unsuspecting, undeserving population had touched me deeply. I also saw flashbacks of the beggars that I passed each morning on my way to the office. Every day I saw how poverty destroys dignity, robs men of the best of what it means to be human, and sometimes substitutes the worst of what it means to be an animal. I am haunted by the vacant eyes of people who have lost all hope. "Reverend, you have not given me an answer. What will he say?" The question hadn't gone away. "Enough," I said, "He will shout, 'Enough!' when he returns." A look of surprise opened the face of the student. "What do you mean, enough?" "Enough suffering. Enough starvation. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough lives trapped in hopelessness. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time. Enough!" [Gregory L. Fisher in Leadership-Vol. 12, #4.] That's our hope; that's our confidence when we suffer. Our Redeemer lives and one day when we die, we will see Him! We'll see Him personally and be with Him. We will live even though we die because we believe in Him. But even more than that, one day He will stand upon the earth and every knee will bow and suffering will literally be ALL over with! This is NOT how things will be forever! Hallelujah! And finally, let me point out this:

III. Deep Down Job Had A Core Confidence Concerning Suffering Despite all his complaining about the pain of his tragedy and God being unfair, at the core of his being he knew God was at work and he expressed it in a moment of clarity in a verse that I think is the high-water mark of the Book: **23:10**. "I may not be able to see Him; I have no idea what He's doing, but nevertheless, I am confident of this:

1. God knows everything about my life, literally *He knows the way that is with me*. Not simply everything I do, but everything about my life and being. He knows my potential, my personality, my capabilities and my limits. He knows what I can take and what is too much and how He can use me. He knows the end from the beginning and what He plans to do with me that I can't imagine. Moreover, Job says:

2. God is controlling what happens and is "refining" me You know how gold ore is refined. You throw the raw, dirty metal into a pot and heat it until it melts. The dirt and impurities come to the top where they are all skimmed off and the pure gold is poured into a mold to harden and form an ingot, a bar. Suffering is that refining process. Through it God is turning up the heat on me and as I melt under it, He is bringing out all the things in me that shouldn't be there and skimming them away! If you think about it, Job started this whole process by God's own estimation as the most righteous man on earth. But God wanted more. He let the devil push Job's buttons and all this anger and self-focus came out, all this dross that was hidden inside. And in the end God skimmed it all away and Job was an even better man! That's why Job says:

3. God will ultimately bring me through it "perfected" He's shaping and molding me and one day I will be an ingot that looks exactly like His Son! Even in the midst of his pain, Job knew that God had a good purpose and was working it out, even though he didn't talk like that most of the time. Listen:

4. when we suffer we are confident He is producing good Look at **Rom. 8:28** with me. No matter how bad it hurts, no matter how awful it feels, no matter how much we want to die or give up, WE KNOW that God is causing even this thing to work together with all other things to produce GOOD in and through us! Job knew that at the core of his being and so do I.

But it's not easy to see when you're in the midst of the suffering. *In February 1862, President Lincoln's son Willie died, and his son Tad became seriously ill. A Christian nurse attending the sick child recalled that the President watched by his bedside and often paced, saying, "This is the hardest trial of my life. Why is it? Why is it?" She told him that she was a widow and that her husband and two children were in heaven. She saw the hand of God in it all and never loved Him so much as she did after her great trials. "How is that brought about?" inquired Lincoln. "Simply by trusting in God and knowing that He does all things well," she replied. "Did you submit fully under the first loss?" he asked. "No," she answered, "not fully. But as blow came upon blow, and all were taken, I could and did submit." Lincoln replied, "I'm glad to hear you*

say that... I will try to go to God with my sorrows." After a few days, she asked him if he could trust God. He replied, "I think I can. I will try. I wish I had that childlike faith you speak of, and I trust He will give it to me." Yes, when you hurt, sometimes you will complain, often you will say crazy things, maybe you will rail against God and yell at Him, but if you genuinely know Christ, you will also have moments where you know that you know that you know that Jesus is with you, that Jesus will receive you even if you die and will one day transform this miserable world, and that Jesus is at work even now bringing good out of what seems like it could be meant only for evil. And like President Lincoln you won't get there all at once; it will probably come by stages. But you CAN ask God to help you trust Him, to make more and more of your moments times of confidence rather than of complaining! And I believe that if you are sincere in asking that, He will grant it.

Job: When Bad Things Happen...

What God Says About Suffering - Chs. 40-41

When we come to the last four chapters of the Book of Job, we move from the human viewpoint to the Divine viewpoint. In chapters 3-31 Job and his 3 friends have an impassioned debate about why all these bad things happened to Job. In chapters 32-37 another friend, Elihu, admonishes Job on God's behalf to stop rebelling against God by complaining and to praise Him even though he couldn't understand what God was doing. But now in Chapter 38 God reveals Himself to Job and begins to speak to him personally, one to one. Now don't miss the significance of the fact that:

I. God Spoke To Job Directly After all the hodge-podge of what everybody else had to say about Job and his suffering, here are the very words of God Himself about the subject! They are worth paying close attention to! Now here's how God did it:

1. He spoke to Job out of a violent storm (38:1, 40:6 repeats it again.) You can tell that even as Elihu is finishing his speech about how great God is, that he is seeing and hearing a thunderstorm approach (**36:32-37:4**). And as the storm arrives in full force, God speaks out of it! You've been in thunderstorms out of doors, haven't you? The lightning is flashing across the sky. Peals of thunder shake the very ground you're standing on. The wind is whipping all around and driving the rain in sheets. It's fearful to stand out in that, isn't it? You feel so small and insignificant compared with the power of the earth-shaking forces all around you. THAT's the platform out of which God chooses to speak to Job! Now realize, this is exactly what Job has been longing for! He's been moaning that he can't find God and present his case to Him, so now God says in verse 3, "Here I am! You wanted Me! Now I'm answering you, so brace yourself! Get ready! Now I'm going to ask YOU some questions and YOU answer ME!" He says it again in 40:7. Now look closely at:

2. His charge against Job (38:2) Don't gloss over that too quickly. Job repeats back to God what He said in **42:3** and that helps us understand the phrase better. God says: Job, ***You are obscuring My purpose by speaking without knowledge!*** Elihu told Job back in **35:16** already that he was multiplying words without knowledge, that he was talking about things he had no way to understand. We've all done that! We blabber on and on about why we think something is happening or whether God is right or wrong to allow it, but we really have no clue what we're talking about! And God says, "When you do that, you are obscuring MY purpose! You are thinking about YOU, not about ME; you are taking the truth of My wise plan, which is playing out in front of your very eyes in what is occurring, and making it impossible to see because you're blotting it out with all the self-focused, longwinded explanations and complaints that are coming out of your mouth since you don't know what you're talking about!" In other words, when bad things come into our lives, the best thing that we can do in response is to stop talking and start listening, listening for what GOD is wanting to say instead of blurting out everything WE want to say! However, before diving into what God actually does say, it's interesting to think about:

II. What God Did NOT Say To Job He did not say ANY of the things that we would probably expect Him to say or want Him to say! For instance, He didn't say:

1. This is all Satan's doing... Even though God showed US back in chapters 1-2 that Satan is the one who actually brought about the loss of all Job's property and took away his health and killed all his children, He didn't tell Job that! He didn't confuse Job by saying what we so often try to say, "Satan actually *did* this; I merely chose to *allow* it to happen!" God didn't try to let Himself off the hook of responsibility and shift the blame. He also didn't say to Job:

2. This is NOT your fault..., even though He showed us THAT plainly in the prologue also, that Job was righteous and without fault. He didn't say, "You're right Job! You DIDN'T deserve any of this! Your friends are wrong to accuse you. You've been the most righteous man on earth!" He didn't vindicate Job, though that's what we want Him to do. We think, "Surely if Job knew that it would make him feel better!" But God didn't think that and He didn't say that! If anything, He FOCUSED on Job's sin, that is, the sin of speaking without knowledge! Now what we'd really like God to say is:

3. I'm sorry you had to go through this... "Job, I hate to see My children suffer but in this world it's unavoidable and besides, I'm going to use your suffering to accomplish a great and wonderful purpose. You'll see in the end that it'll be worth it, but I'm sorry for the pain it's causing you!" No, Job gets no apology and seemingly no sympathy when God

speaks, even though we KNOW that God feels our pain and Jesus sympathizes with our every weakness. And finally, notice that God never says:

4. Here's why this had to happen... He never spells out His reasons for letting Satan touch Job's life. He doesn't say, "Job, there was all this self-focused thinking inside you that I had to refine and purge out. Job, I need a powerful example to show the world that I am in absolute control of everything that happens, that Satan can't do a thing without permission, and you're it! I chose you! And Job, millions of people are going to read your story over thousands of years and be touched deeply by it! I will bring great good out of all this!" God gives not a word of explanation that we are just longing to hear! Nada! Zip!

Sooo... maybe all these things that we usually long to have God say are NOT the things that will really help us when bad things happen to us! You see, explanations don't really satisfy us. Sympathy doesn't satisfy us. Being absolved of responsibility doesn't satisfy us and having someone else to blame doesn't satisfy us. Only GOD Himself really satisfies us! It is not what God SAID that changed Job's heart and brought him peace, so much as it was that God showed up and God SPOKE! Suddenly he saw that God was there in his suffering and that God was speaking! But you say, "Yes, but God never talks to me like that!" What is the first thing God tells Job? Essentially, "Shut up and listen! Stop talking and listen for ME!" ...*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*, like James said [1:19]. When bad things happen, your best response is to say, "OK God, I'm listening... Show me what You want me to know!" and to remain in that posture. He WILL speak. It may take a while and it may come slowly and in pieces, but He WILL show you what He wants you to know. Now let's take a look at:

III. What God DID Say To Job Instead of giving Job answers, God asked him questions! He gave him a 60 question quiz, the kind that a teacher might give to a cocky student who thinks he knows it all, all questions that he not only can't answer but can't even begin to fathom! The point is, of course, to show Job his own limitedness, to show him that he is way out of his league when it comes to knowing how everything in the world ought to work. And through these questions God basically says two essential things. The first is this:

1. I have all WISDOM; you do not! (chs. 38-39). And to say this, He points in the direction that I, for one, would least expect; He challenges Job to:

a. consider the amazing wonders of the physical creation He starts out with • **the earth itself (38:4-7)**. "Job, do you realize that the earth hangs in the middle of space on nothing! Do you know how I did that?" Then He goes on to • **the sea (8-11, 16)**. "Job, who fixed all the boundaries for the oceans; who made it so the dry land appeared and rose up so you could live on it? Do you understand how to do that?" How about • **the day/night cycle (12-13)**. "Who put the sun in place and set the earth in rotation so that day and night occur exactly every 24 hours? Do you know how to make that happen?" What about • **death (17)**? "What exactly is life and how is it taken away?" Or even • **light and darkness (19-21)**. "How did light come into being? How did it happen and why does the absence of light make darkness?" Ponder the weather! Think about • **snow and hail (22-23)** "How does it snow, Job? Where does that all come from? How is it that you make tiny ice crystals so unique that no two are the same up in the sky out of vapor you can't see and have it fall to earth?" Or think about • **lightning (24, 35)** (I imagine about this time God lit up the sky from end to end with a huge bolt of it!). "Job, do you know how I can do THAT? Can you?!" Or think about the land where you live in Uz, think about • **the desert (25-27)** "Job, do you know how I make it rain and all of a sudden grass grows in the midst of all this desolation and the desert blossoms like a rose?" And speaking of rain, what about the way that water can change forms. What about • **rain/ dew/ice/frost (28-30)**? All different forms, yet the same substance! Do you know how that's done?" And just in case that's not enough, look up at • **the stars (31-33)**! "Can you make them all stay in their constellations and yet move in coordinated fashion through the heavens century after century? What keeps them there? [In fact, the light you're seeing now from them, I had to string all the way through space at the same time I created them or it wouldn't get here to be seen for millions of years, they're that far away!] Can you design that?" No wonder the Psalmist would write, *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.* - Ps. 19:1-3. God is talking to us all the time through the wonders of His creation! He is saying, "Look around you! Look how wise I am! Who could design and make all this?" And then God challenges Job to:

b. consider the amazing wonders of the animal kingdom. Think about all the living creatures; watch the discovery channel! The more we study them, the more we see that the knowledge and instincts and systems that God has built into them are complicated beyond imagination! God says, "Do you know how • **they are fed (38:39-41)**? Job, do you know how the lions hunt or how the ravens get their food? I take care of them all! By My hand they are all fed. And do you know how • **they reproduce (39:1-4)**? I time out the birthing season for the mountain goats and for every type of creature just right so they thrive. Do you know how to do that? Why look even at • **the feral animals**, the wild donkey and the wild ox (5-12). They used to be tame but became wild and now you can't take the wild back out of them and tame them! Do you know how all that works, why some animals will serve you and some won't? Just look at a few of those I've created. Look at • **the ostrich (13-18)**. Here's a bird that can't fly, that lays its eggs in open sand and doesn't incubate them and yet can outrun a horse! What human mind could invent such a thing and have it live and thrive? Or what about • **the horse (19-25)**? Specifically, the war horse... Who gives him all that

strength and all that courage that he will run straight into a battle for you, that he will deny all his natural instincts and get excited at the very scent of battle and want to run into the fray? Can you figure that out? Or what about • **the birds of prey (26-30)**, the hawk and the eagle. How do they soar up there hundreds of feet in the air and don't even flap their wings? How do they nest way up on the cliffs and their young don't fall? How can he have eyes so keen that he can see a fish from 200 feet up and crash dive into the lake and snatch it out with such precision? Job, do you know how any of all of this works? No, you don't! But I do! I designed and made it all! So:

c. how can you correct Me?" (40:1-2) "Job, you don't have the knowledge for the job of running the world! You have no idea how it works!" It has taken the whole of human history to begin figure out the answers to many of these questions and most of that only came in the last hundred years! And we still don't know how God put it all here in the first place! Our knowledge is so pitifully limited! He knows EVERYTHING! How can we even begin to suggest that we know better than He what He should and shouldn't choose to do in our lives?

So, God pauses to let Job answer but in verses 3-5 he won't do it! He can't do it! He puts his hand over his mouth, but God is not finished yet; He goes on to make a second point:

2. I have all POWER; you do not! in (chs. 40-41) His first challenge is to say:

a. you can't rule the world, but I can! (40:6-14) "Job, let's see you come up here where I am and clothe yourself with a storm and you single out all the wicked people on earth and crush them. Go ahead! If you have the power to do that, I'll admit that you're the MAN! You can run the universe! But you can't, can you? You're powerless! Yet I can! Why let's look even at two of the animals I made on earth that have too much power for you!" Now let me take a moment aside to explain that nobody knows exactly which animals God is referring to here. Some suggest that *behemoth* was a land dinosaur and *leviathan*, a water dinosaur that were still living in Job's day. That is entirely possible, but others think they are dramatized references to the largest common land and water animals that we know inhabited Job's region in that day, the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Whatever they were, they were animals Job knew and feared. God says:

b. you can't approach behemoth (40:15-24). It sounds like a hippo, grazing on land yet at home and lounging in the water. It is the third largest land mammal by weight, averaging between 3,000 and 6,000 lbs. with the largest ever recorded weighing 10,000 lbs.! It can run 20 mph. and *is considered by many experts, explorers and Africans to be the most dangerous animal in Africa.... The hippo is extremely aggressive, unpredictable and unafraid of humans, upsetting boats sometimes without provocation and chomping the occupants with its huge canine teeth and sharp incisors. [Science Digest, LXXVI (November, 1974), 80-86]* God says, "Job, can you capture one of those? Can you go put a ring in his nose and lead him around? Can you even kill one with your sword? [They didn't have guns in those days! Try it by hand!] You can't, **but I can! (19)**. Then God says:

c. you can't stand against leviathan (Ch. 41) [Read 1-9, 33-34] The Nile Crocodile which inhabits this region of the world can weigh from 500 - 2000 lbs. and can grow over 20 feet long, the largest ever recorded being 2,400 lbs. In Africa they routinely kill and eat zebras and wildebeests, young hippos and cape buffalos and even adult lions! God says, "Hook into one of those and see what happens, stick him full of harpoons from your little canoe and see what he does! Your swords and spears are worthless against him; you can't stand against him, **but I can! (10-11)** Look at him, Job! Take a good, long, detailed look and think about it. If he is that powerful and I made him, think how powerful I am! Job, I have all power; you are a weak, limited human being who can't control ANYTHING! How can you tell Me that you could do a better job of running things!"

Listen, when you're hurting, when you're suffering, God really wants you to know that He is all-wise and He is all-powerful! He knows what He is doing and He is in control! And here's:

IV. What God Is REALLY Saying To Job: So Humble Yourself And TRUST Me! Realize that you can't possibly know and you can't possibly control things; just trust Me! Trust that I am in control and I know what I'm doing! Look with me at how Peter said it in **1 Pet. 5:6-7**. Listen, God is in control! His mighty hand is holding your life. Nothing touches you that is not part of His plan. All those things, your worries, all your anxieties and fears, simply cast them on Him. He loves you! He cares for you! He is working all things together for you. Humble yourself! Submit to Him! Say, "You are Lord and I bow the knee before you, whatever you do is right and I will love You and serve You no matter how much pain I am in!" That's what God is saying to Job and that's what God is saying to you!

Claudia Minden Weiss wrote a meaningful poem that graciously points out in many of its lines the very thing that God is trying to get across to Job. In suffering we so often think only about ourselves but God says, "Humble yourself and trust Me! She wrote:

*I asked God to take away my pain. God said, No. It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up.
I asked God to make my handicapped child whole. God said, No. Her spirit was whole; her body was only temporary.
I asked God to grant me patience. God said, No. Patience is a byproduct of tribulations; it isn't granted, it is learned.
I asked God to give me happiness. God said, No. I give you blessings. Happiness is up to you.*

I asked God to spare me pain. God said, No. Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to me.
I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said, No. You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. God said, No. I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things.
I asked God to help me LOVE others, as much as he loves me. God said...Ahhhh, Finally you have the idea.

Job: When Bad Things Happen...

What God Really Wants For Me - Ch. 42

Today we come to the end of the Book of Job and with it, the end of our series of studies. In the first half of chapter 42 we see Job's reaction after God speaks to him for four chapters and in its second half we see God's reaction to Job's reaction. We see the end of the story, how it all turns out; we see what God does with Job after allowing all this suffering into his life. You see, after his long spell of ranting and raving about his suffering, once God has spoken to him in the midst of his experience, Job finally gets back to acting the way God wants him to and becomes once again an example for us as he was in the beginning. So, the important thing is to not miss the point, to apply all of this to myself, to see in this chapter what God really wants for ME when bad things happen! And the first thing is:

I. He Wants Me To Come To Him Humbly In My Suffering (1-6) Humility, that's the first thing! God draws near to the humble! The prophet Micah said, *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* [6:8] That's what God really wants, that we walk with Him humbly, even when we bad things happen to us. And when God showed Himself, that's what it produced in Job. Look at his initial response in the middle: **40:1-5**. Once God has revealed His presence in the storm, Job instantly shrinks in his own eyes, realizes how great God is and how little he is and is appalled at his own audacity in complaining about God! But now in chapter 42 when God is all done, we have a more thorough response from Job and what he said in these few lines shows us what humility really looks like and it is what God really wants for me. First:

1. He wants me to confess that He is controlling my circumstances to accomplish His purpose (1-3) "Lord, You have all power; You are in absolute control of everything that has happened to me. You sent it into my life and through it you are working out your wise plan and purpose and no human being, not even the devil himself, can thwart it!" That's what Job got out of God's long speech that we studied last week. He's saying, "God, I believe you! I confess that what You have told me is true! I KNOW it!" But that word *know* can be dangerous for us because we make it academic; we make it about learning a lesson. Well, of course, God:

a. He wants me to realize it, to get past believing that He has forsaken me and the devil has had a field day and see that HE did this, that HE sent this into my life. But He wants more than that:

b. He wants me to willingly submit to it Job is saying, "I surrender, I give up, I accept that You have the right to do this. You are God and I am not and I humbly say that I accept this thing as part of my life from Your hand. I will love You and serve You with all my heart even though it is here!" And yet He wants still more:

c. He wants me to submit without being able to understand In verse 3 Job says, "There's no way I can comprehend what You're doing, but I don't have to. I submit to it anyway!" That's what He really wants for me! Some of you remember Matt and Betty Bristol who were missionaries in Kyrgyzstan. Two weeks ago, Matt wrote this note: *Our daily devotion today was on declaring our total dependence upon God--a Declaration of Dependence. This must proceed from an acknowledgement that we are totally helpless on our own. Well, now we have a fresh opportunity to appropriate and live out that truth. Betty's sarcoma has returned, with a vengeance. It went right back to the same location in her chest wall where the tumor was removed six months ago. This time it is much larger than before, has apparently infiltrated the lungs and possibly has infiltrated her bones.... Betty is naturally shaken by this turn of events, although not truly surprised.... The very real possibility is that Betty will be living with this disease and trying to hold it at bay with chemo for her remaining time on this earth, before going to be with Jesus. Of course, we are praying that God's perfect will be done in this as in all things. We intend to keep on doing all we have been doing in our local and global ministries, and keep travelling as we are able--but just work all around the chemo.... Thanks for keeping us in your prayers! We are not giving up the fight, just asking God to let us know if we are fighting against Him--in which case we will joyfully stop. That's the attitude of genuine humility that God really wants of me! Secondly:*

2. He wants me to EXPERIENCE Him in my suffering (4-5) "God, You spoke to me; I heard you; oh, how that changed me! I know that You are here! I used to know all about You; I could talk all about what You're like. But now I have experienced you face to face!" God wants to make Himself real to us in the midst of our sufferings. He wants to meet us there and become close to us in a way that He could not under any other circumstance. At the age of 15 Joni Eareckson dove into the Chesapeake Bay, hit her head on a rock and was paralyzed from the neck down for life. She writes: *God became incredibly close to me. I had seen what a difference the love shown me by friends and family had made. I began to realize that, yes, God also loved me. Few of us have the luxury -- it took me forever to think of it as*

that -- to come to ground zero with God. Before the accident, my questions had always been, "How will God fit into this situation? How will He affect my dating life? My career plans? The things I enjoy? All those options were gone. It was me, just a helpless body, and God. I had no other identity but God, and gradually He became enough. I became overwhelmed with the phenomenon of the personal God, who created the universe, living in my life. He would make me attractive and worthwhile -- I could not do it without Him. [Where Is God When It Hurts, Philip Yancey, p. 128] And of course, you know that Joni Eareckson Tada has had a ministry to handicapped people all over the world for many years. But there in her suffering Joni experienced God in a new way, a deep way. I think that's what Paul meant when he wrote in **Phil. 3:10**, *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...* There is a fellowship with Christ; there is a bond that is forged in the fires of enduring suffering together in dependence on Him that cannot be experienced any other way. He waits there in My suffering for me to enter into it with Him and if I look for Him there, I will know Him more deeply than ever before. That's what He wants more than anything, but there's another thing:

3. He wants me to die to self and repent of all self-absorbed reactions (6) Job says, "I reject myself! I now see how self-absorbed I was in reacting against you and I'm done with that! No more! I am sorry! Forgive me, Lord!" Now do notice that Job is not repenting for sins like those his friends were accusing him of which might have caused his suffering; he is repenting of the sin of how he reacted to it! As we've seen, suffering may cause us to react in all kinds of ways. We may go get loaded, we may run away and hide, we may do something immoral to try to drown it or treat others nastily because we're hurting. Or we may, like Job, get angry and accuse God of being unfair. However I react that is wrong, God wants me to repent of that and turn from it, so that I can begin humbly walking with Him through my suffering in the way He wants and bringing Him glory.

And God doesn't waste any time taking Job up on it. Right here is where Job gets to put that immediately into practice. Look at what He has job do (**7-9**). There is the next thing God really wants from me:

II. He Wants Me To Love And Forgive Any Who Hurt Me These three guys had really hurt Job emotionally. They had accused him falsely of serious things and deepened his pain instead of comforting him. My natural reaction would be to walk away and never speak to them again, to tell them to go away and let me alone and hold it against them. But that is not what God wants. When people have hurt me and made me suffer, somehow:

1. I must realize it is His business to deal with their offenses, not mine. Now that doesn't mean that they get away with it.

a. He knows where I've been right and they've been wrong Twice God points it out to them, *You have not spoken of Me what is right as my servant Job has!* In all their speeches they were saying that God always punishes evil and rewards good with prosperity now in this life. And for all his complaining Job was arguing, "No, God doesn't do it like that. Bad guys prosper and get away with it and good guys suffer here on earth. True justice doesn't happen in this world; it must wait!" His attitude was wrong, but his point was right! And God knew it and He let Job know He knew! God knows all about how people have hurt me and how it wasn't right and fair! And He makes it clear that it was a sin against Him! These 'friends' were told to bring a sacrifice. What was it to be? 7 bulls and 7 rams! That is meant to tell us that:

b. He takes their offenses seriously Today an average cow costs maybe \$800 and an average sheep at least \$100 so God's penalty was like a fine of over \$7,000 for an afternoon of wrong arguing! And no doubt this was also a serious amount for them in that day. Remember later on, a poor man could bring a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons to offer for his sin. My point is that God took their offenses seriously! He does! He doesn't let them off the hook and make me suffer!

But again, that is HIS business! He tells me that vengeance is His, it is HIS to repay! I need to let go of bitterness toward those who hurt me. Instead:

2. He wants me to act in a priestly capacity for them Job was to accept their sacrifices and offer them up and to pray that they might be forgiven. He was to be their priest! Today we are all priests of God! And when it comes to those who've hurt me, that means:

a. He wants me to pray for their restoration to God like Jesus prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them..." Look with me at what Jesus told us in **Lk. 6:27, 32-35**. THAT's what God really wants! He wants me to act like Him! He wants me to care about and love people who hurt me. He wants me to pray for them even if they curse me or accuse me and:

b. He wants me to act in a godly manner toward them even if they hurt me. He doesn't want me to repay evil for evil but to overcome evil by doing good. Job didn't tell the friends to go away. He killed and skinned and burned up their sacrifices so they could be forgiven and he prayed for them as he did it! I know that's tough to do. God knows that's tough to do! I remember some years ago that our late missionary John Funk was in his garage one day when a deranged young man entered with a gun and literally shot him in the head. How the bullet passed through his skull and didn't kill or seriously maim him and the swiftness of his recovery is a miracle of God's protection, but

what's even more amazing is that his first concern was to want to visit this young man in prison, offer him forgiveness and tell him about Jesus! That's what God really wants of me! And be sure not to miss this:

3. my response is crucial to my relationship with Him (10a) The NIV is a bit inaccurate; the KJV does better: *And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends...* Job's experience was for him like the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, a time of being forced to be in a place of suffering where he didn't want to be. But it all changed when he prayed for his friends! When Job really got it and responded the way God wanted Him to, that was the beginning of the end of that awful time in his life. But what if he hadn't done it? What if he hadn't gotten God's lesson? What if he'd said, "No way, they can rot in you know where after what they did to me? I hope they do!" Somehow, I think God might have had to keep him in his troubles longer and have another talk with him! Look at what Jesus said: **Mt. 6:14-15.** That's not to make you afraid that you'll lose your salvation; that's saying, "You can't be restored to a full, free, intimate relationship with your forgiving God as long as you're refusing forgiveness to those who hurt you! It'll always stand between you and Him! You've got to let it go if you want all of Him there is to have!" It's crucial! Now the last thing that God wants me to know from the story of Job is that through suffering:

III. He Will Give Me More Than I Had Before (10b-17) [Read 10b] He gave Job literally twice as much, twice as many sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys. That is what He chose to do for Job. I don't claim that He will do exactly that for you or for me. But I do stand on the words of Jesus; look with me at **Mk. 10:29-30.** To me that says, if you suffer for Him God will not fail to reward you in ways you cannot imagine while you are in this world and in the world to come, He will give you everything; a life that is truly life forever! So, if I suffer physically:

1. He may heal my body as He did Job's Nobody ever notices that. Job got well. He got over his illness. God healed him. God may very well do that for me and He does, many times. Or He may choose not to. Looking further:

2. He will probably restore or create new relationships (11a) Wherever Job's family was after the tragedy happened, wherever all his friends were - they all stayed away and left him to suffer - but now here they are. They're all back. Job's life was full of people once again. God often has a way of doing that. Yes, I may have lost people or relationships as part of my suffering, but God will probably give me new ones again. He so often does, though it is his right to choose to leave me alone in a prison cell until I die for His glory. And:

3. He will likely give me possessions to go forward (11b-12) It all started with each of his many friends coming and bringing him a *kesitah*, a piece of silver worth about as much as 1 sheep, and a gold ring maybe worth about 4 days wages. So, in today's money say a bunch of friends each brought him maybe \$500, enough to grubstake him and he bought livestock and got back in business and before too many years passed owned twice as much. If I've suffered by losing economically, God will probably give me new possessions to go on in life. He'll surely meet my needs, but again, if it's His will He could choose to let me die a pauper. Why:

4. He may even increase my family (13-16) He had seven more sons and 3 more daughters, just like before. If you think about it, he even ended up with twice as many kids, considering that he still really had the first set who were now in heaven. Kapar, one of the pastors we've helped in Kyrgyzstan lost his 6 year old son in a drowning accident two years ago; last time I called him he said, "We are expecting a baby in January!" It was an unexpected surprise, a miracle and a blessing of God. Sometimes He does that. Other times He fills my life up with new brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and children in Christ, with a spiritual family who become a true family to me. He may do for me all that He did for Job; He most likely will do some of it; but even if He doesn't, even if I die still in my suffering without ever seeing one bit of change in my circumstances on this earth:

5. He WILL ultimately remove all my pain and restore all my losses in heaven (17) That's when Job got his real reward. That's when he saw the eternal weight of glory that all his suffering produced for him and when he saw it, it far outweighed his afflictions in this life! Listen to what Joni Eareckson Tada wrote further: *The first months, even years, I was consumed with the unanswered questions of what God was trying to teach me. I probably secretly hoped that by figuring out God's ideas, I could learn my lesson and then He would heal me. I guess every Christian with an experience similar to mine goes back to the Book of Job for answers. Here was a righteous man who suffered more than I could imagine. Everything was taken away from him. Strangely, the Book of Job does not answer any questions about why God let the tragedies happen. But Job clung to God, and God rewarded him. "Is that what God wants?" I wondered. My focus changed from demanding an explanation from God to humbly depending on Him. Okay, I am paralyzed. It's terrible. I don't like it. But can God still use me, paralyzed? Can I, paralyzed, still worship God and love Him? He has taught me that I can. Maybe God's gift to me is my dependence on Him. I will never reach the place where I'm self-sufficient, where God is crowded out of my life. I'm aware of His grace to me every moment. My need for help is obvious every day when I wake up, flat on my back, waiting for someone to come dress me. I can't even comb my hair or blow my nose alone! But I have friends who care. I have the beauty of the scenery. With my art sales, I can even support myself financially -- the dream of a handicapped person. The peace that counts is an internal peace, and God has lavished me with that peace. And there's one more thing. I have hope for the future. The Bible speaks of our bodies being "glorified" in heaven. In high school that was always a hazy, foreign concept. But now I realize that I will be*

healed. I haven't been cheated out of being a complete person -- I'm just going through a forty-year delay, and God is with me even through that. Being "glorified" -- I know the meaning of that now. It's the time, after my death here, when I'll be on my feet dancing. [Where Is God When It Hurts, Philip Yancey, p. 128-130]. The message of Job is simple: When it hurts, cling to God! Hang on to Him! He'll give you more than you ever could have had without the suffering! Simply cling to Him. You see, in the end:

IV. He Wants Me To Learn The Lesson Of Perseverance I'd like to close by looking at the New Testament's one verse commentary on the Book of Job: **James 5:11**. You have seen how Job clung to the Lord and what the Lord did for and through him. The Lord hasn't run out of compassion and mercy; He's still full of it and He will do the same for you. Persevere. Cling to Him. Never let go and you will find yourself blessed.

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts Psalm 2 - A Song Of Christ's Reign

The Book of Psalms is a very precious portion of our Bible because it contains the songs and the prayers offered to God by His people Israel. These psalms or songs contain the heart cries of God's people. Some explode with praise to God out of the heights of joy, while others cry out to Him in mourning and suffering out of the depths of despair. Some exude great confidence and trust in God while others express doubt and questioning, even anger and hatred toward enemies. Taken together, the Psalms reveal the whole gamut of human emotion, which is why we love them so much. They are an awesome vehicle through which we can express the depths of our own hearts to God and a tremendous assurance to us that God hears and knows what's going on inside us. Since there are 150 of them, it would take us almost three years to investigate them all. So I've chosen thirteen of them from the beginning to the end of the book to explore together over the next 3 months or so, those which have become the most familiar and beloved to us over the years.

We begin our study with Psalm 2 and it seems particularly appropriate this week if you've been paying any attention to world news at all. As you know, a terrorist group in the Middle East which calls themselves *The Islamic State* or *ISIS* released a video of the beheading of a second American, a journalist, with the hooded executioner waving his knife at the screen and threatening that their knife will fall upon the neck of the United States. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has proclaimed himself the *caliph* for Muslims of the world and it seems like nobody can or will stop their merciless butchery. In North Korea where the little dictator Kim Jong-Un ruthlessly rules and starves his own people, two Americans were about to face trial and be sent to prison and were pleading helplessly on TV for the US government to intervene. Last week Vladimir Putin's Russian troops invaded Ukraine and the UN says the death toll has now exceeded 2200 in that conflict. In July a passing airliner was blatantly shot out of the sky over Ukrainian territory, killing all 298 passengers and crew. Planes don't fly over Ukraine any more. For a month and a half, a small war has been going on in Gaza as Hamas launched thousands of rockets at Israel unsuccessfully and Israel has retaliated with a ground offensive to stop it. Everywhere we look, it seems, there is some dictator, some terrorist leader, some evil maniac declaring his domain over his little section of the planet and defying the rest of the world. That's the sense that was coming over David as he penned the first stanza of Psalm 2. **(1-3)** Here is the ageless truth:

I. The Leaders Of Earth Perpetually Oppose The Control Of God It began way back in Genesis 10 after the flood with Nimrod who was the first "empire builder", who built and confederated four cities into the first Kingdom with Babel or Babylon among them. Jewish sources believe it was Nimrod who ordered the construction of the tower of Babel in pride and defiance against God who had told Noah and his descendants to spread out and fill the earth. Nimrod wanted them to stay together in one region and rule them all and to further snub his nose at God, he built a tower for the worship of other gods! Egypt ruled the near eastern world and ruthlessly oppressed the Hebrews and other minorities among them in harsh slavery. When Moses declared that God commanded him, "Let my people go!", his response was, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?* Biblical history is replete with the same scenario. Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, shouted defiance against the God of Israel and cursed young David by his own gods. One after another, kingdoms came against Israel, the Syrians, the Assyrians and the Babylonians who at last carried off Judah into captivity, each one led by powerful kings *raging*, conspiring, plotting, creating havoc, all because:

1. they vainly believe they can carry out their own plans They think that they can do whatever they want through their own might and power. They don't need another God and don't have to listen to Him. They are their own gods. In Babylon, great King Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden statue of himself 90 feet tall and commanded everyone in his kingdom to fall down and worship it. And when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego boldly refused to bow because of their faith in God, he threatened them with being cast into the fiery furnace and he fumed, *And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?* - **Dan. 3:15**. In other words, "I am my own god and I can do whatever I want!" Of course, he was not the last. Alexander the Great, Roman emperors, Gengis Khan, Napoleon, Hitler, the list is virtually endless. Throughout all the ages of human history, including ours, the leaders of earth perpetually oppose the control of God and, ever since His coming, they have opposed the name of Jesus Christ and have tried to stamp it out. They openly defy the idea of living under the control of a God who controls them and keeps them from their brutal domination. Yet in verse 1 David mused, *WHY do they do it?* Why do they keep on doing something that is so futile and useless and pointless? You see, all:

2. their raging and plotting ends up accomplishing God's purpose anyway! The whole time they think they are getting their own way and doing what they want, they are actually carrying out exactly what God has planned for them long ago. Nowhere can we see this more clearly than here:

a. this was true in the crucifixion of Jesus Turn with me to **Acts 4:25-28**. The apostles had been arrested, threatened and released by the Sanhedrin and as they met with other believers for prayer, they quoted Psalm 2 and saw the truth of how it applied to their Savior. The Jewish leaders, Pontius Pilate, Herod, the kings of the earth in that locality and the people that followed them all gathered and joined as one to oppose God and to crucify Je-

sus. And yet all they were doing was fulfilling what God had long ago determined to do, to offer His son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world on a Roman cross at that very time and place! It was predestined, ordained, and all their fuming and raging and thinking they were winning and getting their own way was simply doing the will of God! And the apostles realized that God would do the same with the leaders who were trying to oppose them! That's why they prayed as they did in verse 29! As we follow what happened, we find that this same principle:

b. it was true in the persecution of the early church Saul persecuted the church in Jerusalem and the believers scattered everywhere, but wherever they went they planted the church and soon there were churches for a thousand miles and then all across the Roman Empire. Nero began the persecution of Christians in 64 AD and emperor after emperor followed suit for 250 years. Right in the middle of it all, Justin Martyr wrote, *Now it is evident that no one can terrify or subdue us who have believed in Jesus over all the world. For it is plain that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus. For just as if one should cut away the fruit-bearing parts of a vine, it grows up again, and yields other branches flourishing and fruitful; even so the same thing happens with us.* [Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, Ch. 110] Diocletian, the worst and last of the persecutors, had a medal struck bearing the inscription, "The name of Christians being extinguished." And in Spain, two monumental pillars were raised, on which were written, on the first, "Diocletian Jovian Maximian Hercules Caesares Augusti, ...for having extinguished the name of Christians, who brought the Republic to ruin." and on the second, "Diocletian Jovian Maximian Hercules Caesares Augusti, ... for having everywhere abolished the superstition of Christ, for having extended the worship of the gods." [Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, Ps. 2:1] I guess that didn't work out so well because one hundred years later Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire! All that raging and plotting and opposing God and Christ simply accomplished His purpose! And the same:

c. it will be true at the time of Christ's return - Rev. 19:19 says that the end time world leader, the beast or anti-christ, with all the kings of the earth, the greatest force that earth can muster, will gather specifically to make war against Jesus as He returns in glory. And yet, Jesus will slay them all with the word of His mouth, set up His Kingdom and reign forever! Yes, we can expect, even in our day, that the nations will rage and fume, but the second verse of this Psalm assures us that:

II. God's Control Is Not Threatened In The Least By Their Actions (4-6) God is not worried in the least by the things we see on the evening news that tend to frighten us. In fact:

1. He laughs at their vain attempts and brings each one to nothing Nimrod's kingdom was dissolved and the earth populated; Pharaoh's kingdom was devastated and his army wiped out and God's name and reputation were made great among the nations to this day. And not long after the three Hebrew men wouldn't burn, Nebuchadnezzar ended up sending a decree to his whole empire that said, *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.* - Dan. 4:37. God laughs at the haughtiness of the nations of the earth in their puny attempts to unseat Him, thwarts them all, and gets Himself glory in the process. You see, verse 6 is saying that:

2. He has firmly established His Son Jesus as King over the earth God has installed His own King! Jesus is sitting on the throne! That verse has both a present and a prophetic meaning. From our New Testament perspective, we know that:

a. He is seated at God's right hand ruling the world right now - Col. 3:1 says clearly that *...Christ is seated at the right hand of God!* He is sitting on the throne of the universe in the heavenly Zion, the control center of the world in heaven at this very moment. He is in control of all things, always has been, is now, and always will be, no matter what conditions on the earth may seem like. But in the future:

b. He will literally rule the world from Zion upon His return When He comes again and sets up His Kingdom, Jerusalem will be the capital city of earth and all the nations will come up there to worship during His millennial reign. At last, the world will be the way it should be and the nations will not rage and fume anymore; they will submit to and obey the Lord of Hosts and His King, Jesus. And that, dear ones, God said was already done a thousand years BC through David. It is as sure and certain as our own salvation which we talked about last week in Romans 8.

Now in the third verse, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, David goes on to give us a deeper glimpse into the mystery of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Here the Psalm switches from the third to the first person; it is God's King, His Son speaking (7-9) In short:

III. God Has Decreed That Jesus Will Rule The World and here we have the Son, Jesus, explaining how that was confirmed in the depths of a conversation that the Father had with Him in heaven. The Father said, *You are My Son!* He said it to Him again at His baptism, *You are My Son*, and again He said it about Him on the Mount of Transfiguration to the disciples, *This is My Son; listen to Him!*

1. He is God's Son and, as such, is **heir to His full authority**. Before He returned to heaven, He assured His disciples, *...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* - **Mt. 28:18**. All rule, all power, all control, all the authority of God the Father Himself is vested in His Son. The writer of Hebrews quotes this Psalm, saying, *For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"?* - **Heb. 1:5**. Jesus is no created being, no secondary creation. He is the very Son of the Father, the very heir to everything that is His. And:

2. He was declared as such through His resurrection You know, I have always wondered about that phrase, *Today I have begotten you*. What day? And what does begotten mean? Well in **Acts 13:32-33**, Paul was preaching a sermon in a synagogue in Antioch, declaring who Jesus is, and in it he quoted this Psalm saying, *...We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."* Today was the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead! On that very day when Jesus' mission of saving the human race was totally completed, the Father reaffirmed once again what He had told Jesus at His baptism and on the mountain, *You are my Son; TODAY...* and the Hebrew word that comes next usually means to birth a child, but it obviously can't mean that here. He was already God's Son. He didn't become God's Son at that point or any point. Look with me at **Rom. 1:4**. There are times when that Hebrew verb *begotten* means *to declare one's lineage*. That's what God was doing. On that day He was saying, "YOU are my Son, TODAY I have declared that to the whole human race by raising you from the dead!" And the next piece of that conversation is just amazing:

3. He had only to ask for all the peoples in every place of earth and they were given Him The Father said, "You're My Son. All I have is Yours! Just ask me and I will make all the peoples of the earth who are in every part of it your inheritance; all the kingdoms of this world will be Yours and you shall rule them!" Well, Jesus must have asked, because the Spirit goes on to say that:

4. one day He will smash the rebellious with an iron rod and dash them to pieces like a clay pot When He comes again, all the wicked of the earth will be destroyed. There will be no more tyrants, no more wicked leaders, no more evil regimes, and only those who love Him will be part of His glorious Kingdom on earth. And listen to what Jesus says to us. In **Rev. 2:26-27** Jesus says directly to us as His faithful followers, *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.* What Jesus gets, WE get, because we are joint heirs with Him. One day He will come and rule all the nations of earth and we will rule them with Him, sharing in all of His authority over the nations! God laughs because it is not the proud, boasting tyrants of the earth who will rule through all their scheming and planning. It is His beloved Son and those with Him who will rule forever, no matter what the news says!

So, in the last stanza of the Psalm, David makes the application. He says:

IV. Let The Leaders Of This World Be Warned (10-12) Listen, all you presidents and Kings! From President Obama and all the leaders of our country here, to Russia, to North Korea, to the King of Saudi Arabia, all those who lead the peoples of the earth. Here is God's message to you:

1. it is wise to humbly serve God with reverent fear instead of boastfully thinking that your own might and wisdom will produce for you a kingdom of your own making. As Nebuchadnezzar once declared, *He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings...*! You are in leadership only because God, because God's Son Jesus, has put you there. As Rom. 13 says, "You are God's servant to reward good and punish evil!" Fear Him and serve Him humbly! And:

2. the mark of that is declaring loyal submission to His Son *Kiss the Son!* "Embrace Him and kiss both cheeks in a sign of respect! Fall down before Him and declare your allegiance to Him as His follower and then do what He commands!" Why? Because:

3. those who refuse His Son will fall under God's wrath and perish Read the end of the book. See who wins. See who ends up in the lake of fire. See the pain that they experience as objects of His wrath. Instead, *Kiss the Son*, because:

4. those who take refuge in His Son from that wrath are blessed forever and ever.

Of course, that same warning is personal and applies to every human being. All our self-made plans and ambitions are vain. If we live for pleasure, if we live for material things or position, if we scheme and plot about how we're going to succeed in life apart from His control, God laughs at us. Jesus is King. One day we'll all face Him and all our pretensions will be stripped away. So *kiss the Son*; give your life to Jesus. If you refuse, you will fall under God's wrath and perish. But if you take refuge in Him, you will be blessed with Him forever.

Dave McFadden writes: A man once met Horace Greely, the famous newspaper editor, on the street and said, "Mr. Greely, I have stopped your paper." "Have you?" Mr. Greely said, "that's too bad," and went on his way. The next morn-

ing, Mr. Greely met the man again, and said, "I thought you had stopped the Tribune?" "So I did," was the reply. "Then there must be some mistake," said Mr. Greely, "for I just came from the office and the presses were running, the clerks were as busy as ever, the compositors were hard at work, and the business was going on as yesterday and the day before." "Oh," said the man, "I didn't mean I had stopped the entire newspaper. I meant that I had stopped my copy of it because I didn't like your editorials." [People] who rebel against God are like the man who proudly announced to Horace Greely that he had stopped his newspaper. They think that if they reject God's rule in their life that they will stop God's rule in the earth. But that's not so. Whether a person rebels against God's rule in his life or submits to God's rule in his life, God is going to do what He has declared. God has declared that one day, despite mankind's rebellion; Jesus Christ will reign upon the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! [From Dave McFadden's Sermon: The Psalm of the King of Kings] <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/sermon-illustration-stories-65940.asp>

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 8 - A Song Of Mankind's Privilege

Have you ever found yourself in a place where you were impressed with how big the universe is and how small you are? Maybe you've stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon and felt dwarfed by its vastness or on a high mountain peak where the world below you looked like miniature toys with ants crawling about. Maybe you've lain on the beach gazing at the ocean that seems to go on forever while giant waves crash on the beach with a thunderous voice or simply lain on your back looking up at the vastness of the stars on a clear night. It's in moments like these that Psalm 8 often comes to mind, particularly the third and fourth verses, *When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers...what is man that thou art mindful of him?* We often look at this familiar song of David as though it is intended to make us feel small, when in reality its purpose is exactly the opposite; it is actually a song about how tremendously privileged we are. So, if you are feeling small and unimportant and insignificant today, I hope that by the time we're done you'll be filled with joy as you see just how incredibly important you are to God. Now David begins his song with an expression of amazement (1-2). The root of that word *majestic* in the Hebrew carries the basic meaning of superiority. David is saying that:

I. The God We Serve, Jehovah, Is Completely Superior To Everything As a convention, LORD in all caps is always substituted in English translations for God's personal name, *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*, which the Jews considered too sacred to pronounce. "Oh Jehovah, our Master, the God whom we serve, how superior you are to everyone and everything else!" In Ps. 86:8 David prayed, *There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.* Jeremiah prayed, *There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might.* - 10:6. The God whom we love, worship and serve, our God, is absolutely superior to everything else that exists and David goes on in poetic fashion to declare a sampling of four of the things through which His greatness is displayed. First of all:

1. He has a magnificent reputation throughout the whole earth God Himself had promised David, *...I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth* - 2 Sam. 7:9. A person's name is more than just what they are called; it embodies their reputation, their character, their accomplishments, all that they are known to be. I have only to say *Judas Iscariot* or *Benedict Arnold* and their foul reputation as traitors comes to mind instantly, but if I say *Moses* or *Abraham Lincoln* immediately their glowing reputation as great emancipators is right there. Well, our God has a name, a great name, a superior name, a magnificent reputation that is known throughout the whole earth! In David's day it was known to the Egyptians and the Philistines and the Moabites and the Ammonites and all the other nations surrounding Israel for thousand miles; they knew the name of the Lord, the mighty God of Israel. But today it has spread round the very earth. Nearly one third of the people on the planet, 31% identify themselves as Christians. Every Sunday as morning comes the worship of God begins in the islands of the Pacific and as the earth turns, His praise starts up hour by hour from believers in Japan, Australia, China, SE Asia, Central Asia, India, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, then it rolls across North and South America and Alaska before it fades into dusk in the Pacific once more. For 24 solid hours the praise of our God circles the globe one day of every seven! And though there are still 3 billion unreached people who have no genuine opportunity to hear about Him, even so today there is not a single political nation on earth where He is not worshipped, not one! No one has a reputation like His in all the earth! Then in the end of verse 1, David mentions that:

2. He displays His grandeur in the heavens above Anywhere on earth, all a person needs do is look up to see the glory of our God! *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.* - Ps. 19:1. As great as all of that is, the God who created all of it must be so much greater still! Then in verse 2 David goes on to add that:

3. He does praiseworthy feats of strength through the smallest of children Jesus said the children fulfilled this verse the very day that He rode into Jerusalem and went into the Temple and they cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" so loudly that it mortified the chief priests and scribes [Mt. 21:15]! God delights in using the weakest things of the world, like small children, the elderly, the poor and the helpless to get glory to Himself. *Homer Rodeheaver* was the song leader and composer affiliated with Evangelist Billy Sunday. Once he participated in a crusade where a mentally retarded boy came to sing each night in the choir. "Joey was not very bright," said Rodeheaver, "but he never missed any of our meetings and wouldn't leave until he shook my hand. Sometimes I was rather embarrassed by the way he

constantly hovered around me, and I secretly wished he would discontinue the practice. Then one evening a man came with a warm handshake, saying, 'I want to thank you for being kind to my son Joey. He's not right mentally, but never has he enjoyed anything so much as singing in the choir. He worked hard during the day doing simple chores for people so he could contribute to the collection. Through his pleadings my wife and my five other children came to this evangelistic campaign and have now received Christ. Last night his 75-year-old grandfather, who has been an atheist all his life, was saved, and tonight his grandmother also came forward. Now our entire family is converted!'" Oh, what a great God we have, who displays His strength through the weakest of all! And as He does that:

4. He silences every enemy opposed to Him That was David's experience. ...*David spoke to the LORD the words of this song [Psalm 18] on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.* The bodies of every enemy of God and His people from Pharaoh to Nero, from Voltaire to Charles Darwin, from Hitler to Mao Tse Tung lie moldering in their tombs, even as the number of followers of Jesus Christ continues to increase exponentially across the globe. None can oppose Him! Our God is truly superior to anyone and anything on earth.

Now it is in this context that David goes back to think further about the heavens and his conclusion is that:

II. Mankind Seems Insignificant Amid The Greatness Of God's Creation (3-4) Have you ever done what David did? Have you ever considered:

1. the astonishing vastness of the heavens? Did you ever think about simply counting the stars? Well, one source says, *If you had perfect eyesight and traveled to completely dark skies in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, and there was no moon, you might be able to get to count up almost 9,000 stars. With a good pair of binoculars, that number jumps to about 200,000...A small telescope... will let you count up to 15 million stars. ...Astronomers estimate that [our galaxy,] the Milky Way contains up to 400 billion stars of various sizes and brightness. There are spiral galaxies out there with more than a trillion stars, and giant elliptical galaxies with 100 trillion stars. And there are tiny dwarf galaxies with a fraction of our number of stars. According to astronomers, there are probably more than 170 billion galaxies in the observable Universe... And so, if you multiply the number of stars in our galaxy by the number of galaxies in the Universe, you get approximately 10^{24} stars. That's a 1 followed by 24 zeros, 1 septillion stars.* [www.universetoday.com/102630/how-many-stars-are-there-in-the-universe] But the point is that however many there actually are, our God created them all, so:

2. how infinitely great God must be to have made these things so easily If the observable universe is that big, how big is God?! And if all of this was merely the work of His fingers, so to speak, if, in fact, *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host*, as David wrote in Ps. 33:6, if God merely spoke them all into existence with ease, then how infinitely great must God be! And when we stop to ponder a brilliant sunset, a tall mountain, a vast ocean, the infinite reaches of space:

3. human beings seem infinitesimally small by comparison and we are. Like a grain of sand on the endless beach or a drop of water in the vast ocean, we are such a small part of the whole so seemingly insignificant in the infinite vastness of all that God made. Yet David is NOT implying that we are nothing and should think of ourselves as insignificant little creatures; his meaning is the exact opposite:

4. it is an incredible wonder that God would give attention to us! We are such a tiny, minute part of God's creation, yet how infinitely important must we be, because amid all of this vastness, God's primary care is for us human beings! David muses, "What a wonder it is that...:

a. He thinks about the human race as a whole, that what God thinks about, what's on His mind, what he cares about is not all of that out there; it is the human race. We are why He actually MADE all of this in the first place; He made it as a habitation in which to place US! [Is. 45:18]. He fashioned it for us as an environment in which He could grow a huge number of sons and daughters whom He would bring to glory and share eternity with! But the even greater wonder is that:

b. He interacts with us as individual human beings The Hebrew is a parallelism; the second phrase intensifies the first, *the son of man that you [literally] visit him*. That the infinite God would stoop to interact with a tiny individual person, to hear him when he prays, to speak to him, to act on his behalf in his minuscule life, to rescue him in his miniature troubles, to do what He asks in prayer, THAT is an incredible wonder! Yes, we are incredibly insignificant in the midst of all that God has created:

III. Yet, David says, God Has Placed Tremendous Significance On Mankind Look at it. **(5-8)** Oh do you see that:

1. God has given us a marvelous place in His creation now in this present age. In the first place, when He created us:

a. He placed us only a rung beneath Himself in the orders of creation The Hebrew text literally says, *You have made him a little lower than God*. The Hebrew word is *elohim*, which is actually plural, *gods*, so the Greek translation and the New Testament have taken that as a reference to the angels which is why you see *heavenly beings* or

angels in English translations. You'll see why this is important in a moment, but David's point is that when God made man, He made him only a bit lower than Himself. We read in **Gen. 1:26-27**, *God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* The evolutionary thinking of our present generation denies that; it says we're just a small cog in the big process, that we're just the apex predator, the most evolved animal, but an animal none the less. Baloney! We are unique! We are like nothing else in the vastness of the universe because God made us like Himself! We are the only beings in existence that are made LIKE God. Angels, demons, animals and everything else are merely created things but we share the very image and essence of God, that's how exalted we are! Then David says that:

b. He crowned us with glory and honor The word *glory* literally means weight, heaviness. It means importance or significance. God made us the very things that matter most in all of the universe. It is not the universe that matters, not the plants and the trees and the animals. It is US! And the word *honor* literally means splendor, magnificence, great beauty. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are creatures of incredible complexity and amazing capacity as we'll see when we study Ps. 139. There are no other beings like us, anywhere. And to top it off, David says that God:

c. He gave us dominion over the entirety of His creation, and he itemizes, domestic animals, wild animals, birds, fish and marine animals. Of course, he got that from **Gen. 1:26 and 28**, *Then God said, "...let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ...And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."* We're in charge of the earth and everything on it and we're to rule it and to learn to control it to serve our purposes. Of course, we need to be good stewards of it, use it wisely and not waste the resources it contains, but nevertheless we are not here for IT; IT is here for us and we are instructed to make it serve our good purposes as we serve God. We are to explore, to discover and to wisely utilize all that God has put us in charge of, managing it all for our own good as human beings! What an awesome place God has given us! But wait, there's even more; look at the end of verse 6. God put ALL things under our feet! Now to find out what that means, turn with me to Hebrews 2:

2. our dominion over all things includes the world to come - Heb. 2:5-8a The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 and adds the comment that God meant literally EVERYTHING. In verse 5 his point is that God hasn't put the angels in charge of the world to come; He's put MAN in charge of it!

a. we will rule ALL of God's creation with Him forever The world to come, eternity, the new heavens and the new earth that God will make when He's done with this one, we saved human beings will rule all of it together with Him for all eternity! Listen to **Rev. 22:5**, *[His servants] ...will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and THEY will reign forever and ever.* Over what? Over everything else that God ever has or will create! There is nothing that will not be put under our feet, that will be outside of our control! That's how high a position God has given us! However, the writer of Hebrews goes on to say that there's a problem:

b. we do not yet see everything in subjection to us - Heb. 2:8b At present that's not how things are. We don't control everything. We are still the victims of earthquakes and mudslides and tornadoes and tsunamis. As Albert Barnes puts it, "A large part of the animal creation rebels, and is brought into subjection only with difficulty. The elements are not entirely under his control; the tempest and the ocean rage; the pestilence conveys death through city and hamlet; the dominion of man is a broken dominion." It would seem that God has not made good on His promise, that man's fall in the garden and the curse that came upon the whole of the material creation has circumvented the promise of God! How can we believe that we will rule and reign over it all in the world to come? No, we don't see it right now, BUT we do see something:

c. we see this promise fulfilled now in JESUS - Heb. 2:9 We see Jesus and we see what God did with Him!

(1) He was made for a little while lower than the angels in His incarnation. He became one of us and was made to share in our struggles in this fallen world, subject to hunger and thirst and pain, to live 33 years in the broken dominion of this world, though He was the ruler of all! But:

(2) He is now crowned with glory and honor at God's right hand God raised Him from the dead and highly exalted Him and gave Him the Name that is above every Name, and one day every knee is going to bow to that Name! As Stephen was dying under a hail of stones, he looked up and God opened the veil to the spiritual world and *...he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God*, ready to welcome him in! No, we don't see the high, exalted position that God has given us yet in all its fullness. We still suffer as victims, many times, of the creation, but we see what God has done with Jesus who tasted even the suffering of death in our place in order to save us! And if we see Jesus so highly exalted:

(3) His death united us with Him and secures our future - Heb. 2:10-11 Did you hear that? We are ONE with Him! We are brothers and sisters of Jesus, sons and daughters of the Father just as He is! What happens to Him happens to us. He is seated in the heavenlies and we are already seated there with Him. And one day when our bodies catch up with the reality of our spirits at His coming, we will reign with Him forever and ever. It is guaranteed!

Now we can go back to Psalm 8 and understand why David exclaimed in closing once again that:

IV. The Majesty of God Is Simply Overwhelming (9) O God, how great you are! There are simply no words to express how great, how superior, how far beyond anything we can imagine You are! We can't begin to comprehend it; we can only fall on our faces and adore You! *Dr. Duane Gish tells about a remarkable man named Matthew Maury who was "in charge of the Depot of Charts and Instruments of the Hydrographic Office of the Navy from 1841 to 1861. He was a Christian who loved the Word of God. One day, while reading Psalm 8, he was struck by an important truth in the eighth verse. There he read that God had given man dominion over 'the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.' He immediately saw the great practical significance of that verse, recognizing that there must be currents of water in the oceans just as there are in the atmosphere according to Ecc. 1:6 [which mentions "the circuits of the winds"]]. With confidence in the accuracy of the Bible, Maury determined to discover the paths in the seas and the wind circuits, utilizing the charts and log books he had at his disposal. He did discover and plot many of the wind circuits and currents we know today, such as the Gulf Current (which is 40 miles wide and 2,000 feet deep that comes out of the Gulf of Mexico into the Atlantic), the Japanese Current, the California Current, and others. Utilizing this information, the sailing ships of his day plied these currents and wind circuits, reducing by as much as three weeks the time required to cross the oceans. On a monument erected by the state of Virginia to his memory is found a plaque that reads: 'Matthew Fontaine Maury, Pathfinder of the Seas, the genius who first snatched from the oceans and atmosphere the secret of their laws. His inspiration, Holy Writ, Psalms 8 and 107 verses 8, 23 and 24, Ecclesiastes 1:6' Was he a genius? No, he was just a Bible-believing Christian who trusted the inerrancy of the Word of God."* [Days of Praise, Oct. 6, 1993.] And the same book that says there are paths in the seas, says God has put everything in the universe under our control and we will rule it with Him forever! Don't you see Jesus high and lifted up? God means what He says. Trust Him.

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 19 - A Song Of God's Glory In His Creation And His Word

The first verse of Psalm 19 comes readily to mind for all of us. The last week of August, Bob Gualtieri and I were fishing in his boat on a little lake in the Poconos. That evening an immense cloud formation slowly crept over us from behind, shading us and appearing to grow wider as it stretched backward from the horizon. But in front of us it loomed upward into huge piles of clouds brilliantly radiating the light of the setting sun. I just had to stop and stare and take a picture. Why? Because *The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims His handiwork!* At first there were several of these piles but gradually they pushed together into one gigantic shining pillar which glowed until the light began to fade. But even then, the giant V of the clouds trailing back to the horizon was visible in the dusk. As I got in my car and drove the 2 ½ hours home, that giant V was visible the entire way; I could still see it stretching backward in the night sky, even in complete darkness and instead of shrinking it seemed to grow bigger. Every time I looked up, I just kept talking to the Lord saying, "Wow Lord, that's really neat; how great You are!" That's the kind of awe that David is expressing in poetic fashion in the first half of this Psalm. He is saying that:

I. The Glory Of God Is Universally Declared Through His Creation in verses (1-6). But before we actually look there, I'd like us to turn to **Rom. 1:19-20** and review what Paul said about this subject that we usually call *general revelation*, that is, how God reveals Himself universally to mankind through the things He created. In other words, from the very beginning of the human race:

1. the things God made continually reveal two things about Him to everyone everywhere in the world. Anyone can look at the heavens, the mountains, the oceans, at living creatures, at the vast array of the things that exist in nature and see that:

a. there has to be a Creator who designed them You don't find a camera or an iPhone lying on the ground and think, "I wonder how that evolved?" You KNOW somebody made it. It is too complex, too intricate, too detailed to have happened by chance. Everything about it screams, "Somebody made me!" Paul and David are saying, *That's what the world around us does!* The more we understand about the wondrous intricacies of the many plants and animals on earth, their instincts and capabilities to survive, about the cycles of the natural world that never vary and the amazing complexity and capabilities within the human body, the more it becomes evident that Somebody designed this and made it intentionally! Mankind has been looking at the stars for millennia and tracking their movements but instead of saying, "Somebody made all of those and put them exactly where they are!", people worshipped them and tried to use them to predict the future. Yet everything about the heavens above and the earth we live on shouts, there is a CREATOR, and if He made all of this:

b. this Creator must have continuing unlimited power If He made it, He can't be part of it. He's got to be above and beyond it, greater than it, so there's no use worshipping what He made. The God who made it must have a na-

ture unlike any other being, a Divine nature. Plus, if He made all this, the stars, the sun, the earth, the mountains, the seas, the complexity of living things, He must have infinite power. He must be more powerful than any force He has created. Indeed, He must be omnipotent. Any human being anywhere on earth, living in any era of time, can simply look at the world around them and know that there is a God who created it and them and if there is, then HE ought to be known and worshipped!

That's what David is saying to us in the first half of Psalm 19, only in a much more poetic way. He says **(1)**:

2. the vastness of the heavens above us declares His greatness, just as it did to me that August night. Last week we talked about the vast number of stars, perhaps 1 septillion of them. But now let's think about the expanse of that we call sky that surrounds us. It is actually a belt of gases composed of just the right mixture of oxygen and nitrogen to sustain life and there are actually 5 layers of it. The one we see most clearly, where our weather takes place, is called the troposphere. It's about 7 miles or 30,000 feet thick. Jet planes often fly just above it in the stratosphere which extends outward another 25 miles or so. But it's cold out there and the oxygen is very thin and the further out you go, the thinner and colder it is until you hit space. Our sky acts like a blanket that holds in the heat of the sun and evens it out so that life can be sustained. Without it earth would be like the moon which has no atmosphere. On the dark side away from the sun, the temperature drops to minus 243° F, but on the lighted side the sun warms it to plus 253° F! We'd alternately boil and freeze solid! Plus, out there about 9 miles in the lower stratosphere is a band we call the ozone layer because of its high concentration of ozone and it's important because it absorbs most of the sun's ultraviolet radiation. You know what that does if you've ever lain on the beach too long without lotion to block it. If there were no ozone layer, all living things on dry land would be severely scorched by UV radiation. And yet just enough gets through to form needed Vitamin D in animals and humans! How could anyone think this great expanse above us is just an accident, just a chance result of a "big bang" that threw off a little particle called earth! I can't help but think of the words of the song we sing by Lincoln Brewster:

*You paint the night, You count the stars And You call them by name.
The skies proclaim, God, You reign
Your glory shines, You teach the sun When to bring a new day,
Creation sings, God, You reign!*

Listen, *our God made the heavens!* He controls them. Then David says **(2)**:

3. the constancy of the perpetual day/night cycle gushes out His wisdom like a bubbling spring. Did you know that the moon only rotates one time every 27 of earth's days so on any given spot on the moon it is actually light for 13 ½ earth days and then dark for 13 ½ days? Now what if earth was like that? What wisdom must have designed the earth to rotate every 24 hours to get just the right amount of refreshing of heat by the sun, but also the necessary relief from its heat. At the same time, while we humans and animals are using up and consuming the oxygen in the atmosphere by our breathing or respiration and filling it with CO₂, all the green plants of the earth are busy all day long taking in the CO₂ we breathe out and releasing more oxygen into the air through the process of photosynthesis! Only at night do they consume oxygen like we do so our atmosphere essentially never changes and is never depleted! Could that "just happen"? No, a Designer with infinite wisdom created it that way! Then, skipping ahead for a moment, David tells us that:

4. the daily circuit of the sun shows His hand (4b-6) Have you ever been out in the woods at dawn or somewhere in nature and watched the sun come up? I can remember many a time sitting in tree stand or leaning against a tree and watching the light of the sun crawl across the forest toward me. As soon as it visibly breaks above your horizon and touches your body, you can feel it. The cold chill of night begins to evaporate. David says:

a. at dawn it beams like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber after his wedding night with his new wife. It's radiant, it's glowing, it fills us with joy as we feel its warmth and see its brightness after the long night. And then he says:

b. it races across to the horizon with joy like a great man running a race, never slowing down, never stopping, never resting, just running constantly on pace until it reaches the finish line on the other side. Now David didn't know that the real constancy is in the fact that the earth rotates consistently, but we do. Using atomic clocks tells us that the earth's rotation is slowing slightly. The actual length of one complete day is 1.7 milliseconds longer than it was 100 years ago. Think about it. That's 17 ten-thousandths of a second difference in a century! Every single day is exactly the same, absolutely constant! Every day the sun rises and sets exactly on schedule and that's the hand of God. And in its course David says:

c. it traverses the whole earth and nothing escapes its heat Every single place on earth gets the sun's light and heat every day as the earth spins. Nothing escapes it and nothing is left out. And just think, that sun which you look at every single day is 93 million miles away! If it were any closer, we'd fry and any farther, we'd freeze. Our earth actually rotates around the sun every 365 ¼ days in an elliptical fashion which is what gives us our seasons, warmer and colder, or wetter and dryer if you're near the middle or the equator. But our orbit never changes; we never

get too far out so that we freeze or too close so that we boil. It's an ingenious design that shouts, "God made me!" Now go back to vs. (3). You see:

5. this declaration of the glory of God **has no words but it is universally understood** It is not verbal. Yet it is understood by people who speak any language anywhere. It shouts loudly to them without ever saying a word. In fact, (4a):

6. this declaration goes forth to the entire earth There is no place on the planet that it is not heard. There is no human being who cannot see and observe it. We are without excuse! The Apostle Paul emphasized how extensive this is by referring to verse 4 and quoting it in **Rom. 10:18**, essentially saying, *But what about the Jews? Have they heard God's Word? Yes, for [just like the testimony of the heavens] it has gone wherever they are; the Good News has been told to the ends of the earth. [TLB]* Just as surely as the Gospel WILL BE proclaimed to ALL the earth, to its very ends, even so the testimony of creation has already gone there! I'm reminded of a song I hear on Christian radio by the group 33 Miles whose chorus says:

There is a God; this is the proof, That all around the evidence is speaking the truth. From the center of my soul to the edge of the universe, Creation is crying out, believe it or not, There is a God! Hallelujah!

But creation is not the only thing crying out. In the next portion of the Psalm David goes on to exhort us that:

II. The Glory Of God Is Specifically Revealed Through His Word in vs. (7-11). Creation is a tremendous book to read, but it is not enough! God has seen fit to give us an even greater, clearer revelation of Himself, of who He is and what He is like, through His Word, which we have preserved forever in written form in our Bible. And just as we so often fail to see the glory of God when we look at nature, likewise we believers so often fail to realize:

1. the benefits of having the Word of God David spells them out for us in vs. (7-9). Notice the six synonyms that David uses in the poetry of his song to describe the word of our God using His proper name. *The law of Jehovah, the testimony of Jehovah, the precepts of Jehovah, the commandment of Jehovah, the rules of Jehovah, even the fear of Jehovah* - all of these point to the same thing, that Jehovah Himself has actually SPOKEN to us. He has given us His WORDS to explain to us who He is and what He wants of us. What an amazing privilege it is just to have that! So much of the human race still doesn't! In the first place, the Scriptures have yet to be translated into more than 2,000 of the world's languages which are spoken by some 300 million people and secondly, for billions more, it may be in their language but they don't have a copy and couldn't find one if they knew about it! How outrageously privileged we are. David extols six of the benefits of knowing God's Word. First, he says:

a. it is complete. It is whole, perfect. It contains everything that we need to know from God and so as we hear it, **it revives our souls.** It touches the innermost parts of our being and restores us, rejuvenates us; it fills us with life like a river of living water. That's why we need to drink of it constantly. Then at the end of verse 7 he adds:

b. it is dependable. It is sure, certain; it can be counted on. It never changes and therefore, as we, even the most simple and uneducated of us, read and listen to it, **it makes us wise.** It helps us to know what God wants us to know and to think like God thinks. I remember being with simple Yenadi believers in India last summer and watching so many of them carefully cling to Bibles that they can't even read. Yet even as we told them stories and taught them lessons they had never heard, they were being made wise; they were learning things that were completely at variance to what they had been taught. And the same is true of us as we read and listen. Thirdly, David says in verse 8 that:

c. it is right. Literally *straight*. So much in this world is crooked, bent, twisted and corrupted. So many things we trust or come to rely on fail us. But God's word is straightforward and right on correct and always will be. And so, **it gives joy to our hearts.** It fills us with inexpressible joy inside to know what is really true and right amid the conflicting voices that are always shouting in our ears and demanding we believe them! Next in that verse, David says:

d. it is pure, in the sense of being purged of every tinge of evil. Everything we experience here on earth is mixed. Even the holiest of people, the purest of intentions, the most satisfying of relationships, evil creeps into them all, even if only slightly. But the Word of God is absolutely pure and without blemish, just like Jesus, and because of that it *enlightens our eyes*; **it gives us discernment.** It helps us to see and know what is really true in every area of our lives. Because of it we are able to tell when evil has crept in, even the slightest bit. And in verse 9 David adds that:

e. it is flawless. It is clean like silver that has been refined in the fire until there is no flaw. We just celebrated the anniversary of 9/11. The World Trade Center towers had an internal flaw that the terrorists exploited. Their planes full of fuel created huge fires and intense heat that was too much for the steel structure of the buildings and in time they collapsed. But the Word of God has no flaw; **it will stand forever** and ever. The heavens and the earth, the most stable things we know, may pass away but My Word, Jesus said, will NEVER pass away. It will be there for eternity. And lastly David says:

f. it is true and completely righteous God's Word shares the same character that God Himself has. Whatever He says is true, stable and trustworthy, just like Him. It will come to pass. And whatever He says is righteous, holy and without any hint of evil, no matter how much people may accuse it of, just like Him. No wonder that in verses (10-11) David goes on to extoll:

2. the surpassing value of the Word of God God's word is more precious, it has more value, than the finest of gold in the greatest of quantity. It is sweeter than the sweetest taste known to man, than honey from the comb. We are better off to have the Word of God than anything earth has to offer. Why? Because its warning is a precious preservative that keeps us from evil and in keeping of it there is great reward, reward that is eternal! So, the issue now is:

III. How We Should Respond To God's Revelation given to us through creation and especially through His Word. David responded by making three requests of God in verses (12-14) and they should be ours as well. First of all:

1. we should ask to be forgiven and cleansed of faults we aren't aware of (12) Nobody sees all their own faults. We all have blind spots, sometimes huge blind spots that may even be glaring to others, but we can't see them. They're hidden to us and some may be hidden to others also. But, like David, we should want to be pure and clean. So we ask God to reveal to us our faults, to forgive us of them and to cleanse us from them, like the song we sing: *Purify my heart, let me be as gold and precious silver. Purify my heart, let me be as gold, pure gold. Refiner's fire, my heart's one desire is to be holy, set apart for you, Lord. I choose to be holy, set apart for you, my master, ready to do your will.* When we realize who God is, it gives us this deep desire to be holy. Then David reminds us that:

2. we should ask for God's power to keep us from intentionally sinning (13) Presumptuous sins, you know, the ones that we KNOW are wrong but we're tempted to choose them anyway and give them control in our lives. We need God's power to keep us, to protect us, to enable us to resist and say, "NO!" so that we remain innocent of obvious transgressions. And lastly David shows us that:

3. we should ask that our words and our thoughts be pleasing to Him (14) Not merely our deeds, the things we do, but our words, the things we say - and you know how difficult that is! James says that no one can tame the tongue! But God can! He can empower us to talk only in ways that please Him and, what's even harder still, to think in ways that please him, to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, because He is our Rock, our hiding place, our tower of strength, the one who protects us, AND our Redeemer, the one who freed us from our sins by His own blood!

Thomas Aquinas was a medieval theologian who created one of the greatest intellectual achievements of Western civilization. His massive work is called Summa Theologica; it contains 38 treatises, 3,000 articles, and 10,000 objections. In it, Thomas tried to gather into one coherent whole all of truth, including anthropology, science, ethics, psychology, political theory, and theology, all under God. But on December 6, 1273, Thomas abruptly stopped his work. At the convent of Naples in the Chapel of Saint Nicholas after mass Thomas lingered and was seen in prayer with tears before an icon of the crucified Christ. Christ said to Thomas, "You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward would you have for your labor?" Thomas responded, "Nothing but you, Lord." After this exchange something marvelous happened. Thomas never spoke of it or wrote it down, but because of what he saw in that vision, he abandoned his routine and refused to dictate to his associate, Reginald. When Reginald begged him to get back to work, Thomas replied: "Reginald, I cannot, because all that I have written seems like so much straw to me." He had caught a glimpse of the glory of God and suddenly he knew that all his efforts to describe God fell so far short that he decided never to write again. [Leadership, Spring 1993. Page 48.] In the vastness of the heavens above we have but a glimpse of the glory of God; in the Book in our hands we have the unfolding depths of His glory. If we really look and see God for who He is, we will live the remainder of our lives in true humble awe of Him.

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 22 - A Song Of The Cross

For many of the Psalms that David wrote, we can at least try to find an occasion in his life when he might have written it. This Psalm is written in the first person; it is the emotional record of the suffering and deliverance of a single individual, but there is no occasion in David's life, or that of any other Biblical author, where the things written here happened, yet all of them happened, down to the most minute detail, in the suffering of our Lord Jesus on the cross, so it appears that the Holy Spirit gave these words to David specifically to unfold to us the suffering of the cross a full thousand years ahead of time. Charles Spurgeon said, *It is the photograph of our Lord's saddest hours, the record of his dying words, the lachrymatory of his last tears, the memorial of his expiring joys. David and his afflictions may be here in a very modified sense, but, as the star is concealed by the light of the sun, he who sees Jesus will probably neither see nor care to see David. Before us we have a description both of the darkness and of the glory of the cross, the sufferings of Christ and the glory which shall follow. Oh for grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this psalm.* Martin Luther said, *This is a kind of gem among the Psalms, and is peculiarly excellent and remarkable. It contains those deep, sublime, and heavy sufferings of Christ, when agonizing in the midst of the terrors and pangs of divine wrath and*

death, which surpass all human thought and comprehension. I know not whether any Psalm throughout the whole book contains matter more weighty, or from which the hearts of the godly can so truly perceive those sighs and groans, inexpressible by man, which their Lord and Head, Jesus Christ, uttered when conflicting for us in the midst of death, and in the midst of the pains and terrors of hell. Wherefore this Psalm ought to be most highly prized by all who have any acquaintance with temptations of faith and spiritual conflicts. [Spurgeon: Treasury of David] And so with reverent hearts, let's enter this holy ground together and see in the first half of the Psalm:

I. The Suffering Which Jesus Endured On The Cross (1-21a) It begins with that awful cry which we immediately recognize: **(1a)**. *About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying [these very words], "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - Mt. 27:46.* Of course, by doing so, He was telling every Jewish person standing by that He was at that moment fulfilling Psalm 22; they would instantly recognize it. But the cry was more than a quotation; it was real. When we examine the sufferings of Christ on the cross, this Psalm tells us that they came from two sources. The first one we don't usually think about:

1. He suffered because of God the Father In order for Christ to take our place and bear our sins in His body on that tree, for the first time in all of eternity it was necessary for the Father to separate Himself from the Son. Now I don't begin to pretend to understand how that is even possible, but from the viewpoint of Christ hanging there that day:

a. the Father forsook Him, abandoned Him, left Him alone to endure the suffering. This is a feeling that we might have when we are in extreme pain and anguish, yet for us it is not true. God has said, *I will never leave you nor forsake you!* Nothing in all creation can separate us from Christ, but in His case that day it was actually true. The Father somehow separated His very essence from that of Christ so that He could become a sacrifice for our sins. And then to experience the very wrath of God against our sins, to feel the agony of eternal hell heaped upon Him there all at once, what an awful thing that must have been for Christ to endure! No words can tell it! But what made it worse, the Father:

b. He seemed not to answer His cries (1b-2) We, of course, do not have all the words, thoughts and prayers of Jesus recorded for us as He went through that awful Thursday night arrest and Friday trial leading up to the cross itself, nor all His thoughts as He hung there for six full hours, but His prayer in Gethsemane gives us a hint, *Father, if it be possible, take this cup from me...* And it seems from the Psalm as if those thoughts and prayers continued silently through the whole awful process. "Father, why won't you hear me, why won't You answer me?" Surely, we know a tiny bit of the pain of that kind of praying in emotional agony and not sensing any answer. But the Father could not answer! Of course:

c. this was uncharacteristic of God The Psalm points out that this:

(1) it was not how God treated His faithful people in the past (3-5) "So why won't you do it for me?" The record is overflowing with God hearing the cries of His people and doing great and mighty things. And when we suffer and cry out to God, we often wonder that same thing: "Why won't God hear, why won't He answer me as He did them?" And on top of that:

(2) it was not how God had treated Him all His life (9-11) From Mary's womb Jesus had known and trusted the Father. At 12 He had been about His Father's business in the Temple. All of His life on earth as He was walking in our shoes, God had answered Him. He prayed at Lazarus' tomb, *I know You always hear me...* But not this time! Suddenly God seemed to be gone, absent, to have turned a deaf ear and that was so unlike Him! That is part of the pain of our suffering when God does not take it away and it was a real part of Jesus' suffering. It feels like God whom we have known and relied on doesn't care anymore, that He has abandoned us to our pain and refuses to help. Oh, Jesus suffered because of the Father, but He also:

2. He suffered the cruelty of human beings You simply cannot miss how specifically these next verses predict exactly what happened to Jesus on the cross and the Gospel writers certainly didn't miss it; in fact, they repeatedly claimed that David was talking directly in prophecy about Jesus. First of all:

a. a crowd mocked Him while He suffered (6-8,12-13) And that's exactly what we read in **Mt. 27:39-43**, *...those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"* They actually shouted the very words of verse 8 at Him, fulfilling the prophecy without even recognizing it! I doubt you've ever had a crowd of people surrounding you, screaming at you, mocking you, deriding you, calling you names and also, crying out for your death, while you are suffering and helpless to do anything about it. But some of our brothers and sisters down through history have known what that's like and some today in other lands do still. An American-Iranian pastor, Saeed Abidini, remains in Evan prison in Iran today along with captured ISIS fighters who proclaim they will kill him. Pray for him! Brothers like this would testify that it's an awful thing to have a mob cry for your blood, yet Jesus endured it for us. And, of course:

b. He endured tremendous physical agony (14-17) What else could the person in this Psalm be describing but the agony of being crucified, a torture that was unknown in Israel until the Romans took charge a millennium later. Jesus endured:

(1) the strain of being suspended, hanging in the air by His hands, His body stretched until every bone showed and ached like it was out of joint, his heart beating at first rapidly but then more and more faintly until it felt like He was having a heart attack. And then hanging there in the sun, laboring to breathe by pulling himself upward to gasp in every breath, came:

(2) the awful thirst, His mouth became so dry that His tongue stuck to the roof of it. That's why John records, *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. - Jn. 19:28-29.* It was not an act; He was incredibly thirsty after 6 hours of hanging there after the long night of suffering before, but that very thirst is written and pictured here in the Psalm for us, and look how specifically it mentions:

(3) the piercing of His hands and feet - Lk. 23:33 simply says, *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him...* But anyone reading knew that meant driving an iron spike through each wrist into the wood of the cross and another through both ankles, before hanging Him upright. The pain of that is simply unimaginable. Crucifixion is indeed among the cruelest methods of torture that mankind has ever invented! But then notice two more very specific things:

c. He was tortured by Gentiles (16a) He's been characterizing the menacing crowd as wild bulls encircling him and as lions roaring at him, but now He switches the metaphor to a pack of wild dogs surrounding and harrying Him. In fact, the term *dogs* became by Jesus' day a derogatory term by which pious Jews often referred to those who were pagan Gentiles. In the end it was not the Jewish leaders, but Roman soldiers who nailed Him to the cross, and it was they **who gambled for His clothes (18)** *When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. Let's not tear it, they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did. - Jn. 19:23-24.* How specific that was; the soldiers both divided His clothes and cast lots for His robe! Yet how much it must have hurt to see how little they cared about what they were doing. He had nothing but his clothing and even that was taken away mercilessly as He hung there dying. And in the end:

3. He pled with God to deliver His spirit (19-21a) Still He cried out to God for His soul, His precious life. What can that mean but this, *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. - Lk. 23:46* He died committing His precious spirit into God's care, despite the horror of the cross.

What awful, indescribable suffering Jesus endured for us on the cross! That's the half of the Psalm we usually focus on, but the real point of it is the second half, where we learn that:

II. God Answered The Cry Of Jesus In His Suffering I love verse (24). The Father DID care; He did not cease and give up all relationship with His Son and consider Him a thing abhorrent when He was made sin for us. He DID NOT hide His face from Him. I'm sad that Stuart Hamblen in that beautiful hymn we sing, "How Deep The Father's Love For Us", penned the line, "the Father turns His face away". I'm sure he meant that the Father turned away in pain, but He did not! He watched the whole thing face forward with eyes open! He watched His Son, His only Son whom He loved, suffering at His own hand, in every moment of His passion with broken heart and when it was all finished, He DID answer His Son's cries!

1. He answered by raising Him from the dead! Paul said, *When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead! - Acts 13:29-30.* All along God had another plan, as Jesus well knew. Look with me at that other great Old Testament prediction of the cross, **Is. 53:10-11.** 750 years before it came to pass, God declared clearly that all the suffering was to accomplish the saving and that after the death would come life, not only for Jesus Himself, but for the many who would be made righteous by trusting in Him. That's us, dear friends! God revealed that to David and that's why in the Psalm there is this sudden change in the middle of verse 21 (**21b-23, 25-26**). Do you see that:

2. this is a source of un-ending praise for all of us God did the most amazing thing that no one could have imagined. Instead of rescuing Jesus *from* death, He rescued Jesus *through* death and raised Him to life again victorious and in that miracle, He saved us! Dr. S.M. Lockridge put it like this in his powerful sermon "That's My King" that you can hear on YouTube: *The Pharisees couldn't stand him, but they couldn't stop Him. Herod couldn't kill him; Pilate couldn't find fault with Him. Death couldn't handle Him, and the grave couldn't hold Him. That's my King! I wonder, do you know him?* [<http://youtu.be/NXbGxt7-Occ>] I wish I could preach like he does and I wish that you could respond like his congregation does, "Amen" after every phrase, and it goes on like that for nearly an hour! That's how excited we

ought to be about what God did for us in answering Jesus and raising Him from the dead and taking Him up to heaven and seating Him at His right hand and giving Him all rule and power and authority! Hallelujah! But that's not all, look at this:

3. the ultimate result will be the salvation of all peoples and the rule of Christ over the nations (27-28) There's God's theme from Genesis to Revelation: all the peoples of the earth will worship You! Because of the suffering Jesus endured on the cross, all the families of the earth will be blessed as God promised Abraham, the Gospel of God's Kingdom ruled by Jesus will be preached to all the peoples on earth and some from every people will believe and come and worship the King. And ultimately one day, Jesus will come back and take His rightful place openly and rule all the nations of the earth in a great Millennial reign that will stretch on through eternity in new heavens and a new earth, all because He endured the agony of the cross! The world is changed forever and our future is secure because the Father heard His cry and answered far beyond what we could ask or think! So, what should be:

III. Our Response To The Great Suffering Of Jesus On The Cross (29-31) First:

1. all should worship and serve the Lord, even in the greatest of suffering From the most prosperous to the one who is suffering the greatest agony, who is dying and can't keep himself alive, ALL should worship and serve Him. Whether life is going smoothly for us or whether we're going through agony of the soul in life as Jesus was, we should never think that God has forsaken us, that He has stopped hearing us! He has a plan and will answer us in ways that we could not dream. So let us always, always worship and adore Him, no matter what the enemy may throw at us. You see, through the agony of the Cross:

2. what Jesus has accomplished is nothing less than our salvation, His righteousness was given to us that day. **Is. 53:11** says, *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.* By the suffering of the cross, Jesus made everyone who will believe in Him for all generations to come righteous. *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* - 2 Cor. 5:21. That is the Good News, the Gospel, and because of what He did:

3. each generation must be told what Jesus has done so they can serve Him We must tell the next generation and they must tell the next generation who are yet unborn so that down through history until Jesus comes, He may always have a people on earth for His glory to worship and serve Him! Hallelujah!

*Late one afternoon a Wycliffe translator walked along a sandy street of a small African town. Along the way, he was visiting with friends when he noticed sheep being grilled over open fires lining the street. Many of his neighbors bought these same sheep to be slaughtered and sacrificed; then the carcasses were attached to wooden frames, buried in the sand, and cooked. Seeing those sheep stretched out on wooden frames reminded him of Jesus who, with His arms stretched out on the cross, was crucified. He remembered that many of the people in this language community who were sacrificing sheep believed that at death they could mount a sheep to cross over the flames of hell. If the sheep they were riding was strong, the flames would singe the sheep but the one riding would arrive safely on the other side of the flames. Having this thought in mind, the translator entered the compound of a friend to find him drinking tea with his family. Knowing that the translator had just passed through the market and assuming he had been looking for one to sacrifice like everyone else, the head of the house asked the translator, "Is the sheep you bought strong?" The translator replied, "I didn't buy a sheep in the market, but I do have a Sheep, and He is strong. The Bible says that in the past the high priest of Israel sacrificed a sheep once a year to appease God for the sins of the people. When God came to earth in the person of Jesus, He died on a cross as a sacrifice to pay for our sins. That sacrifice was made one time and for all people. The Bible calls Jesus the Lamb of God and He will carry us safely past the flames of hell to heaven. Yes, my Sheep is strong and His name is Jesus!" [The Lamb of God - Wycliffe Bible Translators - Feb 07] Everyone needs to be told about Jesus! The whole world; that's our task. The writer of Hebrews sums up the point of Psalm 22 very nicely: *Therefore... let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.* - Heb. 12:1-3.*

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 23 - A Song Of God's Care

There is no Psalm more familiar and more beloved than the twenty third Psalm. The well-known 19th century preacher Henry Ward Beecher described this Psalm so eloquently: *It has charmed more griefs to rest than all the philosophy of the world. It has remanded to their dungeon more felon thoughts, more black doubts, more thieving sorrows, than there are sands on the seashore. It has comforted the noble host of the poor. It has sung courage to the army of the disappointed. It has poured balm and consolation into the heart of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their pinching griefs, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them; ghastly hospitals have been illuminated; it has visited the prisoner, and broken his chains, and, like Peter's angel, led him forth in imagination, and sung him*

back to his home again. It has made the dying Christian slave freer than his master, and consoled those whom, dying, he left behind mourning, not so much that he was gone, as because they were left behind, and could not go too. Nor is its work done. It will go singing to your children and my children, and to their children, through all the generations of time; nor will it fold its wings till the last pilgrim is safe, and time ended; and then it shall fly back to the bosom of God, whence it issued, and sound on, mingled with all those sounds of celestial joy which make heaven musical forever. [Henry Ward Beecher, in "Life Thoughts."] David penned only six short verses, but in them he pictured who God is to us using two very powerful images that spoke deeply to the people of his day and, evidently, continue to speak deeply to many peoples in lands and cultures all over the globe. And they will speak deeply to us if we will take the time to allow our modernized, urbanized minds to comprehend them. In the first three verses of the Psalm, David begins by saying that:

I. God Himself Is My Great Shepherd Who Placed Me In His Flock (1-3) *The LORD, Jehovah, the God of creation, the God who redeemed Israel from Egypt, HE is my shepherd.* Of course, you know that David himself was a shepherd. He tended his father Jesse's flock of sheep throughout the hill country of Judah all the years of his boyhood. To him the image of a shepherd was not a poetic notion he chose from a book; it came from a life that he lived! We have no clue which time of his life this Psalm comes from, but it is not too much of a stretch to imagine him sitting on a hillside somewhere near Bethlehem watching the sheep grazing and thinking, "I am like those sheep and God is like me. What I do for them, He does for me; the way I care for them, He cares for me. He is MY Shepherd!" And, indeed, God WANTS us to think of Him like that. The prophet Isaiah said, *He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.* - 40:11. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, all of them used the picture of God as the Shepherd of His people. But then Jesus came and look what He said in **Jn. 10:14**. JESUS wants us to think of Him as our Shepherd; His teaching in this whole chapter is based on that image. Peter calls Him our CHIEF Shepherd, emphasizing His authority, the writer of Hebrews calls Him our GREAT Shepherd, emphasizing His power, but here Jesus says He is our GOOD Shepherd. And because He is a Good Shepherd (**1b**), *I shall not want.* That is:

1. I know that I will lack nothing Out of his own experience, Philip Keller wrote a wonderful little book called *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*. On this phrase he writes: *When all is said and done the welfare of any flock is entirely dependent upon the management afforded them by their owner. The tenant sheepman on the farm next to my first ranch was the most indifferent manager I had ever met. He was not concerned about the condition of his sheep. His land was neglected. He gave little or no time to his flock, letting them pretty well forage for themselves as best they could, both summer and winter. They fell prey to dogs, cougars and rustlers. Every year these poor creatures were forced to gnaw away at bare brown fields and impoverished pastures. Every winter there was a shortage of nourishing hay and wholesome grain to feed the hungry ewes. Shelter to safeguard and protect the suffering sheep from storms and blizzards was scanty and inadequate. They had only polluted, muddy water to drink. There had been a lack of salt and other trace minerals needed to offset their sickly pastures. In their thin, weak and diseased condition these poor sheep were a pathetic sight. In my mind's eye I can still see them standing at the fence, huddled sadly in little knots, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich pastures on the other side. To all their distress, the heartless, selfish owner seemed utterly callous and indifferent. He simply did not care. What if his sheep did WANT green grass; fresh water; shade; safety or shelter from the storms? What if they did WANT relief from wounds, bruises, disease and parasites? He ignored their needs -- he couldn't care less. Why should he -- they were just sheep -- fit only for the slaughter-house. I have become increasingly aware of one thing ... It is ... the Master in people's lives who makes the difference in their destiny.* Jesus is not like that man; Jesus is a GOOD shepherd, one who cares so deeply about His sheep that He sees that we lack nothing that we need. In **Jn. 10:10** He makes His purpose plain. He came that we sheep might have life and have it abundantly, that is, have a life that is beyond mere existence, one that overflows with all the fruits of His goodness! Now a word of caution: a good shepherd does not give his sheep everything they want. Sheep are not too smart. They want to go places that aren't safe. They want to eat things that will kill them or sometimes gorge so much that they bloat and can't get up. They want to follow their noses and wander off on their own way and get into all kinds of trouble and danger. Doesn't that sound like us? So, because He is a GOOD Shepherd, God does not give us everything we want and sometimes it seems like He gives us things we would NEVER want. Rather, He gives us what we NEED, what He knows is good for us, so that, whether we realize it or don't at any given moment, we truly lack nothing. Of course, at the most basic level that means that:

a. He provides all my daily needs (2) As you heard a moment ago, sheep can survive in bare brown fields in the desert, but a good shepherd takes them to where they can eat green grass. And sheep can drink dirty, alkali water in the desert, but a good shepherd takes them to where there are clean, pure streams or springs bubbling up where their thirst can be fully quenched. I can honestly testify that in all of my almost 60 years, I have never been truly hungry because of a lack of food, or thirsty because of a lack of drink, or lacked clothing to wear or a home in which to live as a shelter from the elements; I have truly lacked nothing. So can the vast majority of you! And that is because of nothing less our Good Shepherd taking care of us so well! Yet I must hasten to add that not all His sheep have been blessed with that identical experience; even the Apostle Paul said *...I have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.* [2 Cor. 11:26]. Sometimes in His wisdom our Good Shepherd takes us through experiences of suffering in order to accomplish His good purpose for us; He allows us to endure what seems to be a real lack at the moment, but He carries us even

through those difficult times in such a way that, when they are over, we still testify to His providing what we needed in them, as Paul did. Now notice that because He is a Good Shepherd:

b. His diligence gives me rest Philip Keller says sheep won't lie down in a pasture until they have eaten their fill; they won't rest until they know their needs are met. The *waters* in verse 2 are literally *waters of rest*. When the sheep know that there is plenty of food and good water they rest normally. But we are smarter than sheep; we don't look just at the pasture and the stream; we look at the Shepherd! Knowing that He is committed to providing for our needs, we can rest. We don't have to be anxious and worry and run about in desperation to try and find them ourselves. That's what Jesus was talking about in **Mt. 6:26-33**. Look there with me. Why shouldn't we worry? Because we have a Good Shepherd who knows what we need and He will care for that need, so we can lie down. We can rest because we trust Him. Then in verse 3 we read:

c. He restores my soul (my inner self) (3a) Philip Keller says, *Only those intimately acquainted with sheep and their habits understand the significance of a "cast" sheep or a "cast down" sheep. This is an old English shepherd's term for a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself. A "cast" sheep is a very pathetic sight. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand up, without success. Sometimes it will bleat a little for help, but generally it lies there lashing about in frightened frustration. If the owner does not arrive on the scene within a reasonably short time, the sheep will die. This is but another reason why it is so essential for a careful sheepman to look over his flock every day, counting them to see if all are able to be up and on their feet. If one or two are missing, often the first thought to flash in his mind is, "One of my sheep is cast somewhere. I must go in search and set it on its feet again."* Of all people, David knew what it was like to be "cast down"; in Ps. 42:5 he wrote, *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?* In 10 years of being hunted by Saul's army in the wilderness, I'm sure there were many times when he was depressed and felt like he couldn't endure and doubted he was going to make it. Yet when we are in emotional pain, when a loved one dies or a tragic accident comes or a child goes astray, when it seems that our whole world has been turned upside down and no matter how hard we kick, we can't seem to right ourselves, our Shepherd turns us, He "rights" us, He comforts us, He heals us, so that we are renewed and healed and refreshed. Then David continues in verse 3, saying:

d. He leads me in the right paths (3b), which, in our case, are *righteous* paths. If sheep stay in one place too long, they will graze the pasture down to nothing, so they must constantly be moved from one area to another. So, the Good Shepherd, like our Jesus, always knows the next good place to take the sheep each time and the safest, best way to get there. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, *Life is a journey, not a destination*. I'm sure you've noticed by now that it is filled with seasons and changes and moves and often that's scary to us. But our Shepherd knows exactly where we need to go next every time and He leads us there. Sheep don't drive well from behind, as you'll know if you've ever watched a sheepdog at his frantic work. The eastern method is to lead them. In 1867 J.L. Porter described it like this, *As we sat the silent hill sides around us were in a moment filled with life and sound. The shepherds led their flocks forth from the gates of the city. They were in full view, and we watched them and listened to them with no little interest. Thousands of sheep and goats were there, grouped in dense, confused masses. The shepherds stood together until all came out. Then they separated, each shepherd taking a different path, and uttering as he advanced a shrill peculiar call. The sheep heard them. At first the masses swayed and moved, as if shaken by some internal convulsion; then points struck out in the direction taken by the shepherds; these became longer and longer until the confused masses were resolved into long, living streams, flowing after their leaders [The Giant Cities of Bashan quoted in Treasury of David]*. Look what Jesus said: **Jn. 10:27**. We know our Shepherd's voice and we follow Him! He knows the right paths, the paths that are righteousness before God and He always leads us in those ways as we follow Him. We can always trust His leading. Then note this:

e. He does all of this for His own reputation as well as love for me Yes, He genuinely loves the sheep dearly and cares for them, but He also does it for His own reputation as a Shepherd. He does it to display how wonderful a Shepherd He is, to be known to all the world as a Good Shepherd, so that other weak, diseased and starving sheep who've been following harsh, uncaring masters will run to HIS voice and join His flock where they know they will lack nothing along with us! Then, because He is My Shepherd:

2. I know that I will be safe (4) David often had to protect his sheep. He told King Saul, ... *Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears...* - **1 Sam. 17:34-36**. Sheep have many enemies and no natural defense; they rely totally on their shepherd to protect them. And sometimes the valley that leads from one pasture to the next in the hills is dark and maybe lined with thick brush where wolves can lurk. Death may be all around, yet the sheep confidently follow the shepherd through the midst of it on to the next pasture. Well, in life:

a. sometimes our Shepherd's path leads me through a place of serious danger It may be into military service where bullets whizz by, or maybe onto a mission field where fanatics want me gone, perhaps into a crime-ridden

neighborhood in the city, but it also may be when cancer or a brain tumor appears in my body or when I'm involved in a terrible car accident. Danger is an ever-present reality on the journey of life, yet David assures me that:

b. His Presence is always with me, even there, where the prospect of death looms before me. And He will not cut and run! Look at **Jn. 10:11-14a**. *I'm not like that. I will never leave you nor forsake you.* And so, like the sheep:

c. His constant presence removes my fear of evil He is WITH me! I'm reminded of the end of Romans 8, *If God is for us WHO can be against us! Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God* and you know Paul's list! So ...*whom shall I fear...of whom shall I be afraid?* - Ps. 27:1. I trust in my Shepherd and:

d. His ever-present tools bring me comfort In olden times a shepherd always carried two things, a rod and a staff. The rod was short and heavy; we'd call it a club, the weapon with which he would fight the wolf and protect the sheep. The staff was in long and slender so that it could be pressed along a sheep's side to guide it in the right direction and it often had a hook on one end so the shepherd could pull the sheep backward from the edge of a drop-off or lift it out of a pit. And as God's sheep it is a great comfort to us to know that our Shepherd always has with Him:

(1) the "rod" of His protecting power, which He can unleash mightily against our enemies and also:

(2) the "staff" of His rescuing power, which is more than great enough to rescue us from whatever trouble we may be in.

He is always able, but even if He does not deliver me in the way I would like, even if He lets me be hurt or maybe even be killed, I still know this: **Jn. 10:28-30**. My Shepherd will carry me straight through the door of death and into the glory of heaven itself! Nothing is powerful enough to take me out of His hand! That's why, because HE is my Shepherd, I can face any evil, even death itself and not fear it! Hallelujah! But now, in the last two verses of the Psalm, David switches images to paint a different picture (5-6). Sheep don't eat at tables or get anointed with oil. David is saying that:

II. God Himself Is My Gracious Host Who Brought Me Into His House In many of the cultures of Asia and the Middle East there is a powerful concept of hospitality; you can see it repeatedly in Scripture and it persists today. When you receive a guest into your home or your tent, you must feed them and put the very best you have before them. Moreover, your home is a sanctuary to them and you are obligated to protect them against every threat, even with your life if need be. David pictures God Himself as this great, gracious Host, who has taken him in, who has brought him into His house, not just for one meal, but to live permanently. Well, in God's house:

1. there is abundant provision He really spreads a table! I remember the first visit I made in Kyrgyzstan in 2008 to a pastor named Toktogul who was just recovering from serious surgery. The couple was very poor and lived in a tiny, shabby house, but when we entered the small main room, there before us was a huge table spread from end to end with little pastries called *barsook* and grapes and pomegranates and bowls of rice pilaf called *plov* and bread and cheese and noodles and chicken and sweets and tea; not a square inch of the table was visible. You'd have thought Risgul was feeding an army, but that's how you spread a table for a guest! And our God has spread such a table before us. By His Divine power it is blanketed with everything that we need for life and godliness. His provision for us is abundant beyond measure and as we feast together with Him:

2. there is absolute security Enemies can only stand at a distance and watch in frustration, knowing that once we have entered His house, He Himself will protect us with all of His mighty power! We feast together in absolute confidence, without fear, and as we eat together:

3. there is fullness of joy It was custom in that day to anoint a guest's head with oil, literally the Hebrew says *to make it fat with oil*. (I guess the term *fathead* was a good thing then!) But Isaiah prophesied that's exactly what Jesus would do, He would give to God's people *...the oil of gladness instead of mourning* - **Is. 61:3**. The oil was a sign of the joy and gladness and cheer that would be enjoyed at the table as the host and the guest ate and talked and told stories and laughed together. *In Your presence*, David said, *is fullness of joy!* - Ps. 16:11. And not only that, but at His banquet table:

4. there is complete satisfaction The cup is always kept filled. In Kyrgyzstan when your tea cup got near empty the pot would immediately appear and the hostess would fill it to the brim again. If you had enough, you had to leave it sit half full so she wouldn't refill it! The concept is to be completely satiated, to be absolutely full, to have more than enough. That's how it is when you fellowship with God. And, finally, in His house:

5. there is unfailing hope The banquet I'm enjoying together with Him gives me an absolute confidence about my own future. First of all, I realize that:

a. His goodness and mercy will characterize all my earthly life I will eat at His table all the days of my life and it will never be any different. The table will always be spread just the same, the joy will always be full and the cup

filled to the brim. What I experience today with Him, I will know always, because, you see, I am not just a guest. He has brought me into His house and made me a Son. I am family! So

b. His house will be my permanent home I will dwell in it a loooong time, forever, as we know from the New Testament. Remember how Jesus talked about going to the Father's House and preparing a place for us so that He might come and take us there and have us with Him in that house forever? My future is secure! My hope is fixed, certain, sure. It cannot fail.

And all because it hangs on God. He Himself is my gracious Host, or even better, my loving Father who has brought me into His house; He Himself is my great Shepherd who has included me in His flock. *Years ago, a minister in Virginia phoned in his Sunday morning sermon title to the religion editor of the local newspaper. He said, "The topic of my message is, 'The Lord is My Shepherd.'" "Is that all?" asked the editor. Trying to make a spiritual point, the pastor replied, "That's enough!" So, on Saturday, when the paper was delivered to the pastor's door, he immediately opened it to the section containing the church notices. His topic for the sermon read: "The Lord is My Shepherd--That's Enough!" And it truly is!*

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 51 - A Song Of Forgiveness

Psalm 51 is a Psalm of confession, of asking God's forgiveness for sin. Evidently in centuries gone by this Psalm was commonly used in public liturgy as a way for the congregation to confess their sins. *Martin Luther says, "There is no other Psalm which is oftener sung or prayed in the church."* Generations upon generations of believers have used this Psalm to keep alive within themselves a deep consciousness of the utter seriousness of their own sins. One of the greatest evils of our time is that as a culture we have developed the attitude that sin is no big deal. We have become so presumptive about the forgiveness of God that we assume that God is just a kindly soul who always forgives everyone for everything and we do as we please. We have forgotten His complete holiness and lost our fear of His wrath against sin as the Judge of All the Earth. And because of this, even believers, who understand and appreciate the great sacrifice Jesus made to save them, often feel little remorse when they disobey God and sometimes even make that choice deliberately, believing that the gratifying of their own desires matters more than pleasing Him. *Two centuries ago, Thomas Chalmers wrote, "This is the most deeply affecting of all the Psalms, and I am sure the one most applicable to me. It seems to have been the effusion of a soul smarting under the sense of a recent and great transgression. My God, whether recent or not, give me to feel the enormity of my manifold offences, and remember not against me the sins of my youth. What a mine of rich matter and expression for prayer!"* As we study this Psalm together, may God give us to feel the enormity of our own offenses and fill us with the ecstatic joy of knowing what it truly means that they are forgiven. We begin by looking at:

I. The Occasion Of The Psalm which is found in its **Title**. For those who might not know the story, it's in 2 Sam. 11-12. The army of Israel was at war across the Jordan but King David stayed home. From the roof of his palace, he saw Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most trusted soldiers, Uriah, bathing on the roof of her home. Even though he had multiple wives of his own already, he lusted after her, sent his servants to bring her to him and committed adultery with her, thinking no one would ever know. But she found herself pregnant, so David tried to cover it up by bringing Uriah home from battle to give a report, hoping he'd go home, sleep with his wife and eventually believe the baby to be his own. But he wouldn't go home. So, desperate to cover up his sin, David sent a secret note to his ruthless commander, Joab, to make sure that Uriah was slain in battle and he took care of it. Then David magnanimously took the widowed Bathsheba as his own wife to care for her. And this charade went on for nine whole months until the child was born. For us:

1. it reveals just how deeply a genuine believer can fall into sin We're talking about David here, the boy who trusted God and slew Goliath, the man who wouldn't strike down Saul because he was the Lord's anointed, the man after God's own heart whom God installed as King, who danced before the Ark in worship, who wrote so many Psalms and was known as the sweet singer of Israel! There is no question that he genuinely knew and loved God, yet under the right set of circumstances he committed adultery, deceit and even murder, crimes punishable by death in Israel! This serves as a grave warning to us. If a man as godly as David could do such things, then we are fools to think that we could not fall just as deeply. You don't need to look very far to find believers who love Jesus, yet who have fallen into sexual sin outside of marriage or committed adultery against their spouse, even mature church leaders and pastors who have left their wives for someone else. *Some of you remember that in the late 1980's, televangelist Jim Bakker was convicted of fraud and conspiracy. Part of the downfall of his ministry involved an affair he had with a woman named Jessica Hahn. While in prison he wrote a book titled I Was Wrong (Nelson, 1996, p. 21), and in it, Jim writes, "I knew that what I was doing went directly against everything I believed as a Christian. I had never cheated on my wife in all our years of marriage. Jessica Hahn, however, seemed quite comfortable with the situation. I simply abandoned myself to the moment. We did not make love; we had sex. When it was over, I quickly left the room, and in a daze, hurried to the elevator and pressed the button marking the eighth floor. The winter afternoon sun was already beginning to slide down on the horizon as I stepped inside my room. I was horrified. Oh, God! What have I done? I had not considered the consequences of my absurd attempt to make Tammy Faye jealous. I had not even paused to think of the potential ramifications of my actions while I was giving in to the temptation of having sex with a woman other than my wife. I had simply reacted. I had opened the door to attack on the ministry I headed, my family, and me personally.*

Worse yet, the devil had not made me do any of it; I had done it of my own stubborn will. I disrobed and immediately stepped into the shower, turning the water on as hot as I could stand it. I never felt so dirty in all my life. Maybe if I make the water hotter, it will wash it all away, I thought.” Of course, it didn’t. Psalm 51 is a reminder to us that even the people who love God the most can fall horribly, and if they can, how much more easily can we. Reading it should make us resolve to guard our hearts and our lives all the more closely. Then at last God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David, to say on behalf of God, *Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.* And David’s first words were, *I have sinned against the LORD.* This Psalm is actually the thought out and written down prayer of David in the days following that encounter. So, for us:

2. it reveals the attitude a believer must have when God confronts his sin God is always faithful to do that because He loves us and will not leave us go on in our sin without attempting to stop us. So, when He does, we should have an attitude of humble contrition, sorrow and repentance. David is an example of how we should always come to God when we have sinned. In the first twelve verses we have:

II. David’s Earnest Confession Of His Sin (1-12) Read (1-2). To begin with:

1. he appealed to the mercy and love of God, making no excuse. We love to lighten our guilt by providing explanations of how it happened and excuses for why we did what we did. Corrie Ten Boom wisely said, *The blood of Jesus never cleansed an excuse! [The Hiding Place].* David made no excuses. He saw that before God he had been made vile and dirty to the core by his evil behavior and that he needed a thorough washing, a deep cleansing of the heart that only God could give him. So, he appealed to God to have mercy, to take pity on him as one guilty, vile and helpless and not give him what his sins deserved. And only love could make one do that. Only love could make a person release and forgive a murderer, an adulterer, a sinner, and David knew that God’s love could cleanse even what he had done and forgive him. So, he prayed like the publican Jesus talked about in the Temple, *God have mercy on me, a sinner!* Jesus said that’s the kind of prayer that God hears and answers. He justifies; He pardons people who humbly admit sin, not those who excuse it. Then note secondly that David:

2. he admitted how deeply and continually he felt his guilt (3) Most of the time we don’t *know* our transgressions; we don’t realize the awfulness of what we have done. If we are honest, many times we are sorry that we got caught or that we’re in trouble for what we have done. We don’t really feel this deep anguish of recognizing that I have done something that is truly evil, heinous, awful, something that would separate me forever from God Himself and send me to a deserved eternity in hell, if it were not for Jesus. Why? Because we think our sins are little; they are not big like David’s! My lust in looking at pornography or in staring at women at the beach is not evil like David’s act of adultery. My dislike and disdain for some particular person is not like David’s act of murder! But Jesus said to lust IS to commit adultery and to hate in the heart is to commit murder! Oh, God grant us the grace to see how sinful our sin really is before Him, to truly KNOW it, to feel the guilt of it and have it press upon our hearts so heavily that we are driven to God to confess it and not merely to get out of the punishment! Nathan told David he was forgiven but then declared the consequences that God would bring upon him. *St. Ambrose comments, “Observe, it is from the guilt, and not from the punishment, that he thus asked deliverance. That the sword should never depart from his house; that the sin, begun, not only secretly even in its full accomplishment, but far more secretly in the recesses of David’s heart, should be punished before all Israel and before the sun; that the child so dear to David should be made one great punishment of his offence; these things, so far as this Psalm is concerned, might, or might not be. It is of the offence against God; of the defiling, although it were not then so expressly declared, God’s temple by impurity, that David speaks. [Ambrose, in J. M. Neale’s Commentary].* True remorse has nothing to do with wanting to avoid the consequences or the penalty; it is anguish over being guilty of the deed. It is honestly crying, “What have I done! How could I have done this!” in the heart. Then notice that David:

3. he recognized the nature of his sin was blatant rebellion against God (4) Wait a minute? Hadn’t he sinned deeply against Bathsheba and surely even more deeply against Uriah? Certainly he had, but once he realized what he had done, that seemed minor in comparison to what he had really done: he had sinned against God. He had deliberately done evil in the sight of a Holy God. Ultimately, all sin is against God. Bathsheba did not make the law, *You shall not commit adultery*, and Uriah didn’t make the law, *You shall not murder*, God did. Breaking God’s command is despising Him. When Potiphar’s wife was begging Joseph to commit adultery, his reply was, *...How can I do this great wickedness and sin AGAINST GOD!* He saw it clearly. Sin is utter rebellion against God Himself; it is raising my fist to One who loves me and saying, “I don’t care; I will do what I want anyway!” It is treason against my King! Therefore, confession is telling God how sorry we are, not simply for what we have done, as bad as that may be, but for how we have opposed Him and betrayed His trust! It is admitting, “You have every right to punish me; do with me what you will!” Of course, I’m sure that in the process pondering his sin David wondered how he could ever end up doing such a thing. And as he did:

4. he realized that sin was at the core of his being from birth (5) He’s not saying anything bad about his mother; he’s saying, “I realize that sin, this evil force, this drive to do evil things, has been in me from the time I was born. I was

born with a sinful nature at the core of my being. I thought I had conquered it, repressed it, learned to live in victory over it, but now I realize it's still there!" And:

a. he saw that what God wants most is a pure heart (6) It is not merely compliance in outward behavior that God really desires, not simply keeping the rules because we have to. He delights in truth and righteousness and wisdom residing at the core of our being, in the hidden place that we can't see. He wants it to be in our very character and nature as it is in His. But, of course, he also realized, especially now, that we can't make that happen no matter how hard we try, so:

b. he implored God to create a new heart in him (10) He didn't just pray, "Change my behavior and help me do better!" He asked God to change His very heart, to create a spirit in him that would be clean, holy, right and pure, like God's.

David, of course, couldn't have known it then, but that is exactly what God has done for every one of us who believes in Jesus. Through the new birth, God has removed our old, dead, evil, sinful nature and created in us a brand-new spirit, a new nature, created like His in true righteousness and holiness. We have an advantage David never had; God's very Spirit has entered us and is joined to our spirit permanently. However, that evil force of sin that we were born with STILL lives in our body and in our mind, it still impacts us every day and each time we sin we are painfully reminded of that fact. Each transgression shows us over again just how powerful the force of sin still is in us. So, our confession might be: "Father, I failed to live out of my new nature and out of the power of your Holy Spirit; I yielded control to my old master, to sin, and I let it rule me and use my body to do evil. It is such a strong force in me, but, oh Father, by Your power, renew me, restore me to that path of living in dependence on You." Now the natural result of confession is asking forgiveness, so David:

5. he appealed to God to forgive and cleanse him (7, 9) Poetically, he asks for forgiveness in every way: the image of being sprinkled with the water of cleansing by the high priest, the image of being thoroughly washed like dirty laundry, the image of God turning His head to not look at his sins and the image of God crossing his sins off the list of accusations against him. He's imploring, "God forgive me, pardon me, free me from the guilt of what I have done!" This is the natural result of being genuinely sorry for sin, yet those words seem so hard for us to say, even to each other, let alone to God. Then notice that David:

6. he feared the loss of relationship with God (11) David had good reason to fear that. When his predecessor, Saul, disobeyed God directly, the Spirit of the Lord DID depart from Saul according to **1 Sam. 16:14**, and in **2 Sam. 7:14-15** God explained to David how He took His steadfast love from Saul when he disobeyed. That's a pretty heavy thing to realize, that what I've done could cause God to sever His relationship with me! Praise God that we don't need to have that same fear. Because of the permanent salvation Christ provided for us, we CAN'T lose our salvation; the Spirit of God will never depart from living in us; He is permanently joined to our spirit. So, we don't need to fear His sending us to hell when we disobey or taking His Spirit away. But we should certainly realize that when we choose to sin our fellowship with God, our communion, our closeness, is broken, just as it is when one of our own children chooses to go astray. And part of our sorrowing is asking God to be close to us, to speak with us, to walk with us once again, to restore what our sin has broken - and He will! Always! Finally, David:

7. he begged God to restore the spiritual joy he once had (8, 12) Sin destroys our joy in God and in our salvation. David felt like his bones were being crushed. Until you know that things are right between you and God there is no joy. Everything is hollow, empty, depressing, without knowing that we are fully restored to Him in every way. But David must have been confident that God would forgive him because in the next section of the Psalm we see:

III. David's Deep Gratitude Over Being Forgiveness (13-19) Notice 4 things here:

1. he promised to use his own experience to warn others (13) "O God, I have learned from this! And I will use that for You! I will testify to others who are choosing the same path I did that it is a dead end! I will do everything I can to help people out of sin and back to You!" After we know we are forgiven God can use us to warn others, not in a proud, preachy way, but humbly and from the heart, saying, "I've been through this and it's painful; please don't go this way!" Secondly:

2. he promised to sing and declare the praise of God (14-15) "Forgive me and I'll praise You publicly. I'll sing. I'll shout. I'll testify! I'll praise You and glorify You as a great, loving, forgiving God! I'll tell the world about Your mercy!" When we've been forgiven, we should praise God for it! David did, publicly - look back to **Ps. 32:1-5**! He was so thrilled to be forgiven that he loved to declare it! But at the same time:

3. he saw that nothing he did could procure forgiveness (16) He saw he couldn't do anything to make up for what he had done. You can't make up for evil by doing good. He wasn't making God promises about the future to make up for the past, bargaining with Him, because:

4. he understood that what God really wanted was his contrite heart (17) He realized that what God really wanted was the only thing he had to offer and the very thing he was offering at that moment, a broken, contrite heart. When we sin, that's all God wants, our hearts, broken, humble, truly sorry. When we come that way, as David did, He will never turn us away.

Finally, in the last two verses we see:

IV. David's Concern That His Sin Would Impact His People (18-19) David was the King of God's people Israel. He realized that as God punished him, it could easily impact the whole nation! Somehow we never think about that. We never think, "What is this sin going to do to my wife, my kids, my class, to the people in my life?" But we should. Sin always has an impact upon others, especially those closest to us. So David:

1. he prayed for God to keep on doing good and blessing them in spite of his awful failure and horrible example as their leader. The walls of Jerusalem were not actually built yet; David's building projects came later in his life. He's praying, "O God, continue to do good to my people, continue to protect them and give them a safe future. May the consequences that fall on me personally, not keep You from blessing them!" And:

2. he desired that they would worship God out of righteousness, that they would bring genuine sacrifices from willing thankful hearts, sacrifices that would delight God because the worshippers were righteous before Him and seeking only to please Him. That's what we should want for those we care about, that our poor example should not hinder them in any way from following God with all their hearts.

I can think of no better way to sum up the message of Psalm 51 than by telling you this story. *Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the famous 19th century Russian novelist, was sentenced to death by firing squad as a young man for his radical political views. As the rifles were being aimed, the order to halt came and the sentence was commuted to 10 years in a Siberian labor camp. Upon his arrival a woman slipped a New Testament into his hand when the guard wasn't looking. There in a bare board building with three inches of ice on the windows and an inch of filth on the floor, Dostoyevsky discovered the parable of the prodigal son. He saw in that camp the pigsty and himself the son and the truth of God's love and willingness to pardon gripped his soul. Years later, on his deathbed, his daughter describes it thus: "He made us come into the room and taking our little hands in his, he begged my mother to read the parable of the prodigal son. He listened with his eyes closed, absorbed in his thoughts. 'My children', he said in his feeble voice, 'never forget what you have just heard. Have absolute faith in God and never despair of His pardon. I love you dearly, but my love is nothing compared with the love of God. Even if you should be so unhappy as to commit some dreadful crime, never despair of God. You are His children; humble yourselves before Him as before your father; implore His pardon, and He will rejoice over your repentance, as the father rejoiced over that of the prodigal son.'"*

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 62 - A Song Of Trust

For a great many of the Psalms we know nothing about the time or occasion on which they were written. A few of them, like Psalm 51 which we studied last, give us the occasion of the Psalm in the title. But for a number of others, like this one, we can figure out the occasion by comparing the content of the Psalm with what we know of David's life. Most commentators agree that Psalms 61, 62 and 63 are a unit and all come from the same time period in David's life:

I. David's Situation: The Time Of Absalom's Rebellion In case you are not familiar with the story, David had a son named Absalom whom he had managed to alienate against himself (but that's another story in itself). Absalom aspired to be King of Israel and spent four years secretly winning the hearts of the people by greeting them warmly at the gate of the palace as they came to present their petitions to King David and carefully forming a conspiracy with David's trusted friend and adviser Ahithophel. He went from Jerusalem to Hebron and called a great assembly and had himself proclaimed King and the hearts of all Israel were with him. Absalom was raising an army, so suddenly David found himself left with only the loyal troops in the palace and had to flee Jerusalem for his life, eastward into the desert of Judah toward the Dead Sea, then across the Jordan River and all the way to the far eastern border of the kingdom. There he was, in essence a "refugee", a displaced person living in borrowed quarters:

1. he had lost everything: his **position** as King, his **home** in the palace in Jerusalem and all his belongings. He was separated from **the sanctuary**, the tabernacle of the Lord, where he had loved to go and meet with God, which he laments in Ps. 63:2 and had virtually been driven from **the land** of Israel itself, the land that God had promised forever (Ps. 61:2). Everything he loved, everything that was important to him, it was all lost in a day, gone. And on top of that:

2. his life was endangered: His **angry son** was not simply wanting to throw him out, but to kill him and take his throne. He knew that Absalom was coming after him with **a huge army**, the entire army of Israel, a much larger force than the troops who had remained loyal to him. If the coming battle was lost, so was he. And on top of that, Absalom was being helped by his **traitorous advisor**, Ahithophel, who betrayed him and was now giving wise advice on how to kill him! He was very literally passing through the valley of the shadow of death and as he had taken refuge temporarily in the town of Mahanaim:

3. he was waiting to see how the situation would be resolved. It took Absalom some days to call up the soldiers of Israel from their homes throughout all the tribes and to march across the Jordan after him and during that time all David could do was wait. Have you ever been there? Maybe you've experienced a time of great loss in your life, loss of a person, a marriage, a job, a home, a time when it seemed as though the very foundations of your existence are shaken? Maybe even a time when your very life or that of someone you love was in danger, perhaps while serving in the military or from some dread disease in the hospital, and you didn't know whether you or they were going to make it? All you could do was wait to see what would happen, how you would make it through or *if* you would make it through at all. Even if you haven't been there yet in life, let me assure you that one day you most likely will be; very few of us escape the experience of such times of deep, deep loss and danger. How do you react in such a time? Well, here's:

II. David's Affirmation: I Trust In God Alone (1-2) Trouble often strips away from us all the things we depend on without even realizing it. That person we always counted on is not there anymore; that sizeable bank account is now empty; that credit card is maxed out without means to pay it; that job is gone; that strength that enabled us to do so much has failed. All the fleeting control that we relish having over our lives is gone and there's nothing we can do about it. David says, "That's where I was; I could do nothing but trust in God alone; there was nothing else." In truth, that is ALWAYS the case:

1. He is our only means of protection or rescue He's the only Rock behind which I can take refuge. He's the only fortress whose walls can keep the enemy at bay and me safe. He's the only "cavalry" that can ride in at the last minute and save me from certain doom. There is no other who can do it, so David says:

2. when we rest quietly and patiently in Him we are not greatly moved by circumstances. That Hebrew verb in verse 1 means to be still, to be quiet, to rest, to wait, all of those things at the same time. What is our natural reaction when disaster comes? We don't get quiet, we scream; we holler loudly for help; we moan and complain about our situation. We don't rest; we get frantic and cast about, desperately trying to find ways to solve our situation. We run to doctor after doctor. We try any scheme we hear of to get money. We desperately cling to some person, trusting that they are the answer to our problem. Our circumstances shake us; they move us. We do anything except wait quietly and patiently, trusting in God that He is at work doing something in our lives. However, when we DO rest in Him and wait patiently for what He will do next and trust Him with the outcome and with our future, then our circumstances do not move us very much. We have peace in the midst of the storm that life has bombarded us with.

That's the eternal lesson David found to be true in his whole terrible experience and that he is trying to teach us in the Psalm. Charles Wesley expressed it like this: *I rest beneath the Almighty's shade, My griefs expire, my troubles cease; Thou, Lord, on whom my soul is stayed, Wilt keep me still in perfect peace.* And He will, but that doesn't minimize the reality of the danger that surrounds us. Look at:

III. The Design Of David's Enemies (3-4) David talks now as though he's directly addressing Absalom and the foes bearing down on him. He says in verse 3, "I'm like an old stone wall that's leaning over and about to collapse, like an old wooden fence rotted from the weather and about to fall." It would only take a light push to make it happen, but:

1. they persisted in attacking in order to smash and destroy him Instead of bracing the wall or propping up the fence, they came with all their might to smash it to bits and destroy it, that is, him! They were like vandals taking pure delight in smashing and destroying someone else's precious things until there was nothing left, then laughing about it. Then in verse 4 he expresses it another way:

2. they plotted to cast him down from his high position through deceit Absalom and Ahithophel and the rest plotted and planned and schemed this for years, pretending to be friendly, blessing him with their mouths, but in their hearts cursing him and preparing to throw him off a cliff when the moment came. Deceit was their ultimate weapon. We here don't tend to have many human enemies that physically endanger us, but our brothers and sisters in many places around the world do. Next week we'll celebrate the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church and we'll hear a little bit of what they suffer for their faith and pray for them. But ALL of us do have a very serious enemy continually seeking to destroy us: **1 Pet. 5:8**, *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* The image of a roaring lion means little to us nowadays, but I'm reading some of Jim Corbett's books right now and he describes the terror created by a number of man-eating tigers and leopards among the hill people of north India in the early 1900's. Imagine living in a time and place where no one has a gun or an electric light, where several hundred people in random locations have been grabbed by the neck in the dark, killed, carried away and actually eaten by the beast. For 7 or 8 years the entire population of one region would lock their doors and stay inside in terror from dusk until daylight and the bold leopard would come right into the villages, growling and snarling, and claw the doors with all his might trying to get in and devour someone. That's the image Peter is conveying about Satan. He is a powerful enemy, a hungry enemy, and he and his forces are continually lurking in the bushes of your life, waiting for the opportune moment to grab hold of you and destroy you in any way they can. Jesus said of Satan, *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.* - **John 10:10**. He has designs on you, and his greatest weapon is deceit. He lies to you to lure you off the safety of God's path and into the bushes where he can attack. That is our permanent situation in life; we are ALWAYS walking through the valley of the shadow of death. We ALWAYS have an enemy looking for the opportunity to smash us to bits, even though we walk on blissfully unaware of it much of the time! Yet in those times we've been talking about, times of great loss, times of great personal calamity and danger, those moments when we feel like a wall about to

crumble, those are the moments when our enemy would most like to grab us and shake us and drag us away from our faith in God. So how did David sustain himself through this terrible time? Well in the next verses we have:

IV. David's Self-Talk During His Time Of Danger Here's what he told himself, what he reminded himself of constantly in those difficult days (5-7). He's talking to himself, to his own soul, and this is a mantra we would do well to repeat to our own selves in difficult times. He says, three things, first:

1. rest confidently and wait only for God Look up at God, not around at the trouble and danger. Don't scream and shout and wail and moan; be quiet and wait with the assurance that God loves me as much right now as He ever did. He has not changed. Wait patiently and look to Him. Second:

2. everything concerning my life rests on God alone, not circumstances It doesn't matter how strong the enemies, how impossible the situation, how much the debt, how weak the body. Absolutely everything that concerns my life is in His hands. All my circumstances are under His control, even though it looks like they are totally out of control. I rest in that. I trust Him, and third:

3. since I trust God, I will never be shaken no matter what happens If I am destitute, He will feed me. If I am alone, He will be with me. If I am sorely grieved, He will comfort me. If I am weak, He will strengthen me. If I suffer, He will enable me to endure it, and if I die, I will be with Him in glory! As Paul put it in Romans 8, nothing in all the universe is able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus! I CANNOT be shaken, because I trust in Him.

Three young men were put to the ultimate test. The angry King demanded that they bow down and worship his statue and if they would not, they would be thrown into a furnace full of fire and burned to a crisp. The terror of that moment would have been considerable for anyone, just as it was for the early Christians in the persecutions of the Roman Empire for some 200 years. Deny your God or die! But *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."* "We rest in God and we will never be shaken, no matter what happens!" And in fact, they WERE thrown into the furnace which was so hot it killed the people that threw them in. Death was certain! But there in the furnace JESUS showed up! And He insulated them from the heat and He walked with them and talked to them and the end of the story ultimately is that the King ended up worshipping their God instead of vice versa! O Jesus is always there in the furnace, no matter how hot it is, and He will walk and talk with us and insulate us and even if He should let us die through our trials like Stephen, He will receive us to Himself with open arms and we will be with Him forever. So rest, O my soul, in God alone and place all your hope in Him! Hallelujah! Now in the end of the Psalm David turns from talking to himself and we have:

V. David's Exhortation To All Of Us in verses (8-12). He preaches to us, as it were, out of his own experience. His first point is:

1. trust in God at all times (8) Trust in Him at ALL times, not just when everything is going well and life is happy. Trust in Him in the lean times when it looks like there is not going to be enough. Trust in Him in the sad times when your heart is breaking. Trust in Him in the scary times when you're fearful and afraid. And in those times, pour out your heart to Him in prayer. Lay all your fears and your anxieties and your sorrow and your pain at His feet. He is touched by the feeling of your infirmities; He feels your pain with you; in all your affliction He too is afflicted. He experiences it together with you so pour out your heart to Him. He is your refuge, your safe place, the place you can run to hide. Then secondly David says:

2. never place your trust in anything else (9) Never trust in:

a. people to fix your problem We are all just a vapor that is here for a while and then vanishes like the morning mist. We're a breath. The greatest and strongest and wisest of us has only a little power and the weakest and lowest of us is light as air. When you weigh us on a balance, we amount to nothing. So don't fix your hope on so and so to rescue you, on parents or children or a boyfriend or girlfriend or a spouse or a doctor or someone with money or power; you'll be disappointed. Those people may be a great help and an encouragement to you, but don't rest in them; trust only in God. And never trust in:

b. unrighteous means to fix your problem (10a) Don't be tempted to turn to extortion or stealing as a remedy for your financial problems. It will only make them worse. Don't be tempted to have an affair to solve your marital problems or to cheat to solve your difficulties in school. Don't be tempted to leave God's path and trust in some solution that you know is wrong to solve your issues. And never trust in:

c. riches to fix your problem (10b) Don't trust that money is the answer, that if you have enough, you can buy your way out of anything. If you have money, don't depend on it, don't set your heart on it as if it is your security in life. *Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.* - Prov. 23:5. They can be gone tomorrow.

Never put your trust in anything else, David says. Trust ONLY in God at all times! And as he finishes the Psalm, he explains:

3. the reason we can always trust God (11-12) There are three things about God that form the basis for our complete trust, things that God's people have experienced since the world began and they are true for us right now. First:

a. God has all power to help us He is omnipotent, all-powerful. There is nothing that God cannot do. David's faithful band of men went out to meet the mighty forces of Absalom bearing down on him and through the power of God 20,000 people were slain in that battle, Absalom's lifeless body lay under a pile of rocks, David was brought back to his home in Jerusalem and reigned once more as King over Israel. God delivered him when nobody else could. God can do anything He needs to do help us and fulfill His will in our lives. Whether it is power to heal or power to sustain, whether it is power to rescue or to survive, He has it all, so we are right to trust in Him. Second, David says:

b. God has steadfast love for us That's the bottom line. He loves us. We are not some lowly subjects that do not matter. We are the very apple of His eye, His beloved sons and daughters, so what happens to us matters to Him! We are precious in His sight! He will never stop loving us and anything that He allows to happen in our lives, no matter how awful and how painful, is not a sign that His love has run out! His love was declared once, for all, forever on a cross where the Father gave His own Son for us, where the Son gave His own life for us, where God suffered more than we can ever suffer to deliver and save us from our sins. And that love will never change, therefore we can trust in Him. And finally, David says:

c. God is absolutely just and will do what is right He will always give a person what they deserve in the end. Absalom got what he deserved and David got what he deserved. Of course, that doesn't always happen in this life, but it always happens. God is absolutely just. He will always do what is right and righteous and in the end see that justice is done. So, we can trust in Him.

Gladys Aylward had served as missionary to China for nearly 6 years when the Japanese army invaded Yangcheng in 1938. In her care at the time were more than a hundred orphan children and she was eventually left with no choice but to flee with them and one assistant. Unable to use roads or transportation, she was forced to lead the children, on foot, over the mountains to safety in the province of Xian some 100 miles distant. The trek took twenty seven days. Through little used trails and over high mountains she led her charges; their cloth shoes wore out, the small children began to cry, and all were hungry. She herself became ill en route and when they finally arrived safely, she collapsed. Doctors were amazed by the feat as they found she was suffering from typhus, pneumonia, a relapsing fever, malnutrition, and supreme exhaustion. On the twelfth day of that grueling trek, Gladys and the children arrived at their greatest obstacle, the crossing of the Yellow River, a mile or more wide, with no way to cross it. All boat traffic had stopped, and all civilian boats had been seized to keep them out of the hands of the Japanese. The book "The Hidden Price of Greatness" tells what happened: "[Gladys] grappled with despair as never before. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A 13 year old girl in her group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. 'But I am not Moses,' Gladys cried in desperation. 'Of course, you aren't,' the girl said, 'but Jehovah is still God!'" They all knelt and prayed and then they sang. A Chinese officer with a patrol heard the singing and found them. After hearing their story, he said, "I think I can get you a boat." He did and, though it took three trips, they all crossed safely. Listen, when you come to that place of despair in life where it seems to you that all hope is lost, that there is no way through, that you can't go on or survive, the message of Psalm 62 is, "God is still God! He can do ANYTHING and He LOVES you. Trust Him, trust ONLY in Him; rest and wait to see what He will do!"

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalms 67 and 87 - Songs Of The Nations

These two Psalms, 67 and 87, focus on a theme that runs from Genesis to Revelation, the very theme that runs through and connects all of the Bible and declares what God is about in all of human history. For years and years, I read and even preached the Bible, without seeing it. I read right over it without recognizing it, even though it is everywhere in Scripture. The reason is that most of us human beings have a view of the world that is centered on ourselves. In relating to God, we think about how God relates to my life, what He means to me and what He does for me or for those I care about. We seldom think in a God-centered way about what He wants or what He is doing in the world or throughout history. Let me give you a little background. God created the human race to know Him, to have relationship with Him and told them to fill the earth. Instead, they all rebelled and He washed the race away with a great flood and started over with Noah. They multiplied, but instead of filling the earth with people who knew Him, they stayed together and pridefully built a tower to worship other gods. So, in Gen. 11 at the Tower of Babel, God confused their languages and that caused them to move apart and spread over the earth. As they multiplied, they became a plethora of different peoples, people groups, *ethne* in the Greek. Acts 17:26-27 explains that *From one man God made every nation [ethnic group] of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live* and that He did this so that they would seek Him and find Him! It was God's new strategy to get a world full of a variety of people who would know and worship Him! Then turn with me to:

I. Gen. 12:1-3 - God's Promise To Abraham Do you see where this is going? God made a covenant with Abraham, a sacred unbreakable vow:

1. God would make of Abraham a great people. In several generations His descendants would multiply into the nation called **Israel** and further, God would **give them a great name** (i.e., a great **reputation**) **on earth** by bringing them out of the midst of Egypt, the most powerful nation in the world in an overwhelming display of power. Then He would give them the land of Canaan and:

2. He would bless them, not so that they could selfishly absorb it all and live prosperous lives looking down their noses at the rest of the world, but **so that they would be a blessing to other peoples**. In other words, as the peoples all around them heard of the power and blessing of Israel's God, they would come and learn of Him and worship Him too and they would in turn declare Him to others **and eventually through them His blessing would come to all peoples on earth!** Again, His goal has always been to have a world full of peoples and that those peoples would know and worship Him! Unfortunately, Israel never fulfilled her purpose. Instead of leading the nations to her God, time after time she was led to worship the false gods of the other nations. So disgraceful did her conduct become that God had to send her out of the land into exile. That cured the idolatry, but after that she became so self-righteous about having the true God that she scorned all the other peoples of earth and it ultimately led her to reject His Son, Jesus. Are you still with me? We just covered the whole Old Testament! So, after providing salvation for the whole world on the cross, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into the whole world and do what Israel never did, to go to every last place on the earth and make disciples from every last people on the earth. Therefore:

3. ultimately this blessing that God promised Abraham **is to come to the peoples of the earth through Jesus. Gal. 3:14**, *He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [i.e., the rest of the peoples of the earth] through Christ Jesus...* God saved you and I to get His job done, to accomplish His purpose on earth, to make Him known to every people on the planet so that some from every people will know and worship Him.

However, the Old Testament was not quite as bleak as I just summarized it. The Old Testament prophets and especially David and others writing in the Psalms actually understood what God was about and even seemed to be caught up in it at times as they worshipped God; for instance, look at Ps. 66:1-4, 8. The two Psalms which we study today take that exuberance to a deeper level. First, let's look at:

II. Ps. 67 which declares how **God Keeps His Promise Through Us** [*Read whole Psalm*] We don't know for sure who wrote this song, but some of the early sources attribute it to David and it certainly sounds like him. In any case, the author clearly sees:

1. God's great purpose for the world We can see in this Psalm that there are 5 things that God strongly desires. And by the way, I freely admit that I borrowed this part of the outline of the Psalm from John Piper in his most recent book (which you can download free online), *Finishing The Mission*. First of all, God:

a. He wants to be known by all peoples as the only true God (2) *...that your ways may be KNOWN upon earth, your salvation among all nations [peoples].* Our God is *not* the god of any other religion. Ps. 96:5 says, *All the gods of the nations are idols...* The peoples of the earth worship false gods. More than a billion Hindus in India worship literally millions of gods and goddesses who not only don't exist, but their worship is actually the worship of demons, the Bible says. Islam is so much in the news today but please realize that the god of Islam is not the God of the Bible. John said, *No one who denies the Son has the Father...* in 1 Jn. 2:23. So whether you're Muslim or Jewish or any other religion, you can't deny Jesus and worship the true God because He alone is the Father of our Lord Jesus and the two of them are One! God wants all the peoples of the earth to know that He alone is God and that beside Him there is no other! Yet thousands of those peoples still don't know that. Secondly:

b. He wants to be joyfully worshipped by all peoples (3-4a, 5) He doesn't merely want all the peoples to know ABOUT Him, who He is and what He has done. Rather, He wants them to worship Him, to praise Him, to be glad in their hearts and sing to Him out of their joy of knowing Him. Jesus said the Father is seeking after worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. And He's seeking them from all peoples. Thirdly:

c. He wants all peoples to know He is a God of justice (4b) John Piper says, *When the judgment of the nations comes, God will not be partial. No one will be condemned for the color of his skin, or the size of his brain, or the place of his birth, or the quality of his ancestry. No bribes will be considered, no sophisticated plea bargaining. All will proceed on the basis of God's unimpeachable righteousness. Let this be known to all the peoples of the earth.... And the standard of acceptance—his standard of vindication in the court of heaven—will be perfection. And the only remedy for our universal failure and rebellion is the perfection of Jesus, which he performed for all who believe in him, and the punishment of Jesus, which he endured for all who believe in him.* In other words, NOBODY will be accepted by the true God on the basis of his or her own good works, no matter how many they be, because all human beings sin and deserve punishment. The only way to Him is through JESUS! God wants all peoples to know that. Fourth:

d. He wants all peoples to know His sovereign power (4c) God is in control; they aren't. People after people, nation after nation has set out to forge its own destiny, but old Nebuchadnezzar had it right. After God humbled him, who was arguably the most powerful man in the world in his day, by making him act insane for 7 years, he declared, *At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"* - Dan. 4:34-35. That humble acknowledgement of His control is what God is seeking from all peoples. And number 5:

e. He wants all peoples to know He is a gracious God who saves (1-2) God wants all the peoples to know that He is a God of grace, a God who gives us what we do not deserve, a God who forgives sins and saves sinners instead of punishing them, if they trust in His Son Jesus. Every other belief system in the world, every other religion or faith, holds that salvation is based in one form or another upon works or behavior. Our God is the only God whose message is that He longs to extend grace to all people everywhere who will simply believe in His Son and accept the salvation that He provided on the cross. He longs for them to know what Paul calls *the Gospel [the Good News] of grace*.

But all of this is not simply His wish, His desire. Because He is sovereign:

2. God WILL accomplish His purpose (7) Jesus said, *...this gospel of the kingdom WILL be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* - Mt. 24:14. All the peoples WILL hear, they WILL know, they WILL be told. Jesus is not coming back until it happens until His purpose that every people group on earth be blessed with the knowledge of Himself is fulfilled. But here's the kicker. Twice in the Psalm we read how God plans to accomplish this:

3. God blesses US, His people, in order to bless ALL the peoples (1-2, 6-7) We all want God to bless us; we pray for His blessings all the time. But here's what we so seldom realize: He blesses US for a purpose, so that *through* us He can bless the nations. Now Israel was an agricultural nation, as many poorer countries in the world still are. A good harvest of crops was to them the greatest evidence of God's blessing. It meant that He supplied the right weather and the right amount of rain and made the soil fertile so that they had all they needed and more. But even though you and I don't grow crops there's a principle in there for us:

a. He blesses us materially for the sake of reaching the nations God gives most of us more than what we need; He blesses us abundantly. Why? John Piper applies it to us like this, *God gives his people material wealth for the sake of the world's spiritual worship. That is, he blesses his church with riches for the sake of reaching the nations. He gives a bountiful wheat harvest for the sake of a bountiful world harvest. He gives us more money than we need so that we can meet the world's greatest need—the need to know God through Jesus Christ.* By the time 2014 is over, we as a church of 150 people will have given ~\$75,000 to missions, to causes that touch people groups literally all over the world! That's \$15,000 above the 20 cents out of every dollar we put into the offering plate that is budgeted for that purpose. And that's not to mention all the money we invest in reaching our own community and region through all of our outreach programs. I want to commend all of you, not for being generous, but for being obedient to God and giving all that you can to reach the nations! But I also want to challenge you. A couple months ago in a village in India called Adrupalli where our teams have been, a young man named Paul had a herd of 20 goats which appeared to be diseased and dying. So, he quickly sold them before things got any worse and out of what he received he brought an amazing gift of 15,000 rupees (which is \$300, a veritable fortune in his culture) to his little village church as an offering! They were able to buy a new mobile PA system for the ministry and the church in his village has now grown to 50 people. If a poor person like Paul can sacrifice out of HIS abundance to God to reach his unreached people, how much more can we, instead of stockpiling up all our extra for ourselves! He has caught God's vision and so must we! And God is not only concerned about how we use what He has given us:

b. He wants the major focus of our praying to be HIS purpose Don't miss the fact that this whole Psalm is a prayer. *May God bless us* so His ways will be known...*May the peoples praise you...May the nations be glad....* David was asking for God to bring the nations to Himself and that should be the first priority in our praying as well. Jesus taught us, *This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* That's not just a phrase to be mechanically repeated. Jesus said to pray that the Father's Name and reputation would be known and venerated in all the earth, that His rule over the nations would be recognized among all the peoples and that all the peoples of the earth would obey Him the way the throngs of heaven do! The first thing we're to ask for in prayer every day is God's purpose of blessing all the peoples, not just in a sentence prayer like this, but specifically and fervently. How can we do that? Well, every week we print in the bulletin a Hot Sheet with the latest needs from our mission partnerships all over the world. In the foyer or on our website you can get our missions directory and pray for one of our partnerships specifically every day. Also, on the front page of our website you'll see a different unreached people every single day and can click

it to learn how to pray for them. Every month we give you a Kyrgyz Chronicle loaded with prayer needs for the nation of Kyrgyzstan. There are a myriad of helps, but PRAY for the unreached peoples of the earth! Now quickly let's turn to:

- III. Ps. 87** which shows us that **God Is Keeping His Promise Meticulously** Let's read **(1-3)**. The Psalmist declares that:
- 1. God has a tremendous love for Zion** Now what is Zion. Technically Zion is the name for the mountain ridge on which the city of Jerusalem is built and on which the Temple was built and eventually on which Jesus gave His life. So:
- a. in the Old Testament Zion means the earthly city of Jerusalem** as in **Micah 4:1-3**, *In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.* When God at last sets up His Kingdom visibly on earth all the peoples will literally come up to Zion, to Jerusalem, to worship Him! However:
- b. in the New Testament, Zion refers to God's heavenly city, New Jerusalem** ...*the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.* - **Gal. 4:26**. ...*you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God....* - **Heb. 12:22**. And in **Rev. 21:2, 10** we see the Holy City, the New Jerusalem descending from heaven and it is described in detail for us. In short, the term:
- c. "Zion" refers to the place where God's presence is and where all His people gather to Him** Right now that place, that "Zion" is in heaven and that's what God really loves, to have all of His people be with Him where He is. But next He reveals something very neat and wonderful:
- 2. God includes some from all peoples in "Zion" through knowing Him (4-6)** Now what's that about? Even in the Old Testament, "Zion" was not just for Jews; it was for all the peoples. Here's what he's saying. First, God:
- a. He is keeping a register of all the peoples who know Him** God is a record-keeping God. There are books in heaven, the Lamb's book of life where our names are written, the books that record all men's deeds out of which the dead are judged at the Great White Throne, and here we read about another book, a census, a registration book and it is a registering of all of the peoples of the earth. Secondly:
- b. He records both individuals and their "people"** Rahab is Egypt. Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Cush, those are a representative handful all the various people groups that surround Israel far and near. Yet three times he talks about recording "this ONE, that ONE". So as God keeps a meticulous record of all the individuals who know Him, He is also recording what peoples they belong to. I envision it similar to records we read in the Old Testament like this one in **Num. 13:4-6**, *These are their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua son of Zaccur; from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat son of Hori; from the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh.* Each person's tribe as well as name were recorded. But in God's register it is peoples: "From the Egyptians, so and so, from the Philistines, so and so, from the weird Caucasian Americans, our names..." God is keeping track of the people who know Him AND all their peoples. Why? So that He can one day PROVE for His own glory that He has kept His promise! He can show that some from every people know Him and are part of "Zion" and that all the nations of the earth have been blessed! Then notice that:
- c. He notes that they are included as His people by a "birth"** How is someone who was physically born in Egypt or Babylon or one of the other nations said to be "born in Zion". Note how often he repeats that. It can't be by a physical birth; you can't be born in two different places physically. So how can this be? I'll tell you how: **1 Pet. 1:3** says, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!* We, all of us, from all of the peoples of the world, are "born in Zion" spiritually through a new birth when we are born again through faith in Jesus Christ, and we are included as being God's people regardless of our ethnic heritage! Why? So that:
- 3. one day all God's people (and His peoples) will celebrate together in Zion (7)** One day all of us peoples who are His people will be gathered into the heavenly Zion and we'll be singing to Jesus. John saw it in a vision, ...*they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."* - **Rev. 5:9-10**. O what a day that will be! God WILL have the desire of His heart at last!

I want to leave you with a challenge from the words of David Livingstone. He was a missionary doctor who gave 37 years of his life to service in the heart of Africa, which in 1840 was an unexplored and deadly place. His accomplishments are legend and so were his awful sufferings. He died in 1873 on his knees beside his rough bed with his head buried in his hands upon his pillow in the act of prayer. He wrote this: "I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of God. If anything will advance the interests of the kingdom, it shall be given away or kept, only as by giving or keeping it, I shall most promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time or eternity." O God,

please be gracious to us and bless us, and help us to use that blessing so that Your ways may be known on earth and Your salvation among all peoples!

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 90 - A Song Of Life

Psalm 90 is the only Psalm that we have that was written by Moses, according to its inscription, and that makes it the oldest of the Psalms. Moses was truly a *man of God* in the fullest sense, a man whose entire life was lived in close communion with God and for the purposes of God, and this Psalm was his prayer to God. And while we cannot know for certain exactly when he wrote it, it most surely was at or near the end of his life, having led Israel through the wilderness for 40 years. We forget that the main purpose of those 40 years was for an entire generation of Israel to die off. All those men above 20 who came out of Egypt were to die in the wilderness for their refusal to go into the Promised Land and the generation of their children be raised up in their place. Well, Numbers tells us that there were over 600,000 men who died, not to mention wives and others. That means if, let's say, 1 million people died in those 40 years, there was an average of about 70 deaths a day! Everywhere they camped the ground was covered with the graves they left behind! Let's just say that Moses was a man who lived with death all around him every day, plus by this point he likely knew that he himself would be part of that generation; God had probably told him by this time that he would die and not cross over Jordan. So, it is looking back over all of this that Moses prayed about life and it will greatly help us to understand the Psalm if we keep him in view as we read his prayer. The first thing Moses had learned is:

I. The Unchanging Nature Of God (1-2, 4) From the long experience of his life, Moses acknowledges that God:

1. He exists eternally and is always sovereign He is from *everlasting to everlasting*; that means from infinitely backward in time with no beginning to infinitely forward in time with no end. He always was and He always will be; He is eternal. But it is not simply existence that Moses has in view; God has always been and will always be GOD, Lord and Master, the One in control of all things. There is nothing that has ever existed that He did not make, not the mountains, not the earth, not the entire cosmos. And there is nothing that has ever happened that He did not control, nor will there ever be. He is the absolute Sovereign ruler of the universe. And because He is eternal:

2. His perspective on time is infinitely greater than ours A thousand years, an entire millennium, seems to Him like yesterday does to us or like one of the 4-hour long watches of the sentries during the previous night. He was there and in control a thousand years ago when the Crusades began; He was there a thousand years before that when Jesus came to earth. He was there a thousand years before that when David wrote his Psalms and a thousand years before that when Abraham left Ur and on and on. And He will be there and in control in the future for our children and their children and their children and on and on forever. So, the very fact that our individual life matters to Him, even though it's smaller than the tiniest blip on the radar screen of time, tells us what a wonderful loving God He is! But go back and notice the first thing Moses says about Him:

3. He Himself is always our dwelling place, our "home", in every generation. Everybody needs a home, a place where you live and are safe from the elements, from danger, a refuge in which to rest. But for 40 years Moses had no earthly home. He lived in a tent in the wilderness. And he never lived in one place for very long; the camp moved repeatedly. An entire generation of the people of God were nomads roaming hostile desert all their lives, even as their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had done. But Moses had learned something in all of that: God is our true "home"! Refuge and safety and peace and rest are not found in a building, they are not found in a physical location, they are found in God Himself! When we are in relationship with Him, we are "home". And He has always been "home" for the generations before us and will always be that "home" for the generations that follow us. The point is that He is our *eternal* home, our *forever and ever* home, no matter what the circumstances of life may bring us. And that's important to realize because of the second thing Moses had learned:

II. Our Frailty As Human Beings (3) God formed human beings from the dust of the earth; every chemical in our bodies is found in the soil beneath our feet and when we die, we decompose:

1. God causes all our bodies to return to dust, literally, as God had told Adam after he sinned in **Gen. 3:19**, *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*" This was brought home to me very vividly when as my brother passed away in 2010 and was cremated. The undertaker handed me box about a foot long and 8 inches wide and in it was all that was left of my brother. When we later went to sprinkle the ashes in the Susquehanna River that he loved, it was like trying to scatter a few cups of ashes from our fireplace. The wind blew some away, some floated on the surface of the water and some landed on the mud of the bank and just lay there; soon his whole body would simply be part of the soil and that is what happens ultimately to every one of us. The point is that even our own bodies are not our "home"! Paul said in 2 Cor. 5 that they are like a tent, like the tent that Moses lived in for years in the wilderness. And no tent is permanent; it's a temporary home and will be destroyed or dismantled. That's why God has to be our home! In those 40 years Moses had become painfully aware that:

2. death is an inescapable cycle (5-6) Moses uses two metaphors to describe the power of death over the human race. He says:

a. like a flood death irresistibly sweeps us away and drowns us This verse is difficult to translate in Hebrew but the word *dream* is literally *sleep*, and the sense is more like the NIV, *You sweep men away in the sleep of death...* The power of rushing water, of a flood, is immense. When I was 16, I lived through a flood. The little creek next to our house rose 17 feet and became a raging river 200 yards wide and the depth of a house. It swept away everything in its path. The house on the other side ended up directly in the middle and it was gone. If you had tried to wade into that water or were caught in it somehow, you would have been swept away and soon drowned; no one could survive its force or swim against its tide. Death is like that; it's an irresistible force that sweeps every human being away into the sleep of death. Moses saw it sweep away an entire generation in accelerated fashion and that was brought home to him powerfully. Then he also says:

b. like grass death shortly cuts us down and we wither into "hay" When I was a teen, I used to mow hayfields with a farm tractor in the summer. In the morning the timothy grass was two feet tall and all healthy green and covered with dew reflecting the sunlight. The mower was a sickle bar; a blade 8 or 10 feet long that lay on the ground beside the tractor with moving teeth like a huge hedge trimmer. And as the tractor moved it would cut the hay off near the ground and it would fall. Immediately the sun would act upon it and it would begin to wither and dry into hay. In a few hours 40 acres of green hay lay dead and withering in the sun and in another day after we raked it up and baled it, the field was bare. That's how Moses saw his whole generation, like a field of green grass in the morning and by the end of the day all cut down and withered. Like grass we spring up green in the morning of life and by the end of our short day in this world, death cuts us down and we lie withered on the ground. All of us had such a painful reminder of that this past week in the passing of little Chloe, a 9 yr. old girl from our Pioneer Clubs. And God has used so many of you to pray for and love on and care for all of the many people, both children and adults, who were deeply impacted by her leaving. Thank you all for caring and please keep it up. But:

c. the same process inevitably happens to each succeeding generation In Hebrew the sense is that these two verses are connected, that one generation is swept away like a flood and the next springs up like new grass in its place, but it too is soon cut down. Moses saw that cycle before his eyes as one generation passed away entirely and another grew up in its place to go in and take the land. Yet it was not long before Joshua's generation was also gone and another had risen up in the book of Judges. This cycle that one generation always perishes and gives way to another is inevitable, but God is always God and in every generation is always still there and still a refuge for His people! Aren't you glad? Now Moses goes on to explain that:

3. the reason we experience death is God's holy wrath against sin (7-9) That was so obviously true to Moses. Israel sinned and rebelled against God by refusing to enter the Promised Land and for 40 years he watched the effects of their sin cause them to die in the wilderness. But it's true for all of us. *The wages of sin is death...., the soul that sins shall die.* As Paul said, death comes to all of us because sin is in all of us and God is holy, pure, righteous. He can only hate and punish sin and put it away from Him. That's why He had to send Jesus, to take all of that wrath against our sins so that He could save us! And that's why God instituted death. At death we, the real person that we are, our spirit, is separated from the body where sin lives and goes to be with Him, while the body is left to return to dust. However, the deterioration of our bodies throughout our lives is a painful reminder that sin is still in us and the sins we commit are also a painful reminder that death is coming to our bodies one day. Moses says clearly that:

4. our time on this earth has a definite limit (10) We might live 70 years, maybe 80 or even 90 if we're strong enough. My mother will be 100 in January. Moses eventually died at 120, but no matter who we are, there is definitely a limit. No human being lives very long in the scheme of things and:

a. even at best our days are filled with hard work and suffering trouble Life in this world is toil; we have to labor, to work hard to make it. We get weary and exhausted and bad things happen to us. We get diseases, we have accidents, we experience grief and loss and sometimes the days of our life feel interminably long, yet:

b. no matter how long they seem to last, they are quickly over and our soul flies off to God, our eternal home, and our body returns to dust.

So out of all this reflection Moses has done in his prayer, he finally comes to a request and in that request, we learn:

III. How We Should Pray (11-12) Moses realized that:

1. people do not naturally ponder the shortness of life and the fear of God *Who considers it...* Nobody? Hardly anyone. By nature we all plod along in life and act like it's going to last forever. We ignore death and the majority of human beings ignore the fact that they're going to have to face God and His wrath against sin. They could care less. They either figure it will all work out somehow or they just don't figure at all; God isn't in their equation. But we who are God's people, who know and love Him should live differently.

2. as His people we should ask God for two things. We should ask Him:

a. to make us continually aware of the brevity of our life, to remember that our days are numbered and they are rapidly counting down. Dan's got a countdown app on his phone that's counting down the days until he and Dao get married in January. We all need a spiritual countdown app; we need the Holy Spirit to build into us the process of always remembering that our days are limited and they are short, that they are too precious to be wasted because all too soon they will be gone. God has to give us the grace to live in that sense; we don't have it by nature. And then we should ask Him to give us a wise heart, that is:

b. for wisdom to live out His purpose in our fleeting days As Paul put it, *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. - Eph. 5:15-16*. Since we have so few days, we should want them to count for things that really matter, that is, things that really matter to God. So much of what we strive for in life has no eternal value and will burn up like dry stubble and be gone. Striving for material things, for pleasure, for power and prestige, for all the things that human beings usually invest so much effort in trying to acquire; it's all vain. But investing our days in things of the Kingdom, in growing our relationship with God, in ministering to and encouraging people, in sharing the faith, in reaching the nations, things like those last forever. C.T. Studd, the founder of WEC who accomplished so much for the Lord in his generation wrote a well known poem and the refrain of every verse is this: *Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last*. If only those two lines could be a tape that plays over and over in our minds! May God give us wisdom to redeem, to use for His glory, what precious little time we have. Then in the end of the Psalm we have:

IV. Moses' Prayer For His People (13) Or as the NET more clearly puts it, *Turn back toward us, O LORD! How long must this suffering last? Have pity on your servants!* He's praying for his people suffering there in the wilderness. He's asking God to have mercy on them even though they are suffering for their sin. But what he prays next for his people are four things that we can and should all pray both for ourselves and each other. First, verse (14). In other words, "Lord,

1. satisfy us with Your great love and let it be our true joy all our days. Let YOU be what matters in our life and Your love be the source of our joy instead of earthly things as we pass through this life. Let us rejoice in the LORD, in YOU, always, as Paul admonished twice. Let You be what thrills our hearts! And may we learn to cherish You young, Lord, in the morning of our brief lives, so that all of our days may be filled with that gladness." Second, verse (15). In other words, "Lord, please:

2. balance the suffering in our lives with good things that give joy. We know there will have to be bad days, but in Your mercy give us good days too. Lord, you know what we are made of, you remember that we are only flesh, that we can only take so much, that we can only endure so much difficulty and pain without falling apart. Lord, please send us times of refreshing and relief and joy too so that these short years of our lives on earth may have a balance to them before they are all over." Third, verse (16). In other words, "Lord,:

3. reveal Your purpose and your power both to us and to our children. Lord, show us what You are doing in the world, what You are doing in and through our lives. Let us see what You're about so that we can intentionally participate in it. Let us see Your great power at work in people and circumstances as You rule the world. And let our children see it too! Show them so that they will love and follow you along with us!" And finally, verse (17). In other words, "Lord, please:

4. grant our brief lives lasting value in accomplishing Your purpose. Make our lives count for something in Your Kingdom! Cause them to make a difference that is eternal in the lives of people. Work in us and through us so that the work of our hands is really the work of Your hands that will last as a tribute to your Name forever!"

And finally, we ought to turn verse 1 into prayer also: "Lord, BE our dwelling place, be our true "home". Be our safe place, our refuge, as we pass through life." And He will. Listen to Michael Card sing His promise to you:

*Though you are homeless, Though you're alone, I will be your home
Whatever's the matter, whatever's been done, I will be your home
I will be your home, I will be your home, In this fearful fallen place I will be your home.*

*When time reaches fullness, When I move my hand, I will bring you home
Home to your own place in a beautiful land, I will bring you home
I will bring you home, I will bring you home, From this fearful fallen place I will bring you home, I will bring you home.*

[\[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXt-qSD6JSw\]](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXt-qSD6JSw)

Many of you will remember Hanna Cho, the young WEC missionary who was here at GBC with us all last spring. This week she wrote to her friends a powerful testimony, *I was diagnosed with breast cancer on the 16th of September and had breast cancer surgery after one week. I felt that I met the biggest storm in my life. Now I am on the radiation treatment every day except weekend. The treatment is going to be 33 times (until the 10th of December).... I give thanks to the Lord. I was so terrified when I heard that I had breast cancer.... I did not fear my death because I am going to Heaven and to meet Jesus Christ earlier than I thought. But I was very sad when I imagined that I could say goodbye to my family and friends including you earlier than I expected.... That night which I got to know about my cancer I could not sleep and next*

early morning I went to church to attend early morning prayer meeting. At that time God told me "Do not be afraid, Hanna. I am your shield, your very great reward." through Genesis 15. However, after my surgery one night I could not sleep again and asked to the Lord with my tears "Why?" for all night. I cried out to Him "Why didn't you protect me from the cancer? Why did you allow this happening to me? Why did you turn to this way? Why did you put the big suffering at me?"... Next day He let me know one thing [through a wise friend]... It is that it is His call for me. It is His gift for me. When I realized that I cried again and confessed "My Lord, I will obey you in spite of unexpected call." If He is with me all the time, I can walk the way. If I trust in Him, I can rejoice to go to His call... Now I do not understand His purpose for this event. But I believe that He is good and loves me. And I remember that His plan is always right and good although I cannot see it." And here is the prayer request she asked of us: "Pray for dwelling in Him. My ultimate vision is always to love and follow Jesus Christ. I desire to dwell in Him every moment of every day. He is in me and I am in Him. It is the most important prayer." And it truly is.

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 91 - A Song Of Security

Every human being has two basic needs; one is significance, to know that we matter, and the second, which is probably our deepest need, is security, to know that we are safe. In Psalm 90 we talked about God being our dwelling place, our "home", in every generation. In Psalm 91 we will look at the security that we have when we choose to dwell in Him. Right away in the first verse we have:

I. An Invitation To Place Our Trust In God For Security (1) How many times have we read this Psalm and particularly this verse without ever really stopping to ponder the meaning of what it says? It states a principle in two halves:

1. the one who continually dwells in God as their "hiding place"... That word *shelter* in the Hebrew not only carries the sense of protection and shelter but always carries the sense of secrecy or hiddenness, which is why the King James translates it as *the secret place of the Most High*. To help you grasp the concept, *The Hiding Place* is the title Corrie Ten Boom chose for her first book. She and her family lived in Holland when the Nazis first came to occupy the country. The Dutch underground helped them build in their home a false wall, made to look exactly like all the other walls in that room, behind which was a secret room. They would take Jews who were fleeing the Nazis into their home, care for them, and smuggle them on to their next stop, but whenever danger came near, the Jews would all clamber through a secret opening into that safe room, into their "hiding place", where they would be secure. Eventually their home was raided, the family arrested and sent off to concentration camps, but the Jews, secure in their hiding place, were never found and were eventually smuggled away to safety. In both Psalms 32:7 and 119:114, the authors use this same word and say to God, *You are my Hiding Place!* "YOU are that safe place, that hidden place, that refuge where I am safe from the danger that surrounds me!" So, a person who *dwells*, who always remains and lives perpetually in a "hiding place" is always safe and secure, especially since the hiding place we are talking about happens to be, not a room made of bricks and mortar, not a safe-room with a door of steel or a safe-house protected by the FBI, but the Most High God Himself, the greatest, most powerful Being that exists! A person who lives continually in Him: **...remains perpetually under the protecting "shadow of the Almighty"** Living here in a moderate climate, we don't really grasp the desperate need that people living in desert areas have for shade. I've been in some parts of the desert where Israel wandered for 40 years; they often marched across miles of sand and rock in temperatures that stretched well above 100 degrees, where without shade during the day you would soon be parched and burned. But Psalm 105:39 says that God...*spread a cloud for a covering and a fire to give light at night* and God Himself was in that cloud. So, literally, every day they lived "under the shadow of God Almighty", under His shade that protected them. Elisabeth Elliot chose this phrase, *Shadow of the Almighty*, as the title for the biography she wrote of her husband Jim Elliot who, along with Nate Saint, a missionary pilot, and 3 other missionaries, was slain on a sandbar in the jungles of Ecuador in 1957 by members of the very tribe they were trying desperately to reach with the Gospel. News of their martyrdom shook the western world in that day and most called it a horrible tragedy. But she wrote Jim's story to show that all of his young life, he had lived in close relationship with God and followed His direction, that he was "under God's shadow". And even though he had been clearly supernaturally protected from death on a number of occasions, that even in his martyrdom he was still secure under the protecting shadow of God Almighty. *Many years later when one of the other widows finally went back as an older woman to visit the site where her young husband had been killed, as she reminisced, she kept saying, "We were SO sure of God's leading and protection." After repeating it several times, she was reverently asked, "When they gave you Ed's shoe and his watch and said 'he's dead', then what did you think?" Without any hesitation, she replied, "I was STILL sure of His leading and protection!"*

<http://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Mar/29/angels-story-video/> If you dwell in God and trust in Him as your Hiding Place, you are ALWAYS secure under the mighty shadow of His power, no matter what befalls you in life, even if it is death itself! That is the principle in verse 1, but this is not simply meant as a mere statement of truth; the Psalmist is issuing an invitation to all of us to exercise the privilege and he shows us how:

2. it requires a personal declaration of trust in God as our sole protection (2) Now let me clarify something: if I am truly God's child, if I have been born again by faith in Jesus Christ, then I AM secure. Nothing in all creation can separate me from His love. But if I want to FEEL secure, to EXPERIENCE the security that I have in Him, then I have to

make a conscious choice to place my trust completely and only in Him. I have to make up my mind and tell Him, "Lord, YOU are my refuge, my shelter, my hiding place, the fortress to which I run for safety; YOU are my God and I will trust in YOU and YOU alone for my security!" As David put it in Ps. 20:7, *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* When we face trouble, it is easy to trust in other things, to trust in our good credit or the money in our bank account to cover our financial need, to trust in a person like a parent or a relative to bail us out of trouble, to trust our own abilities and strength and the weapons we have to handle a situation, or to be like Asa, who, when his feet were severely diseased in the end of his life, sought not the Lord, but only the physicians (2 Chr. 16:12). To experience security, requires a constant choice, "I will dwell in the Lord my God and trust in Him only as my security in every situation!" Now, He may use people and doctors and even weapons and credit cards to care for us, but we don't trust in any of those; we trust in Him.

Now in verses 3-8 we see:

II. How Our Trusting In Him Affects Us First of all, when we trust Him:

1. we rest safely because His faithfulness is our shield of protection (3-4) Here the image is that of a small, helpless baby bird who is in trouble and it scurries to its mother, who sweeps the chick under its spread-out wings and folds him safely under their strong covering. Those wings shield him from being caught in the trap of the fowler, the bird-catcher; they protect him against the snow and the rain and the wind and any destructive plague that might befall him. And there under those strong wings the little bird rests and falls asleep because he feels safe. Why? Because he is confident in the faithfulness of his mother; he doesn't have any weapons, any shield or buckler of his own. SHE is his shield; her faithfulness, her trustworthiness is what shelters him. That is our God and we're the little chick! When we trust in Him, we are able to rest safely because we know He is faithful and that faithfulness is what shields us from anything that He does not want us to experience and brings us safely into His heavenly Kingdom. Second, when we trust:

2. our trust in Him will remove fear in all times and circumstances (5-6) It doesn't matter whether it is the dark of night or broad daylight, whether it is in the dimness of dusk or the brightness of noon-day, we will not be afraid of unknown terrors, of enemies shooting arrows or bullets, of dread diseases or anything that would destroy us. Why? Because the God in whom we trust is BIGGER than all of those things and in control of all those things. Paul said spread-out in Philippians that when we choose to stop being anxious and we lay the whole matter of our need at His feet that He gives to us a peace, the very same peace that He has, one that passes all human understanding and will keep our hearts and minds secure. We will not be afraid, but will rest safely in the confidence that He is in control of all things. And third, when we trust:

3. we need not be alarmed by what happens to others (7-8) I think of the awful Ebola outbreak in Liberia in recent months and our missionary partner Yallah Kawala there with the little church he has planted, living in the midst of it. I can only imagine them being in the midst of the awful panic in the city of Monrovia two months ago and seeing this one and that one catch the disease and die and the fear that must create that it will happen to me too! In fact, Yallah himself began to have several of the symptoms that are part of the disease and isolated himself, thinking "Dear God, do I only have 21 days to live?" But God put it into his mind to call a doctor friend and it turned out that he only had an ordinary infection that was easily treated by an antibiotic. Dr. Kent Brantley of Samaritan's purse actually did contract ebola, but the Lord spared him, as you know, and he was gracious enough to share his thoughts publicly. At one point early on he told the Lord, "I know you are ABLE to heal me, but Lord, even if you don't, I will never stop trusting in You!" When we rest completely in the Lord, we will not be panicked by what is happening to everyone else around us, especially by what is happening to nonbelievers. Our God is ABLE to do anything and WILL do what He knows is best for us. In fact, the Psalmist goes on now to make:

III. A Declaration Of What God Does For Those Who Trust Him in verses (9-13). First of all:

1. He is in absolute control of our circumstances (9-10) Now the simplest reading of that would be, "God will never let anything bad happen to you." But if that is so, it contradicts so much of what happened to the godliest people even in the Old Testament. Job had all of his 10 children die in a single day and all of his wealth be taken away and got sick on top of it. Joseph was sold into and lived in slavery for 13 years in Egypt. David was a hunted fugitive in the wilderness for an entire decade and was later on driven from his kingdom as a fugitive by his own son. Moving on to the New, every one of Jesus' apostles except John were martyred and he was exiled. These were men who DID trust in God completely and loved Him with all their hearts. If deeply trusting in God meant that nothing bad would ever happen to us, as some teach, we would soon be disappointed! The thought of the Psalmist here is best explained at a deeper level by Paul in *Rom. 8:28, And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Our God is in complete control of all things, even things that are inherently bad and evil, and He chooses what He allows to happen to us, even as He controlled exactly what Satan was allowed to do to Job. And He does it to accomplish a good purpose for His Kingdom and in our lives! In everything that happens we know God is at work controlling it. He not only knows what is happening but He is at work in it. Then look at this:

2. He assigns angels to attend our every move (11-12) Hebrews tells us that the angels are ministering spirits and they have been assigned by God to attend to His children! All around us is an army of invisible beings assigned to watch over and protect us in ways that we never even see and nothing gets through them that God does not choose. They care for us even in such mundane matters as keeping us from stubbing our toe against a stone, if God doesn't want us to, and they are always at work. Satan tried to use these verses to tempt Jesus in **Luke 4:10-11**. He said, "Come on, you know what the word says about the angels protecting you. You know they won't let you die, so jump off the roof of the Temple and let's show the world who you really are. They'll catch you." But, as Jesus responded, this was never meant for us to put God to the test, to jump and see whether his promise will hold good. We are simply to trust that this is the case, that the angels are on duty around us, like the horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha, and they are. I have a neat story about that, you'll have to be patient because I'm saving it until the end. So, God is in absolute control, His angels are on duty all around us, and thirdly:

3. He supernaturally intervenes in our circumstances (13) At times when it is to His glory, He will let a man like Samson kill a lion with his bare hands or hold shut the mouths of a den full of lions to protect an old man like Daniel, when any other person would be instantly be killed and eaten. Or at times he will let a man like Paul be bitten by a poisonous snake and shake it off into the fire without any ill effect whatever, when any other person would die. At times He will intervene and heal a man like Dr. Brantly when hundreds of others in his same condition all around him die. He does not always choose to do that, but He does it frequently enough that we can have confidence that He can do it and is doing it in our own lives, even when we can't see it. He is well able to step into our lives at any moment and intervene to change what looks like a certain outcome.

That's why we are secure: God is in control of all our circumstances, His angels are all around us and He has power to intervene and do ANYTHING He chooses to do to help us. We can rest in that, but look at this. In the end of the Psalm, there is a change from third person to first person. It is no longer the Psalmist talking about God, it is GOD talking and we have, straight from His own mouth:

IV. God's Personal Assurance Of Our Security in verses **(14-16)** and look at what He promises. First:

1. He pledges to give us His ultimate protection (14) Listen, God Himself says, "Since you love Me, I will protect you! Now again, you can't interpret that to mean that nothing bad will ever happen to you. It means that in whatever happens to you, He will protect you no matter what! Look with me at the assurance Jesus gave us in **Jn. 10:27-30**. We are in the Father's hand, safely sheltered and tucked there, and His hand is the strongest force in all of the universe. No one, no force, no circumstance, no evil, can open His hand and take us out of it! He is our hiding place and we are safely ensconced in Him so that neither life nor death nor principalities nor powers nor anything else in all that long list in Romans 8 can separate us from Him. We are safe and secure! Second:

2. He pledges to hear and answer our prayer (15a) When we call to Him, He will answer. In the midst of our difficulty, He is not off somewhere on a vacation or taking a nap or too busy to be bothered. He is listening; He is hearing us. He might not always choose to do what we ask Him because sometimes we ask for things that are not good things, not the right things, especially when we're in distress. But He is ALWAYS answering, always responding. The Holy Spirit is interceding for us and translating our feeble praying to line it up with the will of God and God is hearing us and is at work answering us continually as we cry to Him. Third:

3. He pledges His personal presence with us in our troubles (15b) We are not alone; He has not left us to endure our difficulties and our suffering on our own. He is right there with us, even IN us, walking through it together with us. Listen to what He says through Isaiah, *But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... - Is. 43:1-3.* And if God promised that to His people Israel, how much more does that promise apply to His own sons and daughters who believe in Jesus Christ! Jesus Himself said, *...behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. - Mt. 28:20.* He is always personally present with us, even now in our troubles today! Fourth:

4. He pledges to ultimately deliver us and to honor our endurance (15c) As I keep saying, that rescue might be FROM our trouble, but it might be by carrying us THROUGH our trouble or even THROUGH dying and taking us to glory. As Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego told the King so plainly, *Our God is ABLE to deliver us FROM the burning fiery furnace and He WILL deliver us from your hand, O King!* One way or the other, God will ultimately rescue us safely into His Presence and there He will honor our faithfulness to Him. If He chooses to keep us secure THROUGH suffering, He will honor us when we get to heaven. Paul put it like this: *...this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison - 2 Cor. 4:17.* When we get home, we will see so clearly how we were secure the whole time and how God used the things we endured in this world. And finally:

5. He pledges to us life that is eternal in which we will personally experience His salvation (16) That "long life" concept was clarified for us by Jesus who said, *I give unto them ETERNAL life...*, forever life with Him, saved from the

guilt and the power and the very presence of sin, saved in every possible way and with him in His Kingdom. Even Job in the midst of all his suffering said, *And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!* - **Job 19:26-27**. After I die in this world, I will stand before Him in a brand new spiritual body and I will personally experience Him, ME, MYSELF. And we will be together forever. That is how secure we are.

Going back to the story of the deaths of Jim Elliott, Nate Saint and the three other missionaries in Ecuador in 1957, many years later Steve Saint (Nate's son) was standing on the sandbar with Dawa, now a believer like most of the tribe, who had been present during the attack as a young girl. And in the course of re-describing it, she pointed to a place above the jungle canopy bordering the ridge just south of Palm Beach and stated, "That is where we heard the foreigners singing." When someone asked, "What does she mean she heard foreigners singing above the trees?", Dawa said they were dressed in cloth like she saw a group of foreigners do who sang in a church she went to years later during a visit to the US. Three of the surviving warriors who had been part of that initial attack each confirmed that they were further away but they had seen lights above the trees and had heard singing. Well, in 2002 during the making of the documentary "End of the Spear", the well-known Christian artist Steven Curtis Chapman, who composed music for the sound track, was with Steve Saint and the film crew in the jungle village. As they talked, they heard music from the long house behind them and they realized the sound guy was testing the equipment by playing one of Steven's songs. And suddenly old Kimo, who had been one of the warriors that day, cocked his head and said, "That's just like I heard it! I have heard that long ago. That is what I heard, just like that, when your father died!" So they went in and asked the sound man to replay the clip and, Kimo exclaimed, "I saw lights like stars and that is what I heard." Then he added, "When I heard that long ago, I didn't know what it was. I was afraid. Hearing it I knew we had done a bad thing there. Now, no longer living angry and hating, I see it well that you have in returning brought this back to us." The name of Steven's song happened to be, "Every Tribe, Every Nation". Steve Saint comments, "...I have agonized over what I have thought must have been going through Dad's mind as he lay dying out in the middle of nowhere, betrayed by the very people he and his friends had so carefully and methodically befriended. His failure would leave Marjorie (my sweet mom) a widow. He would never teach his two little boys to fly. His little girl would never sit on Daddy's lap to hear another original bedtime story. He would never again fly sick Indians to the new hospital he and Roger had been working so hard to complete. His passion for sharing the message that had set him free with people who had never heard was suddenly ended. I have imagined all these years that this must have been the pain of Dad's last conscious minutes of life. But now I believe that I was wrong. If Dawa, Kimo, Yowe, and Mincaye heard an angelic choir from the world beyond, I have no doubt that Jim, Ed, Pete, Roger and Dad were made even more aware of their presence. They didn't die alone. Now I do believe that God sent a reception committee to sing for them and to escort them into His presence. As I listened to music, just written, which Kimo clearly asserted he had heard at Palm Beach [45 years ago], my heart swelled with a sense of well-being. God took what five men could not keep and exchanged it for something they cannot lose." <http://4joannewilson.blogspot.com/2012/03/end-of-spear-and-beyond-gates-of.html> Listen, if you dwell in the Most High as your Hiding Place and trust in Him and love Him with all your heart, you are ALWAYS secure under the shadow of the Almighty, no matter what may come your way in life. He is there; He is in control; and you are eternally safe in His hand.

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalms 103 - A Song Of Praise

Since we have just celebrated our Thanksgiving holiday, I have a challenge for you. Have you ever tried to pray for even as little as 2 or 3 minutes without asking God for anything? I confess that I've attempted this personally and in small group settings and inevitably "Would You please..." or "Help me..." slips out within 60 seconds. The unique thing about Psalm 103 is that David does not make one single request in all of its 22 verses. The entire Psalm is simply one complete song of praise to God for who He is and what He does, as are a number of others. Yet how hard this is for us to do! We can hardly go down a list of all the things we're thankful for without turning them into wanting God to do something. Of course, asking for things is not wrong, especially when so many times we ask for others, but the fact that it is so difficult for us to be purely thankful is a reflection of how we see God. Children don't tend to thank us parents every day for all the things we do for them or tell us how much they love and appreciate us. Of course, we didn't do that to our parents either. We tend to take our Heavenly Father for granted, much like we do our earthly parents, and that's why David tells us that:

I. We MUST Deliberately Remind Ourselves To Bless The Lord (1) *O my soul...* David is telling himself, indeed he is commanding himself to bless the Lord. Now what does that mean? God is the one who blesses US! But how is it that we bless God? What does that mean? Well, three hundred years ago William Dunlop explained it like this: *To bless God, then, is, with an ardent affection humbly to acknowledge those divine excellencies, which render him the best and greatest of beings, the only object worthy of the highest adoration: it is to give him the praise of all those glorious attributes which adorn his nature, and are so conspicuously manifested in his works and ways. To bless God, is to embrace every proper opportunity of owning our veneration and esteem of his excellent greatness, and to declare to all about us, as loudly as we can, the goodness and grace of his conduct towards men...* [quoted in *Treasury of David*]. Simply put, to bless God:

1. we must verbally praise Him as an act of adoration We must tell Him with our mouths all the things that we love and appreciate about Him, tell Him all the things that we are grateful that He has done for us. That's what praise is, but

we can't do it by simply reciting a list to God with our lips or in our minds. For it to bless Him, it has to be an act of adoration, an expression of the genuine love that is in our hearts for Him. David says:

2. we must praise Him with our whole being, *let all that is within me bless...* It must be sincere, genuine, from the very depths of our heart and soul. There's nothing worse than a fake "I love you" or one simply said in response out of duty. "I love you" only means something when it is rooted in the very depths of our being. Sincere praise from our hearts is our "I love You!" to God. And then note that we are to bless *His holy Name*. His Name means more than just the word by which He is called, Jehovah or Yahweh or Jesus. His Name includes everything about Him. It means that:

3. we must praise Him for everything that He is and does We praise Him for His nature, for His character, for the way that He is. Have you ever thought how awful it would be if God was NOT like He is? What if He was actually like the God of Islam or like the pagan gods of the world? How awful would it be if He was not a God who is loving and forgiving and all powerful and all knowing? Praise God for being like He is, for everything about Himself that is so wonderful for us. And also praise Him for everything that He has done, not simply in our personal lives, but in all of history from Creation to the Cross to the present day, all the mighty acts that have become part of the great reputation of His mighty Name. In fact, David goes on to say that:

II. We Must Never Forget All His Kind Acts Toward Us (2-5) His *benefits* are His dealings with us, the kind way in which He treats us, the gracious things that He does for us as His people who belong to Him. David gives us a list of five of the most gracious ways in which God treats us, that are just mind-blowing:

1. He forgives all our iniquities, every last one! No matter how vile and awful they are, He, a God who is absolutely holy, who cannot in any way associate with or condone sin or even allow it in His Presence, He forgives every single one of them. He says of us, *Their sins and their lawless acts I will remember no more!* - Heb. 10:17. He does not even call them to mind against us; He doesn't even associate them with us when He looks at and thinks about us! What a God we have! Then David reminds us that:

2. He heals all our diseases How many times in your life have you been sick and have recovered from it? How many times have you been injured but your body healed from it? How many of us have had things that could have killed us like cancer or heart attacks or severe pneumonia, yet here we sit? The point is not to insist that God has to completely heal us from every disease; He sometimes chooses to leave us suffer with a continuing illness or perhaps even to take us home through one. Rather, it is that every bit of healing that we have ever experienced in our lives has not simply been a natural body function or the result of medicine and doctors; each one is an act of God! It is He who makes our bodies heal, dozens and dozens of times! Think about it; I would wager to say that more than half of us in this very room would be dead right now if God had not worked His miracle of healing in our bodies! When he was a teen, our Ben had suffered a burst appendix but the doctors didn't realize it had burst. For a week in the hospital, God kept all that infection confined in one pocket until the doctors at last found and drained it, instead of letting it flood through his body. If God was not a healing God, he would not be here today and neither would the great majority of us! Without healing, many of us would be maimed for life from broken legs and hips and arms and other wounds we received. Praise God that He is a healing God! Then, verse 4:

3. He redeems our lives both now and eternally *The pit* means the pit of death, the grave. How many times has God saved our lives, rescued us from what looked like certain death on the highway, spared us by an inch or by a second from an impact that would have been our end? Some of us have been in war and seen many of our comrades come home in flag-draped coffins, yet somehow the enemy's bullets missed us. Our God is a rescuing God and His greatest rescue was made at the Cross where He redeemed our lives from the very pit of hell itself! And then somehow, some way, He invaded our lives with the knowledge of Christ and drew us to realize what He had done for us so that we received Christ, and He rescued us all over again eternally! If He hadn't invaded my life through a friend and rescued me, I shudder to think what my life would be like today! My friend Stan Nussbaum has summarized the whole of God's work from creation through the cross to the present into a three minute story that can be shared with people who've never heard and he titled it "The Rescuer"! [<http://www.gmi.org/services/research/stans-lab/new/rescuer/>] That's who our God is, a rescuing God! Praise Him for it! Then David goes on to add how:

4. He faithfully loves us and cares about us He *crowns us* with it. As if rescuing us was not enough, He goes even further and surrounds us moment by moment with His great love that never ceases for a second and is filled with compassion for everything that we experience in life. Like the tender, loving mother who will not let her baby out of her sight for a moment and who responds instantly to his every cry and cares about his every need, so deep and so tender is God's caring for us. And to top it off, verse 5:

5. He constantly satisfies us with good things and renews us Do you remember all those wonderful tastes at Thanksgiving Dinner? Just go to India and you'll appreciate them more! How about those comfortable clothes you wear, that sturdy car you drive, that warm house you live in? You don't have any of those things because of your own strength or because you somehow deserve them! They are wonderful gracious gifts from a Father who loves to give

His children good things. Now if you lived in Kyrgyzstan, you might not have most of those, but you would still find many rich and satisfying things that God showers upon you! Then when we're weary, He renews us. Did you ever wonder how an eagle always looks so pristine? He may be 30 years old but his feathers are always trim and never haggard and abraded. That's because he molts! God built him so that old worn-out feathers are constantly being shed in matched pairs on either side of his body and new ones grow back in their place. God is always renewing Him and He is always renewing us, giving us good things that bring us strength and vitality to face the challenges of life. How could we ever forget things like these? How could we ever take them for granted? Yet we do and we have to deliberately find ways to remind ourselves to give Him the praise He deserves for all of these things and to do it from our hearts. Well, now David leaves the individual blessings we should praise Him for to ponder the history of his people a bit and tell us how:

III. God Always Displays Tremendous Mercies To His People in verses (6-19) First of all:

1. He takes the side of the oppressed (6) He heard the groaning of Israel in her slavery in Egypt and came to redeem her. He is for the little guy, the victim being picked on by the bully, the poor servant being taken advantage of by the abusive landlord, the helpless widow and orphan being foreclosed on. He hears when the poor and persecuted cry out to Him and draws near to them. Praise Him for that. Next:

2. He is exceedingly patient with us (7-8) After Mt. Sinai, Moses begged the Lord to show him His glory, remember? And the Lord covered him in the cleft of the rock and passed by and proclaimed these very words about Himself, declaring His own nature. He is merciful to see and care about us when we're in trouble, gracious to do for us what we don't deserve and oh-so-slow to get angry at us because He loves us. How patient God was with Israel, though they turned from Him time after time over hundreds of years. Still, He loved them and sought to turn their hearts back to Him. Oh, how patient He is with us, though we disobey Him and ignore Him and take Him for granted. Praise Him for that! And even when He does become angry at what we do:

3. He does not stay angry at us (9) He sent Israel into captivity but turned right around and brought them back 70 years later. He comforted them and restored them, though they had angered Him in the most serious way through their idolatry. Like any parent, He can't stay angry at His children forever, even if they deserve it. Even for us, *...his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime....* - Ps. 30:5. Praise Him for that! And along with it, David points out that:

4. He does not give us what our sins deserve (10) Oh, if God was not a God of grace, if He gave us what we deserved, our lives would be like serving a prison sentence that keeps on getting extended until every one of us would suffer the full punishment for our sins and burn in hell forever! But, praise His Name, He is a God of grace, a God who so loved all of us, the whole world, that He sent and sacrificed His only Beloved Son in order to KEEP us from getting what we deserve! Somebody better say Hallelujah and praise Him for that soon! In verse 11 David says that God:

5. He has an infinite love for us (11) David didn't have the ability to measure how far up the clouds are, let alone the planets and the stars in space. To him, looking up, the heavens were infinitely far above, way beyond the reach of man. That distance was the biggest thing David could think of to describe the infinite extent of the love that God has for His children. His love for us is not some small thing, some minor part of His character. Paul got caught up in a similar analogy and prayed that we *...may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God.* - Eph. 3:18-19. His love for us is so big, so great, so infinite, that we can't comprehend how Someone could love us that much! Wow, praise Him for that! And then marvel at how:

6. He has completely removed the guilt of our sins (12) How far is the east from the west anyway? I'm sure David simply meant to describe the furthest distance he could think of, but it's interesting how mankind has come to regard the layout of the world. There is a north pole and a south pole, but no east pole or west pole. If you travel north sooner or later you cross the north pole and end up traveling south, only to hit the south pole and end up going north. But you can get in an airplane and fly east for 100 lifetimes and you will still be going east, never west! Or west for a whole millennium and you'll never be going east. As we've set it up in our thinking, east and west never meet; they are infinitely separated, and that's David's point. Our sins are so far removed from us that we will NEVER meet them again, ever. Their guilt is completely removed. Praise God for that! And also for this:

7. He has a deep compassion for us (13-14) God never forgets what we're made of; He made us out of the dust of the earth, made us live by breathing into us the breath of life and when it, our spirit, departs we return to dust. So in between we're just animated dust and it doesn't take very much for us to fall apart! God always remembers that, just how frail we are, how little we can take. And like a doting father, He is always watching out for His children, filled with empathy for whatever we are going through, shielding us and limiting our trials in any way He can to spare us from what we cannot bear. And when we are weak and weary and worn out and can't take another step, He sweeps us up in His arms and carries us. Praise Him for that! Now, He did not just do things like that for Israel long ago; David says:

8. He does not change throughout all generations (15-18) We're like a field full of grass or flowers. Our season ends and the wind blows and before you know it, we're dead and gone. Life on earth is short for us, but God is eternal and His love is eternal. He will be there for our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren, generation after generation until Jesus comes. And His steadfast love, His mercy and compassion, will be the same for all of them until the end of time if they love Him as we do! We can't be there to carry them safe through their journey in this world, but He can and He will! He never changes, ever! Praise Him for that. And finally, David says:

9. He is in absolute control of everything (19) He's in charge. He's sovereign. Psalm 2 says the nations rage, the peoples plot, the kings of the earth set themselves to oppose God and do whatever they want, but God sits in the heavens and laughs at their feeble efforts! Nobody messes up His plan. Nobody prevents Him from doing His will. Ever. He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness!

Oh, how many things we, His people, have to praise Him for! David has mentioned a lot, and still the list is endless! If we set our hearts to truly praise Him, we can go on and on and on. But now in the end of the Psalm, David comes full circle and returns to his beginning motif, telling us that:

IV. The Lord Is Blessed By Everything He Has Created (20-22) David lifts his eyes to exhort the very angels, the innumerable myriads of mighty beings in the heavenly armies that surround God's throne to bless Him. And how do they bless Him? They bless Him by attentively listening to the voice of His word, by eagerly waiting to respond to His every wish and carry it out. Then David lifts his voice to the whole universe, to the all things that God has created, the sun and moon and stars and the earth with all that is in it, and exhorts all His works to bless Him. And how do they bless Him? They do what He has commanded. All the laws of the universe that He established are implicitly obeyed without fail by every creature He has made! You can't help but notice there's a lesson in there for us:

1. verbal praise is fleshed out in obedience The angels bless God as they cry "Holy, Holy, Holy" and they sing the Song of Moses and of the Lamb, but the depth of their adoration of God is fully revealed in their eagerness to obey Him and carry out His will. For the inanimate things and the animals God created it's automatic, they simply do what they were created to do without fail. The earth turns, the seasons change, the wind blows, the stars shine, all at His command. Man is the only created being who is given the freedom to choose whether we bless our Maker or not! Therefore:

2. we must choose to join the chorus of all creation in blessing Him MY soul, in the depths of MY being, I must choose to bless the Lord, to praise Him with my lips and to flesh that out by praising Him with my life.

Will you do it? Will you bless the Lord? Will you praise Him every day for the rich blessings that He, your Creator and Heavenly Father, has bestowed upon you? Will you do it from the heart with all that is in you? And will you listen attentively, ready to do whatever He tells you as that is the highest praise. *In 1873 George Bowen wrote his own response to this Psalm: Let me bless the Lord, because no function will be more rich in blessings to my soul than this. The admiring contemplation of his excellence is in reality the appropriation thereof: the heart cannot delight in God, without becoming like God. Let me do it, because it is the peculiar privilege of man on this earth to bless the Lord. When he would find any to join him in this, he has to ascend the skies. Let me do it, because the earth is fully furnished with the materials of praise. The sands, the seas, the flowers, the insects; animals, birds, fields, mountains, rivers, trees, clouds, sun, moon, stars, — all wait for me to translate their attributes and distinctions into praise. But, above all, the new creation. Let me do it, because of him, through him, and to him, are all the things that pertain to my existence, health, comfort, knowledge, dignity, safety, progress, power, and usefulness. A thousand of his ministers in earth, sea, and sky, are concerned in the production and preparation of every mouthful that I eat. The breath that I am commanded and enabled to modulate in praise, neither comes nor goes without a most surprising exhibition of the condescension, kindness, wisdom, power, and presence of him whom I am to praise. Is it not dastardly to be receiving benefits, without even mentioning the name, or describing the goodness of the giver? Let candidates for heaven bless the Lord. There is no place there for such as have not learned this art. How shall I praise him? Not with fine words. No poetic talent is here necessary: Any language that expresses heart-felt admiration will be accepted. Praise him so far as you know him; and he will make known to you more of his glory. [quoted in Treasury of David].*

Beloved Psalms: God's Precious Words To Our Hearts

Psalm 139 - A Song Of God's Intimacy

Now that Christmas is past, we still have one Psalm left to examine in our series of Beloved Psalms, Psalm 139. This Psalm is one of the crown jewels of the whole book and it is a special blessing to those of us who may feel insignificant, who perhaps feel that we're not important or aren't worth very much or maybe even don't like ourselves. As David pondered deeply the relationship between God and himself, it produced in him an amazement, a sensation of awe and wonder and reverence. And likewise, if I ponder it as he did:

I. I Should Be Overwhelmed By The Intimate Care God Shows For Me Let's read (1-6) and try to grasp what he's trying to convey. In theological terms, God is omniscient; He knows everything. But that is not what impresses David. David is done in by applying that personally. He says, God:

1. He knows everything about me Think about that. The Almighty, infinite, eternal God of the entire universe has decided to involve Himself with me to such an intimate degree that:

a. He knows every single thing I do or say He takes note of when I sit down and when I stand up, when I lay down to sleep and when I get up in the morning. He notices what I eat for breakfast and the clothes I pick out to wear. He sees every interaction I have all day long, the guy who cuts me off in traffic, the customers I talk with in the Acme line, the coworkers who tease with me in the afternoon. And he hears every word I say. Not only that, He knows what I'm going to say before I actually say it! There's no whispering low enough that He cannot hear. He surrounds me. He's in front of me and behind me and on either side; no matter which way I go, He is there and He is seeing and listening. And David says:

b. He knows every one of my habits, all of my ways. How I brush my teeth, how I eat my food, whether I eat one bite of each thing on the plate or eat all the peas and then all the potatoes. He knows how I treat my wife or my husband and my kids, the way in which I do my homework and how conscientious I am about doing my job. And look at this:

c. He knows my very thoughts, both the good ones and the bad ones! He hears the angry thoughts, the vengeful thoughts, the lustful thoughts, the sad thoughts, the kind thoughts, the unfulfilled longings, the deepest feelings that I have; He is aware of everything that I think!

Of course, that depth of knowledge is kind of scary if you want to try to hide something from Him, but that's not how David means it. He sees it exactly the opposite. *Irma Levesque shares this testimony: "I grew up in rural New Hampshire, the eldest daughter in a family of six children. In our chaotic household I found refuge in make-believe, often pretending that I was a beautiful girl named "Joan Bishop" (Joan from Joan of Arc and Bishop from the English translation of my French last name). I never told anyone else about Joan Bishop. It was a secret between God and me. Little girls grow up, though, and the day came when I bade good-bye to Joan Bishop...and to God. I moved to New York, got caught up in a fiercely competitive line of work, and gradually found my personal life getting lonelier and lonelier. In time I knew I wanted to return to God, but I hesitated. Would He welcome me back? One Sunday morning I could not stay away any longer. I went to a nearby church. I walked down the north aisle, past the old pews, each with its own waist-high door and tiny brass nameplates, relics from the 19th century when parishioners purchased their seats. I chose an empty pew and closed the door behind me. 'Please, God,' I began to pray, 'I'm lonely and afraid. Are You here? Is this the place for me? Will these people all around take me in?' I wanted God's assurance that I should stay in that church, but no assurance seemed to come. Suddenly I felt an overpowering urge to leave. Hastily gathering up my coat and scarf, I opened the pew door and stepped into the aisle. As I turned to shut the old door, my eyes were drawn to its tiny brass nameplate. The plate read: J. BISHOP. I returned to my seat. I was home again."* [His Mysterious Ways. Fleming H. Revell, 1988. Pages 72-74.] Oh God knows the deepest, most intimate things about me! And that's what has filled David with awe. He can't get over the idea that God who hung the worlds in space, who controls the seas and the sun and the wind, would pay such minute, intimate attention to him and care about each tiny aspect of his miniscule life. It's too wonderful for him, too lofty for him to comprehend! Even so, David moves on to ponder in amazement the concept of God's omnipresence and what it means to him personally:

2. He is with me everywhere I go (7-12) Do you realize that:

a. I can be in no place where He is not with me A smart-alec agnostic once told a kid coming out of Sunday School, "I'll give you a dime if you can show me where God is." The boy replied, "Mister, I'll give you a dollar if you can show me where God ain't!" It doesn't matter where I go, there He is. If I rise up as high as heaven, He's there; if I descend as low as the grave, He's there. *On July 29th of 2004 I was on an airplane somewhere between Baku, Azerbaijan and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and in the wee hours of the morning I was having some time with God and suddenly the words of Ps. 139:9-10 jumped off the page at me with new meaning, "If I take the wings of the morning, and go to the farthest parts of the sea; Even there will I be guided by your hand, and your right hand will keep me."* I wrote in my journal, "I'm literally on the other side of the world and God, you're here! It never even occurred to me that You wouldn't be, but thanks for being a God who is everywhere so that wherever I go, You are!" I've been to Kyrgyzstan and India and Turkey and London and Jordan and Canada and in all those places, let me assure you that God was there! I saw Him at work in people's lives! There is no place that I can go to get away from Him; He is with me ALWAYS just as Jesus promised. Then David goes on to assure me that:

b. I can be in no circumstance in which He does not see me When I was a little kid, I was deathly afraid of the dark, not so much that I was afraid to have the light out in my room, but I was afraid to be outside in the dark. Because it was dark in the country where I lived, I couldn't see and I imagined all kinds of creatures out there in the dark coming after me to get me! So if we came home from somewhere, I would run from the car up onto the porch by the light as fast as I could to be safe. But what would be even worse than me not being able to see in the dark, is God not being able to see ME in the dark! But He sees perfectly well in darkness; in fact, darkness and light are the

same to Him. He sees me as clearly in the dark as in the light! But what if I fall into a hole, into a deep dark well? What if I'm locked away in a dungeon? What if I am kidnapped by militants and hidden away? Listen, there is no place anyone can hide me that God does not see me and know exactly where I am and that He is not with me right there! Isn't He wonderful? But it gets even better; David says:

3. He created me and planned my existence (13-16) To begin with, God planned me, much the way an architect envisions a building, then draws it out and then has it built according to his drawings. God:

a. He formed my body exactly as He intended in the womb The KJV of verse 16 says, *Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all [my members] were written, [which] in continuance were fashioned, when [as yet there was] none of them.* The point is not just that God planned my days but that He planned my body and then made it exactly according to plan. Listen, your nose is not just a smudge on the diagram! Your big feet are not just a gene from your grandfather. God planned every piece of you before He created you. Then verse 15 says He made my tissues, my frame. He made me out of the raw materials just like He made Adam from the dust of the earth. He took the one-celled me and differentiated it into bone cells and blood cells and muscle cells and you name it. He made the tissues that make up my body. Then He formed my parts. The words *came to be* in verse 16 are literally, He *fashioned me*. He literally squeezed me into shape the way a potter shapes his clay into a vessel. His hand formed each tiny foot, each miniscule finger. Further, He connected me together according to verse 15b. He wove me together. It is literally the word for needlework, embroidery, an intricate connecting together of strands. God put me all together. He put my ears on the side of my head. He attached all my parts in their place, connected all my nerves, all of this according to plan. And the neatest thing is that He made me distinct. In verse 14 the phrase *wonderfully made* literally means distinctly, separately, distinguished from all others. There is not another human being on the face of the earth exactly like me. I'm the only one there is; I am totally unique. Then look at specifically what He made. In verse 16 my *unformed body* is literally an embryo or fetus, that first mass of cells that I was before my parts became distinct. God made that; then in verse 13 He made my *inmost being*, my organs, literally my kidneys, my inner organs, the organs of my body. God made those and then at the end of verse 13 He made my muscles. The phrase *knit together* is literally *He covered me*, that is, with the muscle tissue that covers my body. He covered my organs over and protected them with muscle. And in verse 15 He also made my skeleton, *my frame*, my bones. He determined my height and size and shape. He gave me my build. Oh, it is a marvelous notion; God decided to build me!

b. He pre-determined the stages of my development, my birth and the circumstances of my life He had me planned out just like we planned out every detail when we built this building. He planned each organ and each limb and each bone and put them all together in place. Then He decided when I would come into the world and all the circumstances that would be part of my life, my family, my birthplace, not to mention all the things He planned for me to do and to accomplish in life!

The point is that I am a distinct masterpiece of God. I was worth creating just the way I am or God wouldn't have done it. He doesn't waste effort and He doesn't make junk! I am His unique creation, fearfully and wonderfully made! That's the level of attention that He gave to me, and then look at this:

4. He thinks about me perpetually (17-18) It is not just God's thoughts in general, but His thoughts "concerning me". That is the sense. God thinks about me and those thoughts are precious, valuable, costly; they are worth a high amount. Do you realize what these verses say? The number of thoughts God has had about me are more than all the grains of sand on all the seashores and deserts in all the world! How many times do you think about your husband or wife each day? About your children? It pales in comparison. God has thought about me millions and billions of times from eternity past through eternity future. His mind is on me constantly; He pays me constant attention. O how precious I must be to Him! And even if I forget that, even if I fall asleep, the moment I wake up, there He is, thinking about me! He never stops! He never takes a break, even if I do! Hallelujah!

Listen, when I ponder all of this, I should be overwhelmed. It should take my breath away! How much God must love me to know me so intimately, to be with me everywhere and at all times, to have created me so uniquely and to think about me perpetually! As the apostle John put it, *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* - 1 Jn. 3:1. And if He loves me that much, how much should I love Him? I should love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, should I not? And that's the connection to this next section, which seems odd and out of place in this context (19-22). A number of the Psalms contain sections like this where the Psalmist is cursing or praying for the punishment of his enemies. They are called imprecatory psalms and coming from our New Testament perspective, they seem wrong. But what David is really saying is that, in view of God's immense love for me:

II. I Should Love God So Much That I Hate Evil You see:

1. it is natural to hate the enemies of One who loves me so much and to desire their destruction Think about it. Here is your son who you love with all your heart and he's in the military and you send him off to war. How do you feel about those enemy soldiers who hate him and are trying to kill him? It's natural to hate them but that hatred is actually birthed out of the great love for your son. If I love God with everything in me, then it naturally follows that I hate everything that opposes Him and displeases Him. My hatred of evil is actually a sign of the depth of my love for Him! As **Ps.**

97:10 admonishes, *O you who love the LORD, hate evil!* We who love Him should literally hate evil as much as He does, however in we who are followers of Jesus today:

2. God's Spirit supernaturally produces a love for His enemies and a desire for their salvation Look with me at **Luke 6:27-36**. That was revolutionary teaching in Jesus' day! Nobody in Israel ever talked about loving your enemies! But Jesus revealed to us something deeper about the nature of God. He is kind, even to those who are ungrateful and those who do evil. And He is merciful; He does not treat His enemies as they deserve. Rather He takes pity on them and desires to save them. **1 Tim. 2:4** says that *God our Savior desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*, even His enemies and where would we be if it weren't for that? All of us were enemies of God at one time before we were saved! God loves His enemies, so if we want to really be like our Heavenly Father, we have to do the same. Of course, in our own strength that's pretty much impossible so we need to ask His Spirit to empower us to do it! You see:

3. God desires for us a balance like His own. He is able **to hate evil yet love the evil-doer**. He can so love the world that He would send His own Son to die to save us, yet He can and will send every last soul to hell who rejects that salvation because of His innate hatred for evil, even though He takes no pleasure in it, the Bible says. And He wants us to be like Him.

We don't wrestle with this very often here in our nice cozy situation; we don't live in a war zone where we fear for our lives or we see our friends and neighbors being killed. But when you watch the news and see a terrorist group like ISIS, the Islamic State, slaughtering hundreds of innocent people, even women and children at will as they advance, cutting the throats of captured journalists and putting videos on the internet to terrorize the world, you realize that evil is a real force and that some people in this world are absolutely dedicated to it. They hate God and are opposed to everything He stands for. They love evil; they delight in murder and slaughter. So how do you pray? Much like David did, actually! "O God that you would slay the wicked! If there are any that you can save, that you can rescue, any who will respond to the Gospel, then God save them! Have mercy on them and rescue them out of the depths of their sin somehow. But O God, those that are hardened and determined, the only thing that will stop them is death, so God destroy your enemies and save the lives of the innocent!" It is not wrong to pray for the destruction of God's enemies if we balance it with His desire to save them. But don't miss the point: since God loves me so very much, I should love Him so much that I absolutely abhor evil. And finally, David gets to the personal application in **(23-24)**. David is saying:

III. I Should Love God So Much That I Desire To Be Like Him If I really get how much He loves and cares for me and I love Him with all my heart then:

1. I want Him to remove any speck of evil He finds in me because it is abhorrent to Him! I want to be holy because He is holy, and the only way that can happen is for Him to show me my sins, my faults, the places where I have fallen into evil in my acting or thinking. I am blind to so many of them; I don't know my own hidden flaws. But if I love Him, I will be glad that He knows everything I do and think and I will openly invite Him to search my heart and my thoughts and to cleanse me so that I will be like Him. And if I love Him, instead of wanting to do things my own way:

2. I want Him to lead me in His everlasting way, the ancient way, the way that Jesus Himself walked, the way of holiness.

Charles Spurgeon was England's best-known minister of the Gospel during the second half of the 19th century; he was as well known as Billy Graham might be to my generation. He regularly preached to huge crowds and only eternity will reveal how many thousands of souls found Christ as Savior under his ministry. But it all began on January 6, 1850 when Spurgeon himself was saved at the age of 15 in a little primitive Methodist chapel. And if you want to know the secret that drove his ministry through all those years, it is contained in this prayer of consecration which he wrote on February 1 of that same year: O great and unsearchable God, who knowest my heart, and triest all my ways; with a humble dependence upon the support of Thy Holy Spirit, I yield up myself to Thee; as Thy own reasonable sacrifice, I return to Thee Thine own. I would be forever, unreservedly, perpetually Thine; whilst I am on earth, I would serve Thee; and may I enjoy Thee and praise Thee forever! Amen. [Charles Spurgeon, Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers, W. Wiersbe, p. 235.] Like David, Spurgeon was so taken with God's immense and intimate love for him that he yielded up everything about himself to God and he not only meant what he prayed, but he continued to live that way all of his life. So should we.

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

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Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 32 - When I Feel Guilty

God has created us in His image in a wonderful way. We are made up of so many complex components. We have a spirit, our core where God dwells. We have a body to carry us about. And then we have an element I call the soul or the personality. In that category we have a mind where we think and reason. We have a will where we choose and decide. And we have emotions, our capacity to feel. The ancients thought the bowels or the intestines were the seat of the emotions (probably cause that's one place you feel a lot of pain throughout your life, indigestion, etc.). And we've followed them in talking about our "gut-feelings" and "having our guts ripped out". But really, feelings are a function of our mind and they are a very powerful part of our lives. They are an incredible motivator. Feelings can cause people to kill other people or even themselves. Feelings can move people to give away everything they have or to place their life in danger. In fact, many times feelings rule and control our everyday lives. We make choices and decisions and even order our thoughts according to how we feel. Now that's never the way God intended it to be. Emotions are a wonderful gift. They are what enables us to taste life and experience it to the full. Without them we would be mechanical robots, machines, who operate, wear out, and die. But we're able to love, to care, to receive the same, to know joy and satisfaction and a thousand other things that give meaning and worthwhileness to living. But God never intended for our feelings to control us. And that's why it's important to know how to deal with your feelings. Hence this series. Now as we begin, I want you to understand some basic facts about how your emotions work:

I. An Introduction To The Subject Of Feelings

1. feelings are not really controllable; acting according to them is This might come as sort of a shock but if you think about it, you really cannot control how you feel. You've tried, haven't you? It really doesn't work. You can't tell yourself not to feel jealous or angry and make the feeling go away. Even Jesus when He went into the Garden of Gethsemane had intense emotions, horrible feelings. But as a true man, even He could not simply dismiss or change the feelings He had of loneliness, dread, and repulsion towards the cross and all that it meant. All He could do was to choose with His will whether to act according to His feelings or not. And that's all you can do. You can choose whether to act according to what you feel or not. So please be clear that the goal of the Christian life is not to have perfect feelings, to have perfect control over your emotions. It won't happen.

2. feelings are often inaccurate; they do not indicate truth This is perhaps the most important thing for you to know. The message we hear taught today is: go with how you feel. But feelings very often lie. Feelings react to immediate circumstances. They don't think. They don't reason. They don't evaluate. They just sense. People involved deeply in sin can have wonderful emotions. They say, "How can something which feels so good be wrong!" A serial killer may get a wonderful feeling of euphoria out of torturing a person and watching them die! On the other hand, certain things may make us feel really bad but they are the right things to do. Some parents never say no to their children about anything because they can't stand the feeling it generates in them. Some people feel really horribly about themselves and form a totally untrue perception of themselves from it. Some kill themselves. Feelings are wonderful things but they are not valid indicators of what is true or right. You **cannot** trust your feelings. But:

3. feelings do respond to the mind and will in the following pattern: They can be changed. Bad emotions, wrong feelings can be removed. And good feelings can be generated. But it happens this way and you can trace it in examples in your own life and try it experimentally. It works. First:

a. I learn that something is true: *fact* To change my feelings, I begin with my mind, with knowing something. I learn factually that something is true. Let's take assurance of salvation as an example. How do I get the feeling of assurance that I'm saved? Well, first I read in the Bible that "He who has the Son has eternal life." I know that I've accepted Christ. I know I'm depending on Him to save me. And now I learn that the Bible says I have eternal life. Then:

b. I believe that it is true: *faith* I choose to accept the truth of what I know, to commit myself to depend on it. That's faith. I choose to trust that the Bible is true and it says I am saved, so I am saved. I believe it. Now I may not feel like it yet or even if I do, tomorrow morning I may not, however:

c. I act as though it is true: *obedience* I call myself a Christian. I come to the Father and pray in the name of Jesus as a Christian. I read the Bible and apply the promises for Christians to me. I testify that I am a Christian and live as one, even though I may feel nothing at all. That's obedience, choosing to act on what I believe to be true. And a funny thing happens. Gradually:

d. I begin to feel that it is true: *feelings* I start to feel saved. Feelings often follow. When the mind is set on truth and the will has chosen to accept and act on it, the emotions often line up, but even if they don't or if at some point circumstances happen and feelings change, the facts and the truth don't change and I can't allow feelings to overrule my mind and will in determining my actions.

Now let's move to the particular feeling or emotion of guilt which we want to consider today. It is that feeling of shame and regret and awfulness which results from feeling responsible for something bad. We all know what it feels like. We all experience it. We all need to deal with it in our lives. But before we can, we need to make a serious:

II. A Consideration Of The Reasons For Feeling Guilty Remember I told you feelings lie? Sometimes in life my feelings will lie to me and tell me I am guilty when I am not guilty. Sometimes this will happen when:

1. I have a wrong view of my situation: *I feel I'm responsible when I'm not* For example, I give my son the keys to the car and send him to the store and on the way the car slips on a patch of ice and he has a wreck and gets injured or killed. What happens? I feel responsible. In fact, I take responsibility that is not really mine. I feel guilty. Am I? Probably not, not unless conditions were horrible out and I knew it and was lazy and forced him to go when he begged me not to because he was scared! Accidents happen and I cannot control them nor protect my children totally, no matter how careful I am. I'm not responsible but my emotions are angry and need to blame somebody and will try to make me feel I am. Or it may be that:

2. I have a wrong view of myself: *I feel I'm sinful when I'm not* Something happens and I feel guilty even though I have no direct connection. I start searching my life to find out all the wrong things in it and start saying, "I should have done this or that" or "if only I had done this..." I see myself as a basically guilty person. I've been told from little on up that things are wrong with me. I've been criticized in everything I ever did or been told I was a bad kid or a failure. And for years I've been hearing about what a sinner I am in church and singing "for such a worm as I". And so, I feel sinful, even when I haven't done anything at all. Or it may be that:

3. I have a wrong view of God: *I feel He's punishing me when He isn't* Along the way I got the message that God is in the business of blessing people who are good and punishing people who are bad. So, when bad things happen, I feel God must be punishing me and I start searching my life for secret sins I don't know about. I see God as this Heavenly Taskmaster I have to please and I just know I haven't pleased Him. And then three friends come along and tell me that must be why all my children died and all my camels and oxen and sheep were stolen and I got sick. You know the story!

You see, dealing with the feeling of guilt begins with the mind, with looking truthfully and honestly at the situation and seeing whether you have sinned. And God has equipped you in that regard. He gave you the Holy Spirit and one of His functions is to make you aware of it when you sin (conviction). When you sin, you generally know it and usually instantly! God is not in the business of punishing His children for things they don't know they've done wrong. What kind of Father would He be? And it may be that after careful consideration and maybe you even need to talk with others about it, you can see that the truth is that you're not guilty even though you feel guilty. Then you can go the route above: The Bible says I'm not guilty; I am a child of God; I am a saint not a worthless sinner; I've been made holy; I love God; and I believe the Bible; I'm not guilty and I'm going to choose to act like I'm not guilty. Too bad, emotions; tough luck! And if you take that stance continually with your mind and will, your guilty feelings will change eventually and you will know freedom and joy instead of guilt. However, if I am honest, there are many times in my life when I feel guilty because:

4. I am actually guilty of sin: *I have sinned and I know it* I know what I've done and when I did it and have felt guilty from the moment I did it. That's real guilt that comes from the Holy Spirit, not the false guilt we've been talking about. And here's where we take some:

III. Lessons From David On Feeling Genuine Guilt In Psalm 32 If you ask me, Ps. 32 follows Ps. 51 in David's life. David committed a great sin in adulterous affair with Bathsheba and subsequently arranging the deliberate death of her husband Uriah to cover it up. He hid this and sat on it for a long time, at least 9 months. He married her and the child was born before Nathan the prophet walked up and pointed his finger at David and said, "You are the man!" Ps. 51 is his prayer of confession, where you really see his heart and his sorrow for sin. But I believe he wrote Ps. 32 after that as a maskil, a teaching Psalm, to explain what happened to him and to help others learn from it how to handle guilt when they sin. Having experienced complete forgiveness for that great sin, he begins by sharing the joy of knowing God's forgiveness and from our New Testament perspective what he's sharing is exactly:

1. the truth of your blessed condition in Christ (1-2) The Hebrew word *blessed* here (*esher*) means *happy*, full of joy and bliss. It's an emotional word. The man who feels happiness and joy is the man who knows he's been forgiven! The emotion of joy comes to those who know the fact of forgiveness. And what David knew about himself in that moment is exactly what is ALWAYS true of you in Jesus Christ:

a. your sins have been carried away *Forgiven* means *to lift up and throw away*. They are removed from you. You don't have to carry them anymore. That's because:

b. your sins have been atoned for They've been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. The penalty of death and separation from God which you deserved because of them has been taken by Him and paid completely. So:

c. your sins are not counted against you by God You are no longer under condemnation for them; they are not on your account with Him. The slate has been wiped clean because they were put on Christ's account. And get this:

d. your spirit has no deceit in it That is literally true of you. You've been given a new spirit by Christ and the old sinful one is gone. Your spirit is holy and pure and righteous like God. You don't like to sin; you hate sin. You are a saint, even though the presence of sin still dwells in your body and you sometimes yield to it and sin. That's the truth of God about you. Knowing that truth, believing it, and acting on it, will eventually produce the joy and happiness David was feeling. That was David's normal state before Bathsheba and then again after confessing his sin in Ps. 51, but look at:

2. the feelings you experience when you choose to sin and harbor it (3-4) When you choose with your will to not live like what you are (a saint) and to commit sin and then to either continue in it or harbor it you experience:

a. mental anguish: caused by a conflicting array of thoughts and emotions David felt mental anguish, emotional misery, deep feelings. There was a war going on inside his mind all those months. There were thoughts of what he had done, how he could have done it, of what he deserved, of what could happen to him if it came out and a hundred other things. You too will feel that emotional pain. And with it will come:

b. fixation: inability to put it out of mind Day and night, all the time. No way to forget, no way to be distracted for more than a moment, no way to escape. Even in your dreams at night. And the result of it will be:

c. exhaustion: physical and mental weariness from dealing with it You'll get tired and weary and depressed. You see, we often think that it didn't really bother David until Nathan showed up. That's not so. His life was miserable. Feelings of guilt overwhelmed him and no matter how much he rationalized his actions, nothing would take it away. That is until he took:

3. the steps you must take to remove the feeling of guilt (5) First:

a. you must decide to stop hiding or ignoring what you have done When Nathan's finger was in his face, David knew that God knew and that people knew and that the jig was up and he decided not to hide or deny it. His first words were a confession, "I have sinned..." Hopefully it won't take that for you, but it begins with the same decision: I am going to deal with this thing I've done up front, no matter what it takes.

b. you must admit openly to God what you have done like David did. Now obviously God already knows; you're not telling Him anything new. But you need the experience of doing it, of acknowledging openly to God exactly what you did. That step in itself is so freeing, to come clean, to have nothing hidden any longer, no skeletons in your closet to cover up.

c. you must confess the sinful nature of what you have done You must agree with God that it was an act of transgression, of rebellion. It was evil, sinful, and wrong. No sugar-coating or rationalizing excuses as to why you did it. And when you have done this:

d. you can then experience the feeling of guilt removed Now I say that carefully because I need to make a point. How many of your sins are forgiven right now? How many of them did Jesus pay for? ALL of them. The cross took care of all your sins, past, present, and future. For the believer, then, confession does not procure forgiveness. If you die with unconfessed sin in your life, you will still go to heaven. Why? Because it is Jesus' life and His death which save you, not your constant confession of sins. When your child disobeys you, when is he forgiven? When he comes and apologizes? No, he's forgiven already. The apology and confession isn't for you, is it? It doesn't vindicate you or give you gratification. He needs it! The relationship is already there from your end, but he has put up a wall that keeps him fully from you that he needs to take down by confession! And that's how it is with you and God. When you sin, you put up a wall, you shut Him out, cut off His power and closeness and intimacy in your life. And that's why you experience all the emotional misery and guilt. But confession tears down that wall, opens the door and brings the experience of feeling that guilt removed. Listen to:

4. God's admonition to His children when they are guilty (8-10) He says:

a. I will give you insight to understand your situation - instruct you

b. I will give you direction to choose which way to go - teach you

c. I will give you counsel to know what to do

d. I will give you careful attention All of these are things God wants to do for you daily. He stands waiting to keep you from ever making a wrong step, from ever choosing to sin. He'll help you have insight and direction and know just what action to take every moment. His eye will be on you, literally. But listen to His warning:

e. come to Me willingly; don't make Me force you by feelings or circumstances! Don't be like the horse or the mule! LuAnn's sister has horses. If they're out in the pasture and don't want to come into the barn, you can chase them all over until you drop or if you get smart you wiggle a feed can. They need to be physically bridled or roped to get them to come to you. I had a dog like that. If you let him loose, he'd stay nearby to walk as far as you wanted, but get within sight of home and you could yell until you were blue in the face to get him to come and he wouldn't come. You had to put a rope on him long before he knew he was home or he wouldn't come to you. God says, "My child, don't be like that. When you sin, when you blow it, and you will, don't make Me have to control you by circumstances and let tough things happen to drive you back to me. Don't make Me have to make you miserable emotionally until you can't stand it anymore to get you to come to Me! Come to me right away! Come to Me (verse 6 literally) in a time of *finding*, in the time when you find yourself in the situation. Come right away. And when you do, I will take away that guilt you feel." Just look at:

5. the feelings that will follow from timely confession You'll have:

a. a sense of security (6b-7), a sense of shelter and protection, a confidence that God is for you and He's with you, on your side as you face trouble. You'll have:

b. a sense of being loved (10) You'll sense His love all over again, feel surrounded by it. You'll trust Him completely once again and sense His great love sweeping over you. And you'll have:

c. a sense of joy (11) You'll sing and rejoice like David did. Your heart will overflow when you realize and accept and act on the truth that you are already forgiven, that your sins have been paid for, and will never be counted against you by God, that you are holy.

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 42 - When I Feel Forgotten Or Forsaken

"God doesn't care. He has forgotten about me. He has left me all alone. I can't find Him. I don't know where He is or why He doesn't do something. He has rejected me!" Those are words I made up. But they reflect real words that I have heard believers say over the past 20 years a number of times. They describe an emotion, a deep feeling that I hope you never have to deal with, but one which in reality I know that some of you are dealing with right now and some of you have dealt with for years, perhaps much of your life. It is a feeling that Jesus knew and expressed from the cross when He cried, *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* It is the feeling of being forgotten or forsaken by the very God who saved you. Now before we look at how to deal with that feeling, let me give you a quick:

I. A Reminder Of The Biblical Pattern For Dealing With Feelings Remember I told you that you can't control your feelings outright. They only change in response to your mind and will in this pattern:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. I learn that something is true: | <i>fact</i> |
| 2. I believe that it is true: | <i>faith</i> |
| 3. I act as though it is true: | <i>obedience</i> |
| 4. I begin to feel that it is true: | <i>feelings</i> |

And so, in dealing with this feeling, we start with #1. We use our minds to examine the facts. Am I forsaken or forgotten or am I not? Are my feelings accurate or are they lying to me and I proceed from there down the path. This is an emotion that the writers of the Psalms often expressed; they are full of statements of people feeling forgotten and forsaken. One of the most well-known Psalms like this is Ps. 42. And I believe you'll get much more out of it if you consider with me for a minute:

II. The Background Of The Psalm It helps your understanding of what's going on a great deal if you can identify:

1. the occasion of the psalmist's writing Sometimes the occasion is identified in the heading along with the author but in this case, it isn't, so we have to try to figure out what we can from the content. There are four things you can see about the author of this Psalm:

a. he used to lead public worship and festal processions (4) There was a time when he used to be the leader of worship at God's house in Jerusalem. That makes him a very important person and perhaps the king. But:

b. he is now cut off from access to God's house (4) He is removed from his position. He can't go there and do that anymore. Further:

c. he is oppressed by enemies and taunted by them (9-10) He is in a situation where his enemies have gained victory over him. He has been defeated and now they are taunting him about his trust in God. And here's the clincher:

d. he is across the Jordan and in sight of Mt. Hermon (6) He reveals his physical location as being across the Jordan river and being at least within sight of Mt. Hermon, which is way to the North, almost to Syria. This puts him somewhere in what is called the land of Gilead as he writes. Now let me make a:

Suggestion: It is David who has fled during Absalom's rebellion - 2 Sam. 16-18. David used to lead public worship all the time in Jerusalem. He loved to dance before the ark of the Lord and all the people, to lead the procession. But his own son Absalom plotted with other men who were close to him and gradually stole the hearts of the people away from him. Then they led a rebellion. They gathered an army larger than David's own troops who were with him and marched on Jerusalem to kill him and take his throne. David was forced to flee. Where? Across the Jordan river. On the way he was taunted by Shimei who threw dirt at him and called him a bloody man. He and the men with him set up headquarters in Mahanaim, 50 miles north, and Absalom and his troops encamp in the land of Gilead. I believe this Psalm is the record of David's feelings on that dark occasion in his life, when he is still across Jordan in exile, before the battle has been fought, his whole life having crashed down around him. And in his situation, I can see:

2. the situation that makes me feel forgotten and forsaken by God

a. he was driven from his home and kingdom He had lost everything. And the time when I feel forgotten and forsaken by God is often **when I experience loss**. Somebody I love dies; my business folds; I lose my job; a fire destroys my home; my child is in a tragic accident or develops a terrible illness. When I have everything, I feel blessed by God, but when I lose it, I feel like He's forgotten me or forsaken me.

b. his own son, friends, and subjects turned against him Absalom his son, Ahithophel his best friend, his own subjects and troops who were loyal to him and applauded him now sought to kill him. He's been betrayed and **when I experience betrayal** is often when I feel forgotten or forsaken. When my spouse divorces me or my friend hurts me and takes advantage of me or my pastor or others I look to for spiritual leadership hurt me or forget me, I feel abandoned by God. When people who should care don't care, I begin to feel God doesn't either.

c. he was taunted by his enemies (3, 10) Whether he could physically hear them, like he did Shimei when he crossed the river, or not, he could hear them in his mind, "Where is your God whom you trusted and praised so highly now!" They had the upper hand. His wicked son was sitting on the throne where he should have been. It wasn't right. He was defeated and that's when I feel God's left me: **when I experience defeat**, when I lose the race, when I fail the course, when others who don't deserve it take my rightful place, when the world seems topsy-turvy and there is no justice, then I feel so alone.

d. his life was in danger He didn't know what the future held. The troops with Absalom were far greater than his own. His life was in question. The time **when I experience fear** is often when I feel God has left me. When I'm afraid, when terror has struck me, when I think I might die or someone I love might die. How do you think our brethren in Liberia and places like that feel where they live every day in danger of dying? It can easily lead to this feeling of forsakenness.

Now let's go to the Psalm and examine more closely:

III. Some Feelings That Lead To The Conclusion Of Forsakenness

1. I long to sense God's presence but I don't (1-2) These verses are often lauded as the way a believer **ought** to feel, longing intensely for God but in reality, they're a complaint! David's sense of God's presence with him has evaporated and he longs for it like a deer that can't find water and is ravaged with thirst and brays or squeals for it. Saints of God have testified over the years of times when they feel like the heavens are brass, like their prayers are unheard, They have no sense of God's presence at all, no matter how much they long for it. Maybe you have felt that.

2. I am impatient to see God work but I can't (2b) Literally, "when can I come before His face". It feels like God isn't doing anything, isn't paying any attention, isn't seeing me and I'm impatient for it to end. I desperately want to see Him do something and He isn't. He can't love me; He can't care!

3. I am sorrowful but nothing seems to comfort me (3a) I cry day and night; I am sad over the things that have happened. But nothing brings me comfort. There is no relief. Nothing makes me feel better.

4. I am angry that things are not right but they don't change (3b, 10) My enemies are prospering and doing well. They are taunting me and making fun of me for trusting God. And I am angry, angry at them, angry at God for letting me be like this and not pulling me out, and just angry at the way things are but they don't change!

5. I miss the way things used to be but can't bring them back (4) I remember the good times, the good things, the joy, the happiness that used to be mine that I thought indicated God's presence. I long for the time before my problems happened, before tragedy hit but I can't go back.

6. I feel depressed and despairing (5a, 6a, 11a) My soul is downcast, low. I live in a mental cloud of darkness. I feel like there is no hope, no use. And

7. I feel inner turmoil and confusion (5a, 11a) I'm worked up, in turmoil. I have conflicting feelings. I love God but I'm angry at Him; I loved the people who hurt me. I'm mixed up. I feel like crying, fleeing, and fighting all at the same time. And:

8. I feel overwhelmed by my circumstances (7) I feel like I am adrift in the ocean and the waves are violently crashing over me repeatedly and no matter how hard I swim I can't stay above them. They pummel me one after the other. And so:

9. I feel like it's God's fault and complain to Him (9) "Why God, Why? Where are you? What are you doing? Why would you do this to me?" I put up this wall between God and I and feel like He's in the wrong and has to answer to me. By the way, if that's how you feel, you might as well tell Him so. That in itself is not bad. God has big enough shoulders for all the complaints and accusations of His children and He loves them anyway.

But the miraculous thing is that, even in the midst of this dark night of David's soul, he was still aware of the truth. He was able to differentiate how he was feeling from what was actually true. And the first step in dealing with that feeling of being forsaken or forgotten is to examine:

IV. The Truth Which The Bible Declares (8) There are three facts which David still recognized in the moments when he wasn't overwhelmed by emotion:

1. God is the God of my life He is the one who gives me life, who sustains my life, and who controls my life. He is absolutely in charge of everything that is happening to me. In fact, from our New Testament perspective, He IS my life. He gave His life to me by putting His life in me so that His life has become my life. Our lives are joined as one common life. I have no other life but His, so if His presence was taken out of me, I would fall over dead! If He forsook me or left me or even forgot me, I would not be! He can't do those things and so even though my feelings tell me that God has abandoned me:

a. I am not forsaken - Heb. 13:5-6 is God's promise. Read it. No matter what my circumstances say, no matter what my feelings say, no matter what my enemies say, GOD has said He will never leave me alone without His presence and He will never abandon me. I don't need to be afraid. He is right here and right inside me. That's the truth. And so is this:

b. I am not forgotten - Isaiah 49:14-16 Is it possible for a mother to forget the baby she has borne whom she nurses continually? It is absolutely against nature! Yet read the newspaper; it happens. But God can't forget the child He has borne. He can't forget you or stop loving you or caring about your life and situation. He has engraved you on the palms of His hands. Where? At the cross! When they drove those nails, the prints stayed, even in Jesus' glorified body. He will never forget why He died; He died for YOU. To forget you, He'd have to forget Calvary, to forget all the agony He suffered to give you life. He can't! That's the truth. And so is this fact from verse 8:

2. He directs His love toward me continually - He commands His love toward me; that is, He controls everything that happens to me out of His love. And nothing, nothing that happens indicates that He has stopped loving me. In fact, **Rom. 8:35-39** declares that there is nothing in the entire creation, not death, not the devil, not circumstances, nothing can separate me from His love and make Him stop loving me! Feelings lie! That's the truth whether I feel it or not! And here's another thing David recognized:

3. He puts His song in me even in the darkest circumstances Even out there in the land of Gilead in the dark of the night, David had an inner urging to sing God's song, to praise Him. So did Paul and Silas at midnight in the Philippian jail. The truth is that even when you are complaining on the outside, inside your spirit is still joined to Him and it still knows His love and still wants to praise Him. Corrie Ten Boom could praise God in the midst of a Nazi prison camp for the fleas because His song was in her even in her dark night of the soul.

Now these things are the truth. They are facts. You need to know them. Your mind needs to understand them and be clear about them. One reason you may feel forgotten or forsaken is because along the way you may have been taught or told that God does that to people. You may have been given a wrong picture of God. You may be living in the fear that you can lose your salvation and God will leave you. That's a lie. The truth is that God can no more leave you than you can leave yourself; you are ONE. You need to know that with your mind. And once you do, here's the process of:

V. Dealing With The Feeling Of Forgottenness (5,11) It is repeated twice as a refrain in this Psalm and once in Ps. 43. Step one is this:

1. remember the fact of who God is and what He's like (6) You must make a conscious choice to think, to reason, to evaluate what you know. You must remember the truth that we've just shared. You must choose to acknowledge the truth: God is with me; He does love me; He is right here and He cares about me. And then you follow the pattern. You:

2. decide with your will to trust God and wait upon Him You use your will. You choose to believe what you know. That's faith. You say, "I choose to believe that God is with me and He loves me and that He has ordered even these horrible circumstances out of His love for me. Hang my feelings. Hang what others say. I choose with my will to believe the truth and therefore I choose to obey Him and to act like He loves me, to act like He cares whether I feel like it or not. I will sit here and acknowledge His love in my misery as long as He wants. I will wait for whatever He wants to do." And the crowning act of that will be this: you:

3. continue to praise Him in spite of your feelings Don't take the "yet" as being at some future time. Read it this way, "still". I will STILL, even here, even beyond Jordan with my life in a shamble, praise Him. Let that song in the night out and sing it. Begin to praise God even in the midst of your difficulty and even **for** your difficulty! **1 Thes. 5:18** (read it) says this is what God commands you. It is His will. It is what He wants you to do. Give thanks as an act of obedience to Him by faith whether you feel like it or not. And as you do, guess what!

Gradually your feelings will change. Oh, your circumstances may not change and some of the misery and pain you feel may not change, but the feeling of being forsaken and forgotten will go and in its place will come a wonderful thing, the peace of God that passes all human understanding. Paul wrote in Phil. 4 that if you stop worrying and pray in all circumstances WITH THANKSGIVING the very peace that God has about the world will guard your heart. You will sense in the midst of your adversity His love and care and your darkness will change into dawning. But when that feeling of forsakenness or forgottenness comes, you have a choice to make. Whether you choose to wallow in it or to deal with it is up to you. *Two children were playing on a hillside, when they noticed that the hour was nearing sunset, and one said, wonderingly: "See how far the sun has gone! A little while ago it was right over that tree, and now it is low down in the sky." "Only it isn't the sun that moves; it's the earth. You know, Father told us," answered the other. The first one shook his head. The sun did move for he had been standing on the earth all the time. "I know what I see," he said triumphantly. "And I believe Father," said his brother. Those two kids are all of us. We can choose to accept only what our senses reveal to us, or we can choose to believe Father. And that makes all the difference in the world.*

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 55 - When I Feel Betrayed

Betrayal. It's not a pleasant thing but it's something we all experience. It comes in varying degrees. Some of you know the feeling of betrayal that goes through your heart like a dagger when you find your wife in the arms of another man. Someone recently told me how their close friend of two years went to the realtor who was trying to sell their home and conspired with him to get it for less than it was worth by several thousand dollars and how much that hurt. Some of you parents have felt the betrayal of having your own child steal from you or lie to you and maybe there are those who have felt the awful betrayal of having a parent or some adult you trusted abuse you physically or sexually. Some of you have felt the betrayal of being left standing holding onto an empty promise that the maker never intended to keep in the first place and realizing he was just using you. Or it may have been simply the angry outburst of a friend toward you which revealed some true inner feelings they'd been harboring. Betrayal comes in all shapes and sizes, but there's one thing for sure; it comes to all of us. There will be times in your life when you will know what it's like to feel betrayed. Now as we begin, let me remind you once more of:

I. A Reminder Of The Biblical Pattern For Dealing With Feelings

1. I learn that something is true: **fact**
2. I believe that it is true: **faith**
3. I act as though it is true: **obedience**
4. I begin to feel that it is true: **feelings**

That is the only way to deal with any feeling or emotion you have, including betrayal. Now betrayal was not a foreign emotion to the writers of Scripture. In Ps. 55 we find David talking about his own feelings of betrayal and how he dealt with them at a particular time in his life. To appreciate it fully, however, we'll begin by looking at:

II. The Setting Of The Psalm We know David wrote it and that he recorded it for teaching purposes to benefit us. But notice three things. It comes from a time in his life when:

1. evil forces are in control of the city of Jerusalem (9-11) Second, it is a time when:

2. David is thinking about fleeing to the wilderness (6-7), about hiding in the desert. Now these two things could have been true of the years he spent hiding from Saul except there is a third circumstance:

3. he has been betrayed by a close friend and companion (13-14) This is why I would suggest this Psalm comes from the time:

During Absalom's rebellion when David is betrayed by Ahithophel Look with me at - **2 Samuel 15:12, 30-31; 16:23** Not only did David find out that his own son Absalom had risen up to rebel against him, but he found that his own right-hand man, his most trusted royal advisor and counsellor, Ahithophel, had betrayed him and joined up with his son. This is no doubt the prayer David prayed while trudging along, fleeing toward the desert to escape Absalom but now written down and polished a bit to be used to instruct all those who feel like this. Now in it, David describes very clearly many of:

III. The Feelings That Come With Betrayal (1-11)

1. there is often great bewilderment (1-3) Confusion is part of the pain of betrayal. I become troubled and distraught because I can't understand how this can be, how someone who has loved me (so I thought) can act this way to me, how it is that I didn't recognize the truth about this person and was so foolish as to trust them. There is confusion:

a. because of what the betrayer is saying about me Here is my dear friend Ahithophel giving Absalom advice on how to KILL me! He used to call me friend but now he's reviling me and cursing me. How can that come out of the same mouth that used to say, "I love you; I care about you?" And there is confusion:

b. because of what the betrayer is doing to me No doubt Ahithophel and David had planned many a military campaign; they had strategized many a move against the Philistines or the Ammonites. And now Ahithophel was doing the same to him, strategizing to kill him! How can your trusted close friend who used to help you now intentionally hurt you? It defies human understanding to think that a person with a close relationship to us is capable of betraying us. Yet it happens. So, we experience confusion. Then:

2. there is often great anguish (4a) It hurts. Oh, how it hurts. It grieves you in the depths of your heart. It's much worse than physical pain because no medicine can take it away; no physician can relieve it. It is a wound of the human spirit that must be felt and only God can heal.

3. there is often great fear (4b-5) David is obviously afraid for his life in that situation because of Absalom's army which is after him. But there is another dimension to the fear that David knows. "If people like my own son and my own trusted companion will turn on me, who can I trust? Who else has lurking evil motives? Can I really trust anyone?" People who have been deeply hurt and betrayed often become deathly afraid of trusting anybody and of building any relationships because of the fear of betrayal. They often feel so alone, have intense loneliness out of their betrayal experience.

4. there is often a great desire to escape (6-8), to run away, to just quit all your circumstances in life and find some safe place where you'll never be hurt again. The only trouble is that there isn't such a place and even if there was, the hurt would follow you there! You'd still feel it and have to deal with it.

5. there is often a great desire for revenge (9-11, 15) David was not above voicing what was in his heart. He prayed for Ahithophel to be confused or confounded in his thinking. We already read that prayer in 2 Samuel. But he also prayed that Ahithophel would die! Now listen, don't expect David to be a New Testament Christian and love his enemies with the love of Christ. He did rise to that on occasion, but here he's just honestly expressing to God his desire for revenge, for justice to be done, to see his newly-revealed enemy get what he deserves! If we're honest, we've felt like that. We may not have had the guts to pray like that, but we've felt it! Oh, how many injured spouses do I hear that attitude from, bitterness, anger, the desire for revenge. It's all part of feeling betrayed. Now let's talk about:

IV. The Hurt That Comes With Betrayal (12-21) Why does it hurt so much to be betrayed? Why is the anguish so great? Well, for four reasons:

1. your relationship has been violated (12-13) Here was a person you considered your peer, who was like you, whose heart was like yours, so you thought. You trusted him; you confided in him. You gave yourself to him; you bared your thoughts and feelings to him. And he violated it all! It meant so much to you and yet it meant nothing to him. The whole relationship the two of you had was a lie! It is almost easier to break a relationship than to find out that there never really was one at all; it was all one-sided!

2. your fellowship has been violated (14) Ahithophel and David used to worship God together, to pray and praise together. They were kindred spirits spiritually and David enjoyed sweet fellowship around the things of God with him. But Ahithophel violated it. It wasn't real. It was put on. That love for God which seemed so genuinely like yours wasn't real at all. And that hurts:

3. your trust has been violated (20) The promises you made to one another, the vows you took which to you were sacred and binding, which you would have kept at any cost, even the laying down of your life for the other, he violated. He broke them, every one. You trusted him and he not only let you down but stepped on you after you fell. You feel like an idiot for believing him.

4. your picture of reality has been violated (21) Things are not really the way you thought they were. You've been deceived into a picture of reality that is just not true. Your world as you knew it has just been blown apart by a traitorous act. It's shattered like a dropped Christmas ball.

And the worst part of all this is that feelings of betrayal can affect your relationship with God; you begin to feel that He's betrayed you as well. It's really easy to blame Him for not preventing it, for not revealing it to you, for allowing it to happen. It's really easy to feel all those same feelings of confusion, lack of trust, and even anger towards God Himself, simply because your pain is so deep instead of turning to Him for help. So just how do you go about:

V. Dealing With The Feeling Of Betrayal (22-23) Well, it begins by sealing deep within your mind:

1. the facts you must know David knew them and in the moments when he was thinking clearly, he could recite them. He included them in the end of this Psalm so he could teach them to you. First of all, know this:

a. God will always supply what you need (22b) - He will sustain you. Yes, you have been betrayed; yes, you have been wounded, hurt deeply. Yes, you have been violated and your world has been shattered. But God WILL sustain you! He will supply whatever grace is needed for you to get you through this horrible time. I found some neat verses the other day, **Is. 46:3-4**. Do you hear it? God has sustained you from the moment of your conception; He has sustained you from the time of your birth even until now and He's going to continue to sustain you until the day you die! He'll carry you if He has to. He'll rescue you if He has to. The time when you're betrayed is not the time to turn away from Him but the time to turn toward Him all the more because:

b. He will never let you down (22c) He'll never let you drop or fall. Listen to **Ps. 27:10**. It doesn't matter who betrays you, who hurts you, even if it's your closest friend, your spouse, even your own father or mother. When those dearest to you on earth cut you loose, God will gather you to Himself. He will be there with waiting arms to catch you. He will be a father to the fatherless and a husband to the widow. Listen, you who have been betrayed; God is there for you to be everything you need. He will sustain you by His grace through this time. And also know this:

c. He will deal with the wicked (19, 23a) Rom. 12:19 puts it more clearly. Justice is not your business. The pay-back for sin, the penalty for sin is not yours to mete out. It belongs to Almighty God and He WILL repay in due time. Understand this: Nobody on earth gets away with anything. It may look like it. It may seem like it. It may seem like they can hurt you and walk away scot free. But that's not true. If they are a believer, God will deal with them. He can't allow His child to harbor sin. He loves them and He will discipline them in His own time and way. If they are not a believer, there is a judgment to face. All sin is dealt with. It's either nailed to the cross and forgiven or it's penalty is meted out in the lake of fire. But God has reserved the right to deal with acts of sin to Himself. It is not your business!

These facts you must know. Now here's:

2. the faith you must exercise: cast your situation upon the Lord (22a) Literally, throw it over onto Him. **Ps. 37:5** says, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him." The idea is that of taking the weight that you are carrying and heaving it off of you and onto Him. How do you do that?

a. call to Him continually (16-17) Morning, night, and noon you cry out to Him. You take the hurt and the pain and the problems that have been created right to His throne. The moment the hurt comes back, the thought comes again, you immediately take it to Him and you do it again and again and again. And as you do, you:

b. count on Him completely (23b) You place your trust, not in your own strength to somehow get through this thing and tough it out, but in His sustaining grace to carry you! You admit your own insufficiency; you say, "Lord, I'm crushed. I'll never make it through this. You have to carry me. I trust you. I believe you will sustain me!"

That's exercising faith. It's also being obedient. It's a command, an imperative: CAST your burden! Do it! Don't carry it yourself! Trust God! And when you KNOW the facts and BELIEVE and OBEY by rolling the whole situation over onto God, look at:

3. the feeling that will come: confidence (18) In spite of the hurt he is feeling, David is also feeling an absolute confidence in God and His sustaining power, that no matter who or what betrays him, God will sustain Him. Another name for that would be the peace of God that passes understanding. Now let me show you:

4. the process reiterated in 1 Pet. 5:6-11 This pattern is true for any suffering you must endure, and, of course, it fits betrayal. First:

a. accept this as from God's hand (6) Instead of complaining and rebelling against God, humbly accept that God has allowed this trial into your life for a reason. And then:

b. throw the weight of it upon Him (7) All the concern, all the weight, all the fear, all the worry, all the anxiety, cast it all on the One who cares for you. And:

c. be careful that Satan does not take advantage of you through it (8) Recognize that Satan wants to use this hurt you're feeling to take advantage of you and hurt you more and ruin you. Determine not to listen to his suggestions of hate and revenge and bitterness, even for a moment. Instead count on this:

d. God will eventually do a work in you through it (10) He will restore you; He will strengthen you; He will make you firm; He will make you steadfast. He has all the power and He will sustain you and bring you through it standing.

In closing, I'd like to remind you of just one thing. For those of you who may be wallowing in the hurt today and wondering if even God understands the pain you're feeling, just close your eyes and picture the cross. See Jesus hanging there in agony, dying. See the Father in Heaven weeping as His Son suffers. And listen to these words from John 1:10-11, *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* He was betrayed. Matt 21:33-39 says, *Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.* The Father was betrayed. And then listen to Jesus Himself hanging there in the words of Psalm 55:12-14, *If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, Judas, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.* He says, "I have been betrayed. I will cast my burden on the Lord and He will sustain me." And then He says, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit!" Yes, my friend, God knows what you're feeling. He has felt it. Jesus knows what you're feeling. He has felt it. He cast His burden on the Lord. What will you do with yours?

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 56 - When I Feel Afraid

If you would be honest, there is not a person in this room who has not experienced fear at some point in our lives. Some of you have known the horrors of war and what it is to be afraid for your life. Some have known the fear that comes when the doctor says the word cancer or the fear that comes when the ambulance carries off your husband or wife into the night with the lights flashing. We experience all kinds of fears. In fact, fear is such a common and varied emotion that it's kind of hard to define. After I struggled at it awhile, I came up with a pretty good definition:

FEAR IS a sensing (real or supposed) that I am going to be hurt:

- which creates a state of mental dread
- and impairs my ability to think and act properly

Fear is a very intense emotion. When I sense that I am going to be hurt in some way, I begin to anticipate it, to dread it, to long for it not to happen and that begins to impair my judgment, my ability to think clearly and correctly about the situation. And I begin to act on the basis of my feeling of dread. If that is the case, I may make all kinds of wrong choices. I may simply freeze in panic and endanger myself or others or I may flee the scene wildly. Fear is a crippler, a controlling emotion. It tries to rule and reign in me and if I allow it to, of course, it takes over the control that Christ wants to have in my life. So, when I'm afraid, I've got to deal with that emotion. Now let me give you a quick:

I. A Reminder Of The Biblical Pattern For Dealing With Feelings

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. I learn that something is true: | fact |
| 2. I believe that it is true: | faith |
| 3. I act as though it is true: | obedience |
| 4. I begin to feel that it is true: | feelings |

Ps. 56 comes from a special time in David's life when he knew fear in a very real way. The inscription tells us that it comes from the time when the Philistines had seized him in Gath. The tune it was given is interestingly enough called literally "a silent dove in far off places". David found himself helpless as a little dove in a land far away from any help and he knew fear. Let's turn to:

II. The Story Behind The Psalm - 1 Samuel 21:10-22:1 You may want to read it as I tell it to you. You see, at this time in his life Saul was trying to kill David. He was forced to leave his home and had only a few men with him and no weapons. So:

- 1. David was afraid of Saul and fled to the Philistines: a human idea** Since Saul was king over the entire land of Israel, David might hide out from him but the only permanent solution was to get out of their territory. So, he figured he would defect to one of Saul's enemies, who would see it as a great thing to have Saul's own chief general come over to them. But it didn't work that way.

2. Their king, Achish seized David: a terrifying experience David had forgotten the minor fact that he was personally responsible for the deaths of thousands of Philistines. He was their enemy. He might have been willing to go and stay with them, but they were not ready to have him. So they seized him. What a terrifying thing! To be in the hands of your enemies! Of course:

3. David was afraid: the feeling we're dealing with today Verse 12 says literally that he was exceedingly afraid. He was terrified. Because he was afraid of Saul, he had not thought clearly and now his life was forfeit. There was no defense and no way out. We are not told how long he was in Philistine custody, probably from the moment he crossed the border and said, "Take me to your leader". Though the text makes it seem like it was only momentary, from Ps. 56 I have the idea it may have been much longer. He may have been in custody for some time before being brought to Achish. He was terror stricken. Yet on this occasion he knew what to do. Instead of trying to fix it on his own, he cried out to God and God gave him a crazy but wonderful idea:

4. David feigned insanity before Achish: a God-given idea He acted like he'd lost his mind and gone insane. He clawed at the gates like a mad dog and drooled all over himself. The ancients took a pretty dim view of mental illness. The mentally ill were not treated very well, often kept hidden away, but at least they were not often killed and certainly not held accountable for their actions. So, the inscription to Ps. 34 tells us:

5. Achish drove David away: a God-given deliverance He said "Get him out of my sight!" When David did it God's way, God delivered him. Now: **Ps. 56 is his prayer during this ordeal; Ps. 34 is his praise afterward.**
So, think of David chained up in the hands of his enemies as we look together at:

III. The Feeling Of Fear I think we all know what fear feels like. But if we analyze it for a moment, I think you'll note that fear is a compound emotion made up of many component parts, which we can see as David tells us how he felt on that occasion. First:

1. there is a component of helplessness and vulnerability (1a) He feels helpless. There is nothing he can do. If God doesn't have mercy on him, there is nothing else he can do. That's a large portion of fear. There's this sense that you are powerless, a helpless victim, absolutely vulnerable. That's one of the most devastating feelings you can have. That's what makes the crime of rape such a devastating thing for a woman. Fear is feeling you have no control, no means to protect yourself against whatever the circumstances are throwing at you.

2. there is a component of hopelessness (1b-2) *All day long...All day long.* "It's not going to stop. I see no light at the end of the tunnel, no hope of a way out. The situation's not going to change, the enemy is too powerful; the circumstances too great." I feel helpless and hopeless. And add to that:

3. there is a component of weariness (5-6) Fear is a wearing thing. You get tired of having to look over your shoulder, tired of having to watch out and be careful, of trying to imagine what's going to happen or when it's going to happen. Fear takes a toll on you; it grinds you down and wears you out. And finally:

4. there is a component of anger and vindictiveness (7) You want to turn the tables. If someone is making you afraid, you want the upper hand over them. You're angry and sense the injustice of the thing you fear and want to get even. Maybe you get angry at God for allowing the danger to come into your life.

So, fear is made up of a mixture of all these things. You feel vulnerable and without hope. You're tired and at the same time angry. Now what are:

IV. The Sources Of Fear What is it that makes us afraid? It may come from many different sources. We may be afraid of someONE:

1. who we are afraid of

a. we are afraid of people - "Fear of man will be a snare" - Prov. 29:25 There may be a person who scares you. It may be an enemy. It may be a boss at work. It may be your own spouse or your own father or mother. It may be an abuser or an attacker. People can control you and manipulate you by making you afraid. Then others of us:

b. we are afraid of God We have what Hebrews refers to as a **"Fearful expectation of judgment" - Heb. 10:27.** We are literally terrified of God and afraid of what He's going to do to us or with us when we meet Him or even now. Satan has enslaved thousands to his schemes through this trick. Make them afraid. Prevent them from understanding the truth and turning to God for salvation. Many Christians are still afraid of God because of the kind of picture their teachers have painted of Him. They only hope to squeak into heaven by the skin of their teeth.

And then we may be afraid of someTHING:

2. what we are afraid of It may be:

a. death - "All [our] lives we were enslaved by fear of death" - Heb. 2:15 The fear of death comes naturally to human beings. Satan has seen to that. The greatest fear that any of us has is the fear of losing our physical life. Satan can have a heyday with that. He keeps millions in slavery to his ways just trying to avoid dying somehow. But we all die. We all have to face it. Or it may be:

b. pain - "A man may be chastened on a bed of pain", Job said (Job 33:19). And some of us can't stand pain. We can't stand to hurt. We absolutely hate to hurt and will go to any length to avoid it because we're afraid of it. Or it may be:

c. loss - "What I feared has come upon me", Job said (Job 3:25). He feared losing his children. They were his greatest love and he prayed for them every day. He feared that something would take them from him and it did. We're afraid of losing our spouse, losing our home, losing our job, of having something of value taken away from us. And sometimes it is:

d. punishment - "Fear has to do with punishment" - 1 Jn. 4:18 We're afraid of the consequences of what we have done. We're afraid of what God's going to allow to happen to us because of our sins or what He's going to do to us if we step out of line and displease Him.

Oh, there are so many ways to be afraid. But mark it down, when you feel afraid, if you live according to your fears, you will be like David. You will not think clearly and fear will control you and Satan will use it to hurt you and destroy you any way he can. When you are afraid, you must deal with it. And that's what this Psalm is really all about:

V. The Process Of Dealing With Fear (3-4, 8-11) We have the same refrain repeated twice in verse 4 and in verses 10-11. When I deal with fear:

1. I call to mind the facts: God's Word When David was terrified, stricken with horror, God called his mind back to the facts, back to the Word. He had loved God's Word all His life. Look at the facts which came to David's mind:

a. God knows what I'm going through (8) Literally it says, "You count or record my wanderings; put my tears in your bottle (NIV margin), are they not in your book?" The ancients sometimes had a tear bottle, a reminder of their sorrows. They would catch their tears as they cried in agony and keep them in a wineskin or later on a glass bottle as a reminder. God has a tear bottle. He has a record of everything you pass through. He knows everything that has befallen you in your wanderings, everything that you're going through, everything you're afraid of. You are not alone and you are not forgotten. And what's more:

b. God is for me (9b) Cross out "by" and "will". This I KNOW: God is FOR ME. That's the bottom-line fact. If you are saved, if you have trusted Christ as your Savior, if you have become a child of God by faith, then know this: God is for you! He's on your side. He loves you. He cares for you. He does not want you to be afraid. Listen to what the New Testament has to say - **Rom. 8:15**. You're not a servant. You're a son. The Spirit God put inside you calls Him Daddy. **2 Tim. 1:7** says it clearly. God hasn't given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind. What does that mean? God put His Holy Spirit inside you and the Holy Spirit is there to provide for you everything you need, power and love and clear thinking! Fear brings powerlessness and punishment and irrationality. But because God put His Spirit in you, you have all His power, you have all His love, and you can have His mind, the very mind of Christ. If you're afraid it isn't from God. In fact, **1 Jn. 4:18** is God's clear statement: there is NO FEAR in love; perfect love casts out fear. God loves you perfectly and there is no fear to be had from Him! He is FOR you, no matter what Satan whispers in your ear, no matter what the circumstances scream or what your enemies taunt. This I know that God is FOR ME! And because of that:

c. nothing can genuinely harm me (11b) Oh, they can kill my body. They can cause me pain but they can't touch the real me, Jesus admonished us in **Lk. 12:4-5**. After killing the body there is no more they can do. Nobody can touch your spirit, the real you. It belongs to God. It's already seated in heaven in Jesus. The real me is not powerless and hopeless. It is invincible. And nothing can take away my hope because God is for me and who can be against me! These are the facts. When I'm afraid, I must return to the facts the Word gives me and then:

2. I exercise faith in the facts: I trust in God (3-4) What does that mean? Well, it means specifically that:

a. I make a deliberate choice to not yield to fear I choose to not live by my feelings, to not live out of fear. I say what David said, "I will not be afraid". That doesn't mean, "I will not FEEL fear" but rather, "I choose not to give myself over to my fears and let fear control me - **Heb. 13:5-6**. You see when I know that God is for me then I make a choice. I boldly and confidently affirm that God is my helper. He will take care of me ultimately and I will not live in fear of what man may do to me. And so:

b. I choose to trust God at the very time I feel fear (3, 9a) The KJV says, "What time I am afraid..." In the day, in the hour, in the moment when I feel fear, I choose to trust God right then and there. How? Instead of running on my fears, I call out to Him. I say, "O Lord, I am feeling afraid, but I will not live by my feelings; right now, I place all of

my confidence and trust in You that you will care for me and do what is best for me and if I perish, I perish and I'll be with You!" And then:

3. I obey God and give thanks regardless of the fear I feel (12) "I am yours, Lord. I belong to you. You bought me. I am ready to do what you want me to do in this situation. Show me what it is. And Lord, I thank you even for this scary thing that you have brought into my life." And once I know the facts that God is for me and nothing can harm me and I choose to trust God to care for me and I choose to obey God and do what's right, even if I feel afraid, gradually a strange thing happens:

4. I begin to feel unafraid (13) Verse 13 more literally says (DBY), "For thou hast delivered my soul from death; [wilt thou] not [keep] my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" David realized, "Lord you've already taken care of my soul; I've already trusted you with that; can't I trust you with my circumstances as well?" His fear began to give way to confidence and listen to **Ps. 34:4-8** which he wrote afterward. Oh, listen to the joy and the utter confidence that came and took away his fear.

Listen, my friend, are you afraid of something today? Is it crippling you and wearing you out? Is controlling your life? Make a decision today not to live in fear but to trust yourself and your situation to God. When your soul is enveloped with Him, there will be no room for fear.

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 60 - When I Feel Defeated

Palm Sunday. What a time of triumph it was. Can you imagine the feelings of Jesus' disciples as they finally see their Master riding into Jerusalem being publicly acclaimed as the Messiah? Listen to the Hallelujahs, the Hosannas; see the palm branches and garments cast at His feet. But how different they must have felt on Friday as they listened to the same crowd shout, "Crucify Him!", as they saw Him nailed to a cross, as they watched all their hopes and dreams and desires die before their eyes. How did they feel? Defeated! And despite all the times in life when you will know (as ABC sports puts it) "the thrill of victory", there will be a whole lot of times when you will experience "the agony of defeat." Your business may fold or you may lose your job. You may get sick and for all your efforts not get any better. Your Sunday School class may shrink instead of growing or what you've worked so hard at may have to be stopped. There are things in life you just won't beat, times when you won't win, times when you will be so sure of what God is going to do and He won't do it. There will be moments when, like the disciples, all your hopes and dreams and desires are dashed on the rocks and you experience this feeling of defeat. Now quickly let me remind you of:

I. A Reminder Of The Biblical Pattern For Dealing With Feelings

1. I learn that something is true: **fact**
2. I believe that it is true: **faith**
3. I act as though it is true: **obedience**
4. I begin to feel that it is true: **feelings**

There was a time in David's life when he experienced this feeling of defeat and he expressed it and wrote it down for us in Ps. 60. The title of the Psalm clearly mentions:

II. The Situation Behind The Psalm in which David found himself. It came from the time when he fought the Syrians of Mesopotamia and the Syrians of Zobah in the North and then the Edomites in the south. It directly correlates to **2 Sam. 8:13, 1 Chron. 18:12**. Upon his accession to the throne David fought a massive war against the enemies of Israel. You find it in 2 Sam. 8.

1. the set of enemies David had faced First, David fought the Philistines on the west, then the Moabites, and then the Ammonites and Syrians and Edomites to the east and south across Jordan banded together and attacked in waves. Now the text clearly points out:

2. the series of victories David had won He defeated those Philistines and took back territory from them. He defeated the Moabites and made them lie down on the ground and measured them with a cord putting 2/3 of them to death. He fought the Syrians at Zobah and when those from Damascus came to help, he defeated them and put garrisons in Damascus. Victory, victory, victory! He couldn't lose! And then as he returned, the Edomites advanced against him and he met them in the Valley of Salt south of the Dead Sea. It's kind of hard to figure out exactly what happened there except that both the two verses mentioned and the Psalm title say there was a great victory with thousands of Edomites slain. However, the number differs. The Psalm says 12,000 but the history 18,000. The Psalm credits the victory to Joab but Chronicles to his brother Abishai. It seems clear to me that there was probably more than one battle in this campaign and Ps. 60 makes it clear that one of these battles must have been a loss before the final victory:

3. the defeat David obviously experienced Listen to it (*READ 1-3*). That's no victory song; it's the wail of defeat. Now imagine the feeling. David could do no wrong. God was with him. All his enemies fell one by one and now all of a sudden, he loses a battle. His army is in danger. His capitol of Jerusalem is in danger. He himself and his family are in danger. His kingdom is in danger. He is defeated and comes back and throws himself on his face before Almighty God and expresses:

III. The Feeling Of Defeat (1-3) Look at those verses again. When I experience defeat and disappointment and failure here's what I feel like:

1. I feel like God has rejected me, like He has pushed me away from Himself. Suddenly I don't sense Him near anymore; it's like He's gone away or hidden. Here's a man who's been close to God all his life. He fought the lion and the bear by relying on God and won. He fought Goliath and won. He fought Saul and won. He prayed the whole time. He attributed all of it to God so it is very natural now when he loses to feel that's a sign that God is missing. He's been rejected and cast off. Some of you sitting here today feel the same way; you've experienced defeat or failure in life and you think God's forgotten you, that God doesn't love you anymore. Or perhaps:

2. I feel like God has opposed me He has deliberately stopped me and stood against me, just like He stood in Baalam's way. He scattered my army. He took away my job. He caused me to fail the test or to lose the race. He's changed sides. He's helping the enemy instead of me. Some of you know that feeling: everything I want to do God puts a damper on. He bars my way. When Jeremiah lamented over the defeat of Jerusalem he wrote *Lam. 3:7, He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.* And I may:

3. I feel like God is angry with me, like He is punishing me by allowing my defeat. I hear that all the time. Bad things happen and people feel, "Why is God punishing me? What have I done? Why would He let this happen to me?" Now part of the reason I have those feelings about God is that:

4. I feel like my world is falling apart David felt as though there was an earthquake going on in his life and the ground under his feet was trembling and being shaken. What he had built his life on was being pulled out from under him. And when defeat comes you have that same feeling. Your world is falling apart. You're used to God doing nice things for you and answering your prayers and meeting your needs. And then along comes a defeat and all of a sudden you begin to question everything. Your roots are shaken. You had your mind all set to think, "This is how things ought to work," and now you find that doesn't match reality. And you find yourself like David:

5. I feel bewildered and unable to proceed You're staggering and unsure of yourself, of which way to go or what to do, just like a drunken man is unsure of his steps and is bewildered and confused. You feel confused, disillusioned, uncertain. You feel like running away and hiding, like giving up and never doing anything again, if this is how it's going to be.

And you won't either, unless you find a way of:

IV. Dealing With The Feeling Of Defeat Step #1 is this:

1. you must flee to God's banner of truth (4) David knew something. When the troops are in retreat and the enemy is winning the battle, what do you do? You raise up a banner, a flag on high, so that all your scattered soldiers can gather to it and regroup and stand against the enemy together again. In the midst of your defeat, God has raised high a banner for you to flee to and that banner is truth. The word for *bow* here is the same as the Hebrew for *truth*. In fact, most other translations say, "You have raised up a banner to be displayed because of the truth." You see, the banner God wants you to rally to is His truth. When your feelings overwhelm you, there's a place God's given you that you can run: the *fact* of the Word of God. And when David thought about it, here's what he knew:

a. God still loves you (5) David knew God still loved him and God still loved Israel. Defeat didn't change that. It was not the indicator of that. Your relationship with Almighty God is not changed by circumstances. Listen to the words of one who served God as an apostle, who traveled all over at His command but knew defeat. He was beaten. He was jailed. He was hindered and hated and at last beheaded. He wrote **Rom. 8:35-39!** Did you hear that? Can trouble separate us from the love of God? Can hardship do it? Can not having enough to eat or wear do it? Can being put to death do it? What if we're in that situation where the enemy rules over us and threatens us with death all day long, where we're counted like so many sheep to be slaughtered? No, none of that can change God's love for you. They put Corrie ten Boom and her family in a concentration camp to suffer and die. They had done a noble work sheltering Jews and saving them from death. But they were defeated and now they were to die. But read her book; they knew that there in the midst of total defeat God loved them. God says nothing in all the creation can separate us from the love of God. God still loves you! And check this out:

b. God controls what happens to you (6-7) In these verses God names the various parts of Israel. "Shechem on the west of Jordan and Succoth on the east are mine. Gilead in the northwest and Manasseh in the north and Ephraim in the hills and Judah in the south, all are mine. I parcel them out; I measure them off; I wear them and I

swing them any way I want. I am in control!" God is in absolute control of everything that happens to you. He hasn't quit on you or opposed you or punished you. He's chosen in His infinite wisdom and knowledge to allow this defeat into your life. There isn't a saint of God who has escaped it and you won't either. But the good part is **Rom. 8:28**. God causes all those things, even defeats, to work together for the good in your life. You may not understand it or ever get to see it directly, but you can take it to the bank: God controls what happens to you to fit His good purpose in your life, in the lives of others, and in the world. And here's a third truth:

c. God controls and even uses His enemies (8) "Moab? Who are they? I use them to wash my hands if I want to? Remember how I laid them down and you measured them with the cord and killed every 2 lengths? They aren't even a threat any more. Edom? The ones who defeated you, who look so mighty and invincible right this moment? Why, they're my shoe mat. I throw my sandal down on them and step on them any time I want to; you'll see. And Philistia, I just shout in triumph over them. They can't lift a finger against me. You remember that. I do with all of them what I please." God controls even the forces that defeat you! The people, the system, the company, whatever it is. God controls it and does what He wants with it and even uses it for His purpose. Satan became God's agent to work in Job's life, Nebuchadnezzar His instrument to get glory by throwing three young believers into a fiery furnace. He used hard-nosed Pharaoh to glorify his name through the bondage of Israel and Pontius Pilate to put His own Son on a cross. All those looked like defeats, but in all of them God gave ultimate victory. He was in control and working out His purpose. His Word declares it. And He is controlling even now in this defeat you may be feeling and desiring to get glory to His name. How will this come about? Step 2:

2. you must place your trust in Him (9-11) Once you flee to the banner of truth, the facts, you must choose to exercise **faith**. David turned to the only place he knew to turn. He made a choice. He chose to trust God in the wake of defeat, no matter how he felt. And like David:

a. you must recognize that human help is worthless So many times our first reaction is to try to quickly go find somebody to fix our problem, to try to humanly patch it up and solve it some way. When Israel was in trouble with the Babylonians, to whom did they turn? To the Egyptians instead of God! But trusting in human help to deliver you from defeat is useless. When David was just a boy standing in front of a 9 ft. tall enemy armed with a spear and sword too heavy for him to even lift, David knew something - **1 Sam. 17:47**. Swords and shields and spears and circumstances and money and all that stuff don't matter. The battle is the Lord's. It's in His hands. What matters is not what you have or don't have, what you know or don't know, who's with you or not with you. What matters is who you're depending on! You see:

b. you must recognize that the One who allowed defeat is the only One to whom you can turn Who can beat Edom? Who can get me into their strong city? There's only One! The same One whom I feel like has rejected us. It doesn't matter how I feel; I know He's the only one who can deliver me and make things turn out the right way - **Ps. 33:16-21**. What do you do? You recognize there is no help and no hope outside of Him and you decide that you're going to trust Him no matter what, no matter if you lose everything, no matter if you lose your own life! And one more note:

c. you must recognize that circumstances do not indicate God's attitude toward you nor His willingness to work in your life One setback, one defeat, even a string of them together don't indicate God's attitude toward you. His Word does that! And one defeat doesn't mean He has quit working through you. Verse 10 might read, "Will you not go out (in the future) with our armies? Who can defeat Edom? Not more horses and chariots. Isn't it YOU, O LORD? Won't you go out with our armies again!" Sure He will and He did! David went back and won! A defeat doesn't mean God won't work through you and it doesn't mean He WASN'T working through you! So, what do you do?

3. you must call out to Him (5a, 11a) You call out to Him. You pray like David did, "Save us; help us; give us aid." You pray like Peter did, "Help Lord, I'm sinking!" You say "God, I trust you completely. I don't know what you're doing or why this thing has happened to me. But I know you love me and you're in control. So let's go. What do I do now? What's the next step. I'm willing for whatever you want." That's **obedience**. And when you reestablish His word in your mind and know that He loves you and He's in control and He's allowed this and you choose to trust Him and you obey by calling out to Him in prayer and making yourself available to Him for whatever He wants, here's:

4. the confidence you'll experience (12) You see, **feelings** follow! And the Hebrew is interesting. It says "IN God" not "with" Him. The text says:

a. in Him we shall do mighty things The KJV says "we shall do valiantly". No, we won't win every battle. We'll lose the ones that God wants us to lose. But when we trust in Him, He will do mighty and wonderful things in us and through us, things we could never imagine and would never see if we got to plan things. Oh, when your trust is in God, you'll have a sense of His power that goes far beyond winning and succeeding, all the way to enduring anything the Enemy has to throw! And you will also have the assurance that:

b. He will ultimately triumph over all In fact He already has! He will tread on our foes. In the end no enemy will stand before Him but at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, even in hell!

In closing I'd like you to turn to **Ps. 108:1-5**. Now if you read carefully, you'll find that 108:6-13 are word for word identical with 60:5-12. It's like taking a song and rewriting it, keeping the second verse the same but giving it a brand new first verse. I believe 108 was written later as David reflected back on that horrible defeat in his life and reflected on those first feelings he'd had of being rejected and opposed by God. The truth hadn't changed so he left it, but His feelings had changed. So, he wrote down the new ones. Sing that when you're defeated! Sing that when your world is falling apart and you're perplexed and don't know which way to turn. How, you say? Make a conscious decision to place your absolute trust in Almighty God. Call out to Him. And he'll turn your darkness into joy.

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 61 - When I Feel Insecure

Every human being has two or three basic needs, depending on how you classify them. It's the way God has made us to be; He built us with certain basic needs so that He Himself might meet them and we might find them met in Him. One is the need for love, to know that I am loved and to respond by giving love. We all have it. Another is the need for significance, to know that I matter, that I count, that I'm worth something, that I have a purpose. We'll talk about that in a future study. And the third is the need for security, to know that I am safe, protected, sheltered from the constant dangers life poses. And that's where the rub comes in, doesn't it? Almost daily, it seems, life throws some circumstance or situation at you which makes you have feelings of insecurity. From the first tiny steps you take into unfamiliar rooms of your house until you sail the uncharted waters of the incapacities of old age, life sends you things which make you feel insecure, unsure, unsafe, incapable. Now, as I said, God meant for us to meet our need for security in a relationship with Him. Non-Christians, of course, can't do that. They have to find security however they can in life, in people, in a job, in money, in whatever. The unfortunate thing is that many times, even we who do have a relationship with Jesus Christ do the same thing and don't even realize it. We get at least a good portion of our sense of security from the same things, from our spouse, our parents, our pastor, our church, our home, our job, our health. And when these things are threatened, we have immediate feelings of insecurity. And then there are those of us who have never been able to quite find security even in those things to begin with. We had unstable or even hostile parents, a difficult home life. We married someone who's unstable, who doesn't afford the security we long for. We never have enough money to quite make it and have never been able to build deep friendships. We know we're saved, but we're not even sure God really likes us. Our whole life we've felt insecure. Well friend, whether you feel occasionally insecure during crises or chronically insecure all the time, you have a basic need going unfulfilled and God wants to fill it with Himself. He wants to remove that feeling of insecurity and replace it with that feeling of safety and confidence and assurance that you long for. How? Well:

I. A Reminder Of The Biblical Pattern For Dealing With Feelings

1. I learn that something is true: **fact**
2. I believe that it is true: **faith**
3. I act as though it is true: **obedience**
4. I begin to feel that it is true: **feelings**

Psalm 61 comes from a time in David's life when he experienced insecurity and I think we'll find it helpful to think about:

II. The Setting Of The Psalm We're not told when it was written but there are several clues in the text itself about David's personal situation. Notice first of all that:

1. he is king (6) so it must have been during his reign, not before.

2. he is at the boundary of the "land" (2), away from God's "tent" (4) The word *earth* can just as easily be translated *land*. David is at the boundaries of the land, not in Jerusalem. If he was there, he'd have gone to God's "tent", that is, the tent pitched for the Ark or the Tabernacle where sacrifice was offered, to find security. But he can't.

3. he has enemies (3) and his life is in danger (6) He has foes in this place and he is afraid that his life may be shortened. He is in danger. Now when you look at David's life as king, there is only one time in it that fits all these circumstances:

Conclusion: he has fled from Jerusalem during Absalom's rebellion One commentator calls this Psalm "the prayer of an expelled king on his way back to the throne"! That situation is at the root of a number of the Psalms. It shook everything in David's life. His position as king was threatened. His son Absalom was now claiming it and had a greater following than he did. It was obvious he couldn't count on the nation he had led so wonderfully and delivered from all their enemies. They were fickle and had sided with Absalom. He couldn't count on his army; most of them were over there too. He couldn't count on his family or his best friends; they too joined the rebellion. He couldn't even buy his way out of it with cash, though he was rich. But they weren't satisfied with his position. They wanted his life. Absalom and

friends wanted him dead and if they had played their cards right, they would have succeeded! Any piece of David's security that had been based on earthly things was gone and there in Gilead David experienced:

III. The Feeling Of Insecurity (1-2) David said, "My heart grows faint. It's overwhelmed; it's enveloped. I'm weak. I can't go on. I have nothing left to count on so I'm calling out to you." Not only was he weary and tired but his security was all stripped away. Let's just contemplate some of the feelings David must have had because they're:

1. the feelings you experience When crisis comes into your life or when your whole life has been one big crisis, first:

a. you feel uncertain of what is going to happen to you David had no guarantee (and in this case not even an inkling) as to whether he was going to live or die. Some of you know what that feels like, don't you? If he did live, he had no assurance of what kind of life it would be. A life hiding as a fugitive in the rocks once more, a life banished from his homeland as an exile among the Gentiles? You've been there, haven't you? What's life going to be like without my spouse, without my friend, without my child, without my job, without my health? What's going to happen to me when I can't take care of myself? That's a terrible feeling: to be uncertain of your own future. Then:

b. you feel uncertain of your own ability to face the situation David had to face Absalom with the small group of men who stuck by him, a few thousand at most. Absalom, on the other hand, had the whole army of Israel. 20,000 of them were killed in the ensuing battle so think how large the whole army must have been, perhaps twice that or five times that. The odds were 5 to 1, or 10 to 1 or maybe 25 to 1 against him. Surely David was uncertain that he could succeed and even survive! You've run up against those brick walls in life where you knew that there weren't enough resources in you to face the situation, where you knew there was no way for you to pay the bill, where you knew you could not physically cope with any more pain, where you knew you couldn't face this thing emotionally, you couldn't take what this person had done to you and you were going to fall apart. There was nothing left. And then maybe it gets so bad that:

c. you feel uncertain of your position before God You wonder if He's going to do anything to help you. Nothing is on the horizon. You can't see any hopeful signs that He's going to step in and rescue you. You begin to wonder if He knows, if He cares, even if you're really His child.

Insecurity. It's a horrible feeling and look at:

2. the patterns that develop if it continues First:

a. you develop vacillation in thoughts, beliefs, and behavior Your mind knows somewhere deep down that God cares and somehow He's helped you make it this far. But your feelings war against that. So sometimes feelings win and sometimes knowledge wins and you go up and down, up and down, like a roller coaster. One moment you think you're going to make it and the next you think you're going to die. One moment you believe God will take care of you and the next you think He's taken a vacation and left town. One moment you act like everything's going to work out and the next you're ready to run away from it all. Insecurity means a roller coaster life and, unfortunately, if it continues, each peak crests lower and lower until life is missing the ups and there's nothing but the downs, depression and despair. Secondly:

b. you develop an attitude of fear and act out of it When you're insecure you're afraid. Afraid of everything. And that attitude of fear cripples you because you act out of it.

Something has to be done. You can't let those feelings of insecurity stay and dominate your life. You've got to deal with them. But how? Well, remember the Biblical pattern.

IV. Dealing With Feelings Of Insecurity First:

1. you must know the fact: God has given you a heritage (5) There is a heritage, an inheritance, a treasure that God has given to all His children to possess. And that heritage is Himself! God told the tribe of Levi that He himself would be their inheritance. They didn't need fields and lands and an earthly inheritance to provide their needs. He Himself would do it. And that is true for all of us. The privilege of a relationship with God as our Father is the heritage of all His children. It is yours, my friend. It is not just for somebody else, not just for people who serve a lot or are important. You are a child of God and you are His but more importantly, He is yours! You have Him to meet all of your needs! What does David say about Him? He teaches us in his prayer that God is three things to us:

a. God is our Rock - strength (2) This Hebrew word is not the word for a stone you would pick up or even a sizeable one. It means a rocky wall or cliff. It can refer to an entire rocky mountain. Very seldom does it even indicate something as small as a large boulder. When God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock, it wasn't a rock with a split but a fissure in a cliff! That's why David talks about the rock that is "higher than I". When he looks at himself and his situation, he sees no ability; he's fainting away. When he looks at God, he sees a mighty rock of strength that towers above him, a cliff that would never crumble. Standing up there, no wave could touch him; nothing could erode his foundation and pull him down. Symbolically the term *rock* became a symbol for strength. At least five times it is directly translated "strength" instead of rock. Look at **Ps. 73:25-26**, *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* Literally, it says, "God is the ROCK of my heart!" Speaking of idolaters, the Bible says, "their rock is not like

our ROCK!" My friend, when you don't have the strength to face life, you have a ROCK! You have an omnipotent almighty God who is yours to draw on and to live out of. You must know that. But there's more:

b. God is our Fortress - safety (3) The Hebrew concept of a tower doesn't mean much to us because we think of decorative towers like the Eiffel tower or the Washington monument. But to the Hebrews a tower was a fortress, a castle which provided safety from the enemy. When Abimelech attacked the city of Thebez in the book of Judges, that city had a strong tower and all the inhabitants entered it. Abimelech had to storm the tower and died in the process. A tower is a fortress and when you enter into it you are safe. Nothing can get to you. And that's what God is. Prov. 18:10 says, *The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.* My friend, when you are not safe, when you are in danger, when the forces of life assail you from whatever angle, you have a fortress to run to, a place of safety, a castle with walls so thick that no army on earth can penetrate them. You have an omnipotent Almighty God who is yours. And the Scripture says if He is for you, who can be against you!! It says that His hands are greater than all and nobody is able to pluck you out of His hands! You are safe in Him and you need to know that. But there's still more:

c. God is our Refuge - security (4) Did you know God has wings? Not really. The word picture here is that of a mother bird who calls to her chicks when the storm comes and they run underneath her wings and she settles down over them to shelter them with herself. She is their refuge, their Hiding Place, the place where they are secure. God is like that. He's an Almighty Omnipotent Father with great big eternal wings, with huge arms. Moses told Israel in his parting blessing, **Deut. 33:27**, *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* Because you are in Him, you can feel safe; you can feel secure like the little child asleep in its mother's arms. Paul said you can have a peace that passes all understanding, the very peace of God that will shield your heart and mind. That's security and He's it!

Those are the facts. God is your Rock, your Tower, and your Refuge. He's your Strength, your Safety, and your Security. Ingrain them deeply in your mind. Call them to remembrance when the feelings of insecurity sweep over you. But knowing is not enough:

2. you must exercise faith: choose to abide in Him (4) The Hebrew says, not *I long to*, but *I WILL dwell...I will take refuge*. When David felt insecure, he made a choice. He knew his security was in God and He cried out (verse 1) to God; he called to God (verse 2). He said "God, you are my strength, I will abide in You; You are my Safety, I will abide in You; You are my security, I will abide in You." And that's what you need to do. You exercise faith:

a. by trusting Him to be your strength (2) You recognize that your strength is NOT sufficient to make it through this or any other situation and you transfer your trust to HIM to provide the strength you need. You exercise faith:

b. by trusting Him to be your safety (6-7) You recognize that there is no way you can keep yourself safe, no way to protect yourself. You are always vulnerable. And you transfer your trust to Him to be your safety, to protect and keep you. And then you exercise faith:

c. by trusting Him to be your security (4) You recognize that there is no security in anything on the face of this earth. There is no other place to run and hide, so you run to Him and transfer your trust to Him as your refuge, your security that nothing can touch.

In that moment when the feeling of insecurity comes, in that moment at the boundary of the land when my heart is faint and I'm overwhelmed, I learn that instead of trying to handle it yet again on my own, I stop right there and turn and call out to God and deposit the care of me with Him all over again. Then:

3. you must act in obedience: choose to act on your faith (8) Verse 8 does not mean *then* in the sense of "after you help me". It is better translated *thus* or *so*. On the basis of what I know and the choice I have made to trust my keeping to His care, I must act. How?

a. by praising Him for the heritage He's given you Praise Him that he is your Rock and your Fortress and your Refuge. Get Ps. 18:1-2 out and sing it back to God like David did, *[David] sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said: I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.* Express your trust. Say it. Confess it. Fill your mind with what you are and what you have, not how you feel. You can choose to do that even if you don't feel like it! And then you act out your faith:

b. by continuing to do what He wants despite your feelings You continue in the things that are right, the things God wants, your study, your giving, your fellowshiping, your honesty, your caring for others, and whatever other thing He may be directing you. You lay yourself before God and say, "I am Your child; this is Your problem; what do you want me to do? I'm ready!"

And do you know what? If you keep on choosing to exercise faith and obey God:

4. gradually you will come to feel secure You'll start to feel like the Psalmist did in **Psalm 46** (*READ*). It doesn't matter if the earth gives way under my feet and the mountains fall into the ocean. It doesn't matter if the whole world as I know it collapses around me. It doesn't matter whether I live or die. God is within me and I will not be moved. The Lord is with me and He is my fortress. I'm always safe in Him. He is my eternal security. Paul put it this way: *I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day!* - *2 Tim. 1:12*. May that feeling of security be yours as you learn to rest in Him!

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 62 - When I Feel Impatient

There is one feeling I KNOW all of us are plagued with: impatience. I get it really bad sitting in traffic or standing in line at Acme. We hate to wait, don't we? Unfortunately, many of the things we have to wait for in life are a lot more serious than that. Abraham had to wait 25 years from the time God first promised him a child until that child came. I don't know what age he married at but he had to wait until he was 100 to enjoy having a child with his own wife. And he had problems with it. They became impatient and that's why there's war in the Middle East today! But that's another story. Some of you know what it's like to wait for a child. Jacob had to wait 7 long years to marry the woman he loved (plus a week!) simply because she had a greedy father. Some of you know what it's like to wait to marry the one you love or even to have to wait to find one TO love. Moses had to spend 40 years in the desert tending sheep for God to prepare him to fulfill the original desire of his heart to see his people delivered. He waited so long that all hope had died and he didn't want to go. Some of you have had to wait long for your dream too, being set aside in some other place than where your heart really is. David had to hide like a rabbit in the wilderness for 10 long years while Saul hunted him before God's promise to be King was finally realized. And some of you know what it's like to have to endure mistreatment and injustice for what seems like forever. Even Paul had to wait 3 years in the desert of Arabia alone with God learning before God would let him go and do the kind of ministry that was really in his heart. And some of you know what it's like to have to wait in order to serve. There's hardly one of us who isn't waiting for something important in life and when that something is important the feeling of impatience becomes more than just a petty annoying problem. It can become a life-dominating obsession, an all-consuming passion to end the waiting. So, it's important that we learn to deal with these feelings.

I. A Reminder Of The Biblical Pattern For Dealing With Feelings

1. I learn that something is true: **fact**
2. I believe that it is true: **faith**
3. I act as though it is true: **obedience**
4. I begin to feel that it is true: **feelings**

LuAnn read somewhere this week a saying: **You don't feel your way into behaving; you behave your way into feeling!** Though we are not told when it was written and have very little clue in the Psalm itself, Ps. 62 obviously comes from a time in his life when David was experiencing impatience. He was being assaulted in some way. There were malicious betrayers at hand seeking to slay him (*throw down* in verse 3 is literally *to murder* or *slay*) and it was dragging on and on with no end in sight. Maybe it's another Psalm that came out of that time of Absalom's rebellion when he fled to the wilderness. But I would like more to imagine that these are David's sentiments from those long 10 years he spent in the wilderness hiding from Saul, his life on the line daily, waiting, longing for the day when he could just go home and not have to live as a fugitive. What a pressure-filled time that must have been. It must have been so hard to wait and be patient. In fact, David mentions some of:

II. The Pressures That Produce Impatience (3-4) The first pressure is:

1. the passing of time David's heart cried "How long?" Fifteen times in the Psalms you have this cry, "How long?" It is the cry of the suffering human heart. We want an end to things, an end to waiting, to suffering, to longing, to fearing, to feeling. And the passing of time, the dragging on and on and on intensifies it and makes it worse. The longer we wait, the more the feelings of impatience come. And along with the passing of time goes:

2. the growth of weariness He says, "I feel like a leaning wall that doesn't have the strength to stand up any longer, like a tottering fence that the next little nudge will cause to topple over." There's a willow stump on the edge of my mother's driveway that's been there for years. The other week I walked over to it and gave it a little kick and half the stump broke apart and fell backwards and tumbled down the bank into the creek. It was weary. The elements had been beating on it for years and its material was just too tired to hold together any longer so it fell. People get like that. You not only get tired OF waiting; you get tired WHILE waiting. Struggling either physically or emotionally gradually exhausts you and you wear out and the more you wear out, the more impatient you become for it to end and the more desperate you become to do whatever it takes to end it. And then you sometimes add to that:

3. the sense of injustice The sense of verse 4 is that his enemies are trying to "drive him out of his high position". Remember, before his years of hiding, he was a chief general in Saul's army. He was the hero of Israel who had slain the giant. He was the one they used to sing about, "...David has slain his ten thousands", the one that led Saul's army

out to battle and dined at the King's table with his son. Saul saw the handwriting on the wall. He knew God wanted to make David king in his place instead of his own son. At the same time, he would ask Jonathan, "Where is David? Why isn't he at dinner?" and all the while be plotting to kill him if he showed up! It wasn't right. He had done nothing to deserve it. He deserved to be resting at home with his wife from whom he'd been driven away, instead of lying in a tent in the cold. And the more injustice you suffer, the stronger becomes that feeling of not being able to wait until it ends, until everything is set right. Oh, I get that sometimes. When I see on the news that a mother hung her 4 year old in the kitchen, stood him on a chair and waved goodbye and then kicked the chair out or some 200 lb. man beat a 2 year old to death because he wouldn't stop crying, my heart starts to cry, "How long, Lord? How long are you going to let this go on? How long before you step in and do something about this world and let Jesus set it all right?" Now just think if that injustice is something being done to you personally, it makes waiting all the worse. It can make it torture. Now when you have to wait, it becomes a great opportunity. Did you know that? It is a great opportunity for Satan to tempt you to try and change the situation in the wrong way. David even mentions some of:

III. The Temptations That Arise Through Impatience (9-10) First:

1. you're tempted to trust in other people (9) You look for someBODY to rescue you. The person trapped in a difficult marriage may be tempted to ease their pain by grabbing onto another woman or man to end to their waiting. The person desperate TO marry may throw themselves at the next likely looking candidate as the answer to their longing, whether or not it's God's will. Some sufferers will latch onto their spouse or onto a friend as their sole source of emotional support. Impatience will drive you to try to get your needs met through people. But people can't solve the real problem and they'll fail you. David says, "You can take the whole lot of them, low and high alike, and throw them together on a balance and they're lighter than air when it comes to giving you security." That's one of Satan's temptations. Then:

2. you're tempted to trust in your position (9) You might think, "Well, I AM SOMEBODY! I am the boss; I am a church member or leader...my position will get me through this". And that's just a variation on #3:

3. you're tempted to trust in your own ability (10a) to solve the problem, to think, "I'm strong, I'm hard-working, I'm tough, I can fix this somehow." And you're even tempted to solve it by fixing things in an illegitimate way. You can steal to meet your needs. You can take money under the table. You can pressure somebody into helping you. You can take advantage of them to fix your problem. You can pay off somebody to get your ticket fixed. Or maybe:

4. you're tempted to trust in money (10b), to think you can buy your way out of it. You always have enough in the bank or a high enough limit on your credit card. You can always find a way for money to fix it somehow, to pay your way out of it.

You see, Satan's goal in long-lasting difficulties is to use your impatience against you to get you to quit trusting in God and trust in something else as your answer. On the other hand, listen to **2 Cor 1:8-9**, *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened **that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*** God has a goal and a purpose too, to teach you NOT to rely on yourself, to trust in all these other things, but to rely completely on HIM. So how do you prevent falling into the temptation to trust other things? Well, you have to deal with the feeling of impatience.

IV. Dealing With The Feeling Of Impatience Step 1, of course, is:

1. you must remember the facts (11-12) That's what David did. He said, "No matter what I feel like, there are two things I know":

a. God is completely powerful: He can do anything that needs to be done No matter what you feel like He's doing or not doing, God is able to do whatever needs to be done. He can smash your enemies or save them. He can rescue you completely out of your situation or give you so much Divine strength that you can endure it victoriously. As Isaiah put it, God's arm is not too short to save! Whatever needs to be done, He can do it! But that fact is balanced by this one:

b. God is completely loving: He will do what is best for me out of love That word is *hesed*, the Hebrew equivalent of *agape*. It is God's sacrificial, covenant love, the love He pledged to you and demonstrated once and for all in Jesus Christ. God loves me; He sacrificed Himself for me. He has set His love upon me and that means He will always do what is best for me, no matter what! Sometimes that means passing *through* the fire instead of escaping it, but no matter what, He loves me and:

c. God is completely just: He will see that everyone receives justice This is a just universe because it has a just God! Nobody ultimately gets away with anything. Wrong does not go unnoticed and unrecompensed. In the end God *will* see that everyone receives the justice they deserve. Vengeance and righting wrongs is His business. He said so. And you can mark this down: God *always* takes care of His business!

So, when you feel impatient and the strain of waiting is getting you down, remind yourself of what you know: God is in control and He loves you and He is at work right now in this situation. Then:

2. you must exercise faith (5-7) This is David's confession of faith. This is what David believed and what in that moment he chose once again to believe. And you see, if those facts are true, then you too must in that moment of impatience choose to believe like he did:

a. that your future depends on Him alone He is the source of your hope. Your future does not depend on you or on somebody else or on accident or chance. It depends on Him alone. The KJV says "ONLY" and Spurgeon called this the "Only Psalm" because that theme of God only is repeated so often. Faith says, "You alone are my hope, You control my future." Then you choose to believe:

b. that your strength to endure or your rescue depends on Him alone He is your Rock (Strength) and your deliverance. Whether you get rescued or find strength to somehow endure depends only on God, not on you. And further:

c. that your protection depends on Him alone He's your Fortress; you don't have any other. Your safety and your security both come from Him. You can't provide them; you can't get them somehow. You're His. You can't be shaken. You can't be snatched away and pulled loose. He's your safety, no matter whether your body lives or dies! And finally, you choose to believe:

d. that your position depends on Him alone The word *honor* is the same word as in the commandment: *Honor your parents...* It means "to make heavy". It speaks of value and importance. My value, my importance does not come from me; they are not matters of my own achievement. I do not "make" myself something. God makes me something. He determines my value, my worth, my importance.

It's all in Him, only in Him. Faith says, "I see it now. I'm impatient. I want life to change. But life is not about me; it's about God and what He wants to do in my life. Everything I am and have is ONLY of Him. I choose to believe that and so I take step 3":

3. you must obey (8) There are three imperatives here, three commands, things where David says, "Do it!" To act on what you believe you first:

a. determine to rest in Him and stop relying on all other things (5a) You make a decision of your will that since everything depends only on God, you are going to quit relying on people and position and money and whatever and trying to weasel ways to fix your own problems and you are going to lie still in dependence on Him. You're going to adopt the position, "I depend on God alone and I stand ready to do what He says and receive whatever He sends." Then you:

b. decide to trust in Him on each specific occasion (8a) At the moment when the feeling of impatience comes, at the second when your emotions say "I can't take this anymore!", you at that moment obediently trust Him. You take a step of trust. How? You:

c. pour out your heart completely and deposit your cares with Him (8b) We're talking about prayer. We're talking about intimate prayer. We're talking about prayer where you spill your guts, where you pour out your heart to God, where you lay bare before Him all the thoughts of your heart. And prayer where you pour it all out at His feet and lay it there because it's His problem. You deposit it with Him. When I go down to the bank tomorrow and cash my paycheck, the part that I deposit, I leave there for safekeeping. I place it in their hands with absolute confidence because I trust they will care for it in the way that is right. Peter said you are to cast the care of you on Him. Throw it down. Leave it there, with Him only.

And know what? When you get in that habit where every time you feel impatient you remind yourself who God is to you and you choose to trust in Him alone and you pour out your heart before Him and deposit your care with Him, even if it happens 10 or 20 times a day here are:

4. the feelings you will begin to experience (1-2) David was already there. He'd already been through the process. He put the end result up front. He said:

a. I am at rest peacefully in God I am lying still; I am reposed. My mind and emotions, my soul, finds that peaceful rest in Him even while my body is lying in the cold tent out in the wilderness! Paul said in Phil. 4 that if you would take everything to the Lord in prayer that you would know a peace that would pass understanding. Your heart and mind would be kept in peace, in rest, not in the striving of impatience. And he said:

b. I will never be greatly moved The word *shaken* is literally "greatly moved". Oh, I might have some ups and down in emotions from time to time, I may feel shaky like the tottering old fence, but I will never fall over. I have absolute confidence that God is enough. He's all I need. He will perfect that which concerns me.

My friend, what are you resting on? That's what it all comes down to. Are you resting on God alone? When you do, He will replace your impatience with His peace. Jesus said, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* - John 14:27. And, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* - John 16:33.

Dealing With Your Feelings: Selected Psalms

Ps. 139 - When I Feel Insignificant

Today we'll conclude our series on feelings by talking about the last of our basic needs as human beings. Every one of us needs to feel, not only loved and secure, but also significant. We need to know that we have value, that our life has meaning and purpose, that we are not just an accident on the face of history and our life a series of coincidences that don't really matter. We need to know that we have worth. But unfortunately, many times we don't feel like we do. There are a ton of times in life when people tell me, when circumstances tell me, and when my own feelings tell me, that I am not significant, that I have no worth.

I. The Feeling Of Insignificance: *I have no worth* Now that feeling can come in several variations which we need to talk about. For instance, I might come into a circumstance where I feel that:

1. I have no purpose - worth based on perception - When David became king, he looked around for any of Saul's relatives to whom he could show kindness, a noble and unusual act! There was only one, a son of Jonathan his friend whose name was Mephibosheth. He was crippled in both feet. He couldn't go out and fight with Israel's army. He couldn't lead a normal life. He was living in someone else's house, depending on them to supply what he needed. And when David told him he was going to give him all the land that belonged to his grandfather, 2 Sam. 9:8 says, *Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"* Some of you know what it's like to feel like a dead dog, to feel useless, to feel too old to matter, too handicapped to matter, too weak to matter. You base your worth on your perception of your circumstances. You don't feel you have a real reason for living. Closely related to that is the feeling that:

2. I have no ability - worth based on performance - Elijah served God well. He stood up alone against what seemed like the whole nation to turn them back to God. He stood against the prophets of Baal and killed them all. But Jezebel sent him a death threat and he couldn't take it anymore. He crumbled. He ran for a whole day into the desert and **1 Kings 19:4b** says, *[Elijah] prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."* He failed. He gave up. He got tired of trying. He saw that he couldn't do the job, though he tried his hardest. And he felt like dying, like he had no worth. Lots of people base their worth on their performance and when they sooner or later discover their performance isn't good enough (as a spouse, a parent, a Christian, or whatever), they are devastated because their whole significance is gone. Or the feeling may come to you as:

3. I have nothing - worth based on possessions In **Lk. 12:15b** Jesus warned against coveting material things and said, *"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* But for a lot of people, it does. The motto of our society is really, "He who dies with the most toys wins." Many, many people put into Job's shoes, losing everything and being reduced to poverty, would have no reason to live because their worth is based on possessions. You know, if we'd be honest, some of us feel really bad about ourselves because we have nothing. Or maybe we feel:

4. I am nobody - worth based on position When Samuel told Saul he was God's chosen one to be King of Israel, Saul replied in **1 Sam. 9:21** *"But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?"* Some people see their worth in terms of their position, who they are, the family they belong to, the position they hold at work, in church, or wherever. But that isn't really enough to get you through the crises of life and when your position crumbles, you feel worthless. Or finally, you may feel:

5. I am not loved - worth based on people Nobody cares. David felt like that when he was reduced to hiding in the cave from Saul. He wrote in **Ps. 142:4**, *Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.* "I'm worth nothing because nobody cares anymore. Nobody loves me. I'm not worth loving." So, my worth is based on a relationship with other people.

Now be honest. How many have ever even briefly felt insignificant in that deep sense, felt like you had no worth, like your life was without meaning or purpose or value? At times we all do. How are we going to deal with it?

II. A Reminder Of The Biblical Pattern For Dealing With Feelings

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. I learn that something is true: | fact |
| 2. I believe that it is true: | faith |
| 3. I act as though it is true: | obedience |
| 4. I begin to feel that it is true: | feelings |

Psalms 139 is a good place to start. I don't know when David wrote this but there is hardly another portion of Scripture that declares with equal clarity:

III. The Fact Of My Significance - *my worth comes from God* That's the only place to get it. My significance, my value, my worth does not derive from me, nor from my behavior, nor from my circumstances. It is given to me by Almighty God. This Psalm declares four facts that ought to make you feel significant right down to your toenails! Let's start in the middle with this truth:

1. God created me intricately (13-16) Some of us don't feel very good about our bodies. We get a smaller or larger piece of our worth from how we look. But just look at what the Bible says about how God created me as an individual:

The process:

He planned me (16b) A number of translations give a different sense to the end of verse 16, for example, the KJV says, *Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all [my members] were written, [which] in continuance were fashioned, when [as yet there was] none of them.* The point is not just that God planned your days, but He planned your body and then made it exactly according to plan. Your nose is not just a smudge on the diagram! Your big feet are not just from your grandfather. God planned every piece of you before He created you. Then:

He made my tissues (15a) He made me out of the raw materials just like He made Adam from the dust of the earth. He took the one-celled me and differentiated it into bone cells and blood cells and muscle cells and you name it. He made the tissues that make up my body. Then:

He formed my parts (16b) *came to be* means He fashioned me; He literally squeezed me into shape like a potter shapes his clay into a vessel. His hand formed each tiny foot, each miniscule finger. Further:

He connected me together (15b) He *wove* me together. It is literally the word for needlework, embroidery, an intricate connecting together of strands. God put me all together. He put my ears on the side of my head. He connected all my parts in their place, connected all my nerves, all of this according to plan. And what's neatest is:

He made me distinct (14a) *wonderfully made* is literally *distinctly*, separately, distinguished from all others. There is not another human being on the face of the earth exactly like me. I'm the only one like me there is; I'm unique. And look at specifically what He made:

The parts:

my fetal being (16a) *unformed body* is literally an embryo or fetus, that first mass of cells I was before my parts became distinct.

my organs (13a) *inmost being* is literally my kidneys, my inner organs, the organs of my body. He made them.

my muscles (13b) *knit together* is He *covered* me, referring to the muscle tissue that covers my body. He covered my organs over and protected them with muscle. And He made:

my skeleton (15a), my frame, my bones. He determined my height and size and shape. He gave me my build. Oh, it is marvelous! God decided to build me. He had me planned out just like we planned out every detail of our church building. He planned each organ and each limb and each bone and put them all together in place. I am a distinct masterpiece of His. I was worth creating just the way I am or God wouldn't have done it. He doesn't waste effort and He doesn't make junk! I am His creation, fearfully and wonderfully made! Now couple that with this fact:

2. God knows me completely (1-6) I am not some distant, removed creation to Him. He knows me completely:

The manner:

He knows every fact about me (2a) The Hebrew *to know* has a broad range of meaning. In this verse it obviously means simply to know information. God knows every intimate miniscule fact there is to know about me and everything that happens to me. On top of that:

He understands me (2b) *perceive* is to discern or understand. He knows all my motives for acting, all the ways that I react and why I do.

He sifts everything about me (3a) *discern* is literally to *sift* or winnow the way you separate the chaff from the grain. I can't fool Him. He knows the quality of everything about me. He knows what's real and what's fake, what's a front and what's genuine, my good qualities and bad ones, my strengths and weaknesses, my faults and flaws. And:

He uses my ways for His purpose (3b) *familiar* is literally to *benefit* or make a profit. God uses all my ways, all my actions and habits, all of who I am. He uses it for His benefit. It's all part of His plan. Everything I do has a place in His grand scheme of eternity. Just what does He know?

The extent:

my actions (2a,3a) When I sit down, when I get up. When I leave the house and when I go to bed. Everything I do. Everything. And He knows:

my thoughts (2b) Isn't it neat how we can hide our thoughts from people? We keep them from seeing what we think. Maybe if they're real close to us they have an idea. But He knows them even far off. We may be as far from Him as a human being can get and He still knows them. And He knows:

my habits (3b) My ways, my paths, the roads I take. My patterns of life and the direction I'm going, good or bad. And He even knows:

my words (4) He not only knows every word I say, He knows it before I say it! Jesus said that every idle word we speak we are accountable for and that which you whispered in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. God has it all written down in the memory banks of glory.

Now what's the first sign that you have interest in something or that something is valuable to you? You get to know it. You find out everything about it! Look at the attention God pays to you. Why would you do that for something or someone who has no value, no worth? You are worth God's infinite attention! Third fact:

3. God thinks about me continually (17-18) Look at the little footnote *concerning me*. That is the sense. God thinks about me and those thoughts are precious, valuable, costly, worth a high amount. Do you know what this verse says? The number of thoughts God has had about me are more than all the grains of sand on all the seashores and deserts in all the world. How many times do you think about your husband or wife each day? About your children? Do you know how many times God thinks about you? His eye is on you continually. He pays you constant attention. O I must be of great value to Him! And fourthly:

4. God is with me comprehensively (7-12) No matter where I go, up, down, sideways, near, far, light or darkness, He's there, guiding me, holding me fast and secure. The pagans always used to worry about where their idolatrous gods could go, whether they could go someplace their god couldn't. The reality is that you can't find a place to escape from the true God. A smart aleck agnostic once told a kid coming out of Sunday School, "I'll give you a dime if you can show me where God is." The boy replied, "Mister, I'll give you a dollar if you can show me where God ain't!" He is always and everywhere with me and that is particularly true now in New Testament times because now He is actually IN me!

My friend, regardless of how insignificant you may feel, the fact is that you are in the sight of God of great and infinite value! He gave the most precious thing He had, the life of His own Son, the precious blood, to purchase you so that you might be with Him and He might enjoy you forever. To that end He created you down to every detail and He knows you more intimately than you know yourself and He thinks about you and pays attention to you constantly and He is with you always and will be even unto the end of the age! You are worth something to God and that is the only thing that makes you worth something, period! So how am I to be:

IV. Dealing With The Feeling Of Insignificance when it comes? Well, God's Word gives me the **facts**. Then:

1. I choose to confess as truth what God says about me (14) - faith Your works, what you've made, are wonderful and my soul, my life, my being, knows that exceedingly. In that moment when you feel worthless, when you feel like nobody, like dying, like crawling in a hole somewhere, like less than a human being, you make a choice. You say, "I will believe what God says about me". I will confess what I know. I am a wonderful work of God, a creature of infinite worth and value. I am the apple of God's eye and the joy of His life. He made me just like I am and knows everything about me. Right now, whether I can see it or not, I am part of His plan and exactly where He wants me. You can't see that, but you confess it by faith and praise Him for it, whether you can see it or not. And then:

2. I surrender myself completely to God (23-24) - obedience Since my worth comes completely from God and not from me:

a. I invite God to change whatever He wants in me I cooperate with His purpose. Rather than resist Him and try to selfishly make myself what I want and find my worth somewhere else, I open myself up as much as I possibly can to that knowledge, that attention. I invite Him to search me and show me things about myself that need to change, anything that's offensive to Him or hinders His purpose. And:

b. I invite God to do whatever He wants with me because that's what makes me the most valuable, the most useful. I allow Him to lead me in the eternal path that He has laid out. Instead of devoting my energy to gaining po-

sition or possessions or improving performance or impressing people, I devote myself to Him and His purpose. And that makes me of ever-increasing value to His kingdom. And if I do that often enough, finally:

3. I begin to feel the worth God has given me At last it begins to sink in to my feeler and I can say with Paul, *giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* - **Col. 1:12-14**. I can say with John, *And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."* - **Rev. 5:9-10**. Oh, that's me. I am a king and a priest and an heir of God. I am a saint with an inheritance in a kingdom that is all light. I AM somebody in Him. I have significance. Will you do it? Will you take that stand by faith and confess the truth about yourself? Start today!

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THE SONGS OF ASAPH: INTRODUCTION

Our Book of Psalms is a collection of songs written by a number of men. About 90 of them designate the author in their heading. David wrote by far the most with 73 being attributed to him. Of the remaining 15, 12 are attributed to a man by the name of Asaph. We're going to examine them one at a time but before we do, let's examine what precious little we know of the man Asaph. Asaph was a Levite from the clan of Gershon according to 1 Chron. 6:39, 43 who lived during the time of David and Solomon and served God under both of them.

1 Chron. 6:31-33, 39, 44

1. He was in charge of music at the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. He was a minister of music. Verse 48 says the rest of the Levites got all the other work like skinning animals for sacrifice, handling the tithes, and such. His job was to make, arrange, and write music. Did you notice the place of music in the worship here? Who was it directed to? The Lord! Music was not something performed to a congregation. In fact music was performed many times when there was no congregation at all. It was directed to the Lord. It was ministering to and serving the Lord. It was a necessary part of worshipping God. We would do well to remember that aspect of it as we use it even today!

2. He was part of a team of three men: Heman, himself, and Ethan, of whom, Heman seems to be the chief and Asaph at the right hand, second in charge. There was no competition between the three but rather coordination. Compare 15:16-19. Asaph was part of the procession that brought the Ark up to rest in Jerusalem. He was a cymbal player. After that he seems to have been put in charge. Compare 16:4-5. His job was to lead, particularly the instrumental praise and play the cymbals. David gave him his first song that day, verse 7. No doubt his responsibilities were to orchestrate music and to teach it to the other Levites including his own children so that there was continual praise before the throne of God.

So this was a man who spent his entire life in the sanctuary, writing and performing songs, a man who was not out on the battlefield fighting battles with the army, nor working the fields, but who concentrated his life in the presence of God. And God saw fit to have 12 of his songs, Psalms 50 and 73-83 recorded in the Word for us. They must be special. They are songs from a man who lived in the presence of God. What part does praise play in our lives? How important is being in the presence of God to us? With that perspective in mind, we'll explore the Songs of Asaph in succeeding weeks.

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 50 - God's Judgment Is For His People

When a man spends his life in the presence of God, in the Temple like Asaph did, hearing God's Word read and sung, seeing the sacrifices, and so on, he gets a pretty good idea what God is like. And Asaph tells us what he knows about God in the Psalms he wrote. This one, Ps. 50, stands by itself while the rest stand in a block. In this one, clearly he is thinking of God as the great heavenly Judge.

I. The Courtroom (1-4) It is not limited to 4 walls; it is the universe! God's judgment is universal in scope and He is the glorious and mighty Judge above all judges.

II. The Criminals (5) His own people, the ones who were under the covenant, who were coming day after day offering sacrifices in the Temple. Asaph is looking at the parade of Israelite worshippers coming by him daily and thinking about them from God's perspective. This Psalm is about how God judges His own people, not the wicked of the earth.

III. The Judge (6) God Himself who is absolutely pure and righteous. You know, one day we're going to stand in a place much like this, the Judgment Seat of Christ where His people be gathered and He, the Righteous Judge, will reward or remonstrate us!

IV. The Crime - There are really two of them, two things God has against His people:

1. formalism - going through the motions (7-13) They had fallen into the trap of going through the motions of sacrifice without their hearts being in it, doing it as though the bulls and goats were something God needed. The remedy is in verses 14-15: give genuine offerings of thanks to God. When God does something for you, bring him a true offering in thanksgiving that comes from the heart. Keep the vows (of sacrifice) unto God but not out of habit.

2. hypocrisy - living a false life (16-20) We're not above these same things. We would come to church and worship and sing the hymns and yet take something not ours or lie or slander somebody or even commit immorality. There have been people in this church and all others that do those very things and all of us do some of them! God wants our walk to match up with our words. And when it doesn't, God may be patient for awhile (21-22), but eventually you'll have to experience God's justice. What's the remedy? Again (23), it is offering thank offerings, genuine expressions of thanks for what God has done in your life, considering your way and repenting and turning your heart to God completely.

Asaph sees the fact that God sees right through us. And he reminds us of that fact.

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Ps. 73 - God's Judgment Is For The Wicked

The overall theme of Asaph's Psalms is the same: the Judgment of God. Everyone of them deals with some aspect of His judgment. The first, Ps. 50, made it clear that God's Judgment is for His People. We are not exempt from it. But Ps. 73, the next of Asaph's Psalms, makes it clear that God's Judgment is also for the wicked. In it, Asaph tells the story of a spiritual struggle that occurred in his own life and how he almost lost his faith in God. First you have:

I. His Conclusion (1) God surely, certainly, truly, IS good to His people. He was beginning to doubt it and here's why:

II. His Observation (2-12) Wicked people seem to get away with it! So many of them seem to have health and no struggles and no problems like the godly have. They get by with every kind of evil thing and even smirk that there must surely not be a God or at least that He doesn't care! Haven't you noticed this?

III. His Folly (13-15) What does it pay to be godly? What profit is there in being pure if God does not judge the wicked? Why not be wicked and enjoy it like the rest if it doesn't make any difference. Asaph almost started to believe that. He almost voiced it and did damage to others with it. But then something happened.

IV. His Understanding (16-28) He walked into the sanctuary, the Temple of God, and was suddenly struck by something: God's Holiness. And then it hit him. Nothing unholy will ultimately be in God's presence! The NOW is not what matters but the final destiny, ETERNITY. The wicked are standing on dangerous slippery ground and suddenly death will come to them and they will perish forever. On the other hand, Asaph realizes that God holds his hand (verses 23-24) and guides him and that he will eventually enter eternal glory while the wicked perish. So ultimately it doesn't matter how the wicked prosper now; they will be judged by God. His judgment will fall on them. It also doesn't matter how rough life is for me, I'll spend eternity with Him.

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 74 - God's Judgment Sometimes Waits

This Psalm is a maskil or teaching psalm, a psalm designed to give instruction. If it was really written by the same Asaph, as its inscription seems to declare, then it is also a prophetic psalm. The only situation in Israel's history which fits the circumstances described in it is what happened at the time of the captivity. So God is telling his people ahead of time what it is going to be like and what they are going to feel like in the future. He has a message for them to learn now that will prepare them for it. First, look at:

I. The Situation:

- no sanctuary (4-8)
- no signs (9)
- no prophets
- no end in sight

Imagine how the vision of this must have broken Asaph's heart, a man who lived in the sanctuary in the presence of God. A real devastation! In fact, here are his feelings:

II. The Question (1-3, 10-11): How long? Forever? - Sometimes when we are oppressed or hurt it seems like God is waiting forever, like our troubles will never end. But in times like that, we have this confidence:

III. The Confidence: God brings deliverance to His people (12)

- He parted the Red Sea (13)
- He destroyed the Egyptians (14) - Leviathan, the crocodile was the symbol of Egypt, of Pharaoh.
- He gave water in the desert (15)
- He dried up the Jordan River
- He established the creation (16-17)

He has plenty of power to deliver us and meet our need. His arm is not shortened. God can do what we need. So here is:

IV. The Plea: Deliver Us From The Enemy - Asaph cries out for God to act in deliverance and reasons with God. Now in doing so he teaches us the four reasons that God must bring judgment!

- He must defend His honor (18,22-23)
- He must love His own (19)
- He must remember His covenant (20)
- He must give justice (21)

So the lesson of the psalm is that when we are in that devastated condition, we must be patient. God has a history of delivering His own, God has all power necessary to do it, and God has irrevocable reasons for doing it. We must be patient. We must wait.

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 75 - God's Judgment Cannot Be Opposed

This Psalm has what scholars designate as a melody indicator: Do Not Destroy. It could indicate the tune that the Psalm was sung to. But only four Psalms bear it. The others are Psalms 57-59, all by David, two of which specify the occasion, when David was being pursued and hunted by Saul and "Do Not Destroy" was the prayer of David's heart. In Psalm 75 Asaph seems to extend that theme from a prayer for deliverance from destruction, to a vision of what is going to happen in the future. God's judgment is going to come upon the wicked who are trying to destroy the righteous and that judgment cannot be opposed. It starts out as a Psalm of:

I. Praise For God's Judgment (1-3) Asaph is praising God for His nearness during those times when we face destruction and also that God controls the judgment of the wicked. He chooses the time and the manner of it. And He is going to hold the world firm until that time. Now from the New Testament we know the time. At the return of Jesus Christ, God will judge all the wicked of the earth who are alive. He will smash down all the oppressors among men. And then at the end of the Millennium they will stand before God at the Great White Throne to be sentenced to eternal damnation. And so Asaph continues with a:

II. Warning To The Wicked (4-8) It is a warning to the wicked not to boast and act proud. Lifting up the horns is a metaphor from the animal world for a proud attitude. But here are the reasons why there is no room for pride:

1. **nobody from anywhere can exult you to a high position.** It is not of human doing. It is God who puts you where you are. If you're high right now, God put you there, but He can also put you down low when He wants. You

can't stop Him. When God goes to judge you, there's nobody you can turn to. Nobody can help you; nobody can stop it. His judgment is unopposable. And this is what He says:

2. all the wicked will drink the cup of His wrath They will drink it, not in part, but all of it, down to the very last sip, the very last part of the cup. They will experience the absolute fullness of the wrath of God upon their sin and there will be no escape. No pride will help in that day. So Asaph gives his:

III. Concluding Assurance (9-10) He praises God for this fact: the pride of the wicked ones will be cut off in destruction, but the righteous will be set in the position of exultation with God. That's how it will be. It is unchangeable. Evil can never triumph. Nobody can oppose or escape the judgment of God as much as they would like to!

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 76 - God's Judgment Is To Be Feared

This Psalm says one thing: God is nobody to mess with. Now Asaph, you remember, lived during the days of David and there are some clues to the timing here. In verse 2 the words *His tent* indicate that the tabernacle is still in Jerusalem, so there is no Temple and it is after the ark has been brought up to Jerusalem. This would place the great destruction that Asaph is referring to about the time of 2 Sam. 8-10, when David was defeating and subduing a number of his foreign enemies. My guess is that it refers to 2 Sam. 8:3-5, where David conquered the army of the Syrians. God gave in that day a great victory over horses and chariots, and the enemies of God and of Israel died and lay slain by the thousands. Asaph would have had the opportunity to see all this and this Psalm is more than likely his response to the awesomeness of God's judgment on Israel's enemies. First we see:

I. The Place Of God's judgment (1-3) There is only one place to find God in the Old Testament and that is in Israel, in Judah, in Jerusalem, on Mt. Zion, in His tent, His tabernacle. The whole world would know that now! And He never left home! He simply pronounced judgment (8) and the all the weapons of the enemy were broken and stopped. Then Asaph pauses (*selah*) to catch his breath.

II. The Awesomeness Of God's judgment (4-9) What a sight it must have been to look over that battlefield at all the heaps of slain warriors and wrecked chariots and dead horses. And Asaph concludes something about God's judgment:

1. it kills the mightiest of men

2. it stops the mightiest of weapons The horse and chariot was the mightiest weapon known to man in that day; I'm not sure whether David even had any at this stage in his life. I think it's in this battle that he acquired his first horses and chariots. They couldn't stand before God's judgment. And the point is that nothing can stand before it; nobody can stand against His wrath, not even all the nations of the world massed together in the last day!

III. The Effects Of God's Judgment (10-12) When God shows His judgment openly and outwardly, it has great effects:

1. it brings Him praise This is that famous verse, *the wrath of man will praise you* and we usually take that to mean that God turns the anger of the wicked to His glory. That's true, but the NIV may end up closer to the point. When God shows His judgment on wicked men, people bow down and say, "Praise the Lord!!" That's what Israel was doing!

2. it restrains the wicked The meaning of this second clause is debatable but if the NIV is right, wicked men will think twice before trying to oppose God's people again. Those Syrians sure gave up and quit trying!

3. it convicts the saints It reminds us that that same great and terrible God is the God we worship and the God we have made vows and promises to. It puts a healthy dose of fear into us. It gives us a healthy respect for our Father and causes us not to trifle with Him

4. it draws the unbelievers The Syrians began sending tribute, but it was not just to David, it was to David's God! It brings unbelievers to want to worship the right God!

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 77 - God's Judgment Is Certain

Here's a trivia question: What is Jeduthun? Answer: It is the name of another chief singer and Levite; he is the "Director of Music". Here we have one musician writing a song for another! This Psalm came out of a very troubled time in Asaph's life, a time when he was in great distress and was praying, but it didn't seem to help. But then he meditated on the past, on the great things God had done, and it gave him a fresh conviction that the Judgment of God is certain.

I. His Distress (1-3) Whatever this trouble is, it has really affected him. He has been crying out to God, not only in the day but even at night, crying out to God to stop whatever or whoever was afflicting him and put an end to his suffering and distress. But nothing was happening and he was growing weary and tired of praying. Satan was wearing him down.

II. His Questioning (4-9) At first he prayed with vigor, but after a while his mind began to raise some serious questions, questions that are still the same today, that come into our minds when we suffer:

- Will this go on forever?
- Has God stopped loving me?
- Has He failed to keep His promise?
- Is He no longer merciful?

In short, is something wrong with God? Has He ceased to be the just, loving, kind God that I know? Will He never judge the wicked and deliver me? These are natural doubts that arise when God makes us wait. But these thoughts are not to be left go; they must be dealt with. So we have:

III. His Cure (10-15) He begins to remember what God has done in the past, to think about the times when God has allowed His people to be afflicted before and how He's always delivered them and judged the wicked. The one special work of God that he's thinking about is the Exodus. God displayed His power among the nations by judging the Egyptians and rescued His people at the same time. And when he remembers this, it has a profound effect. He begins to break out in praise. He begins to have a confident assurance that just as Israel had to suffer and wait until judgment came, so he could wait in hope, knowing God's judgment and deliverance will come.

IV. His Description (16-20) This is interesting because it adds inspired details not found in the Exodus account. Evidently, as God drove the water back and the people went through, there was also a terrible storm with thunder and lightning and a downpour. It shook the ground. And Asaph pictures the scene most strikingly: the waters writhed and convulsed at God's presence, His lightning lit the way, the sky resounded with His thunder until the very earth shook. And yet He led His people through the midst of it like a shepherd!

God's judgment is mighty and it is certain. The wait may be long but there will come a day when God will judge the wicked and rescue His own. We may well look at the whole world and ask that question concerning His return. How long, O Lord? Have you forgotten? And then we look back and remember and we are assured, "No, one day Jesus will return and smite the earth with the rod of His mouth..."

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalms 78 - God's Judgment Is Continual

A maskil is a teaching Psalm. Because it is long and contains a narrative of the whole exodus and wilderness events, we can tend to miss a very important fact about the whole Psalm. The occasion can be found by connecting its opening remarks after the preface (9-11) with its closing remarks (65-72). God's original blessing rested upon the tribe of Ephraim; it was evidently the leading tribe of privilege. Ephraim was Joseph's son and so would be in line for the birthright as the firstborn of Jacob's wife Rachel. Reuben forfeited his right as actual firstborn through adultery. Simeon and Levi forfeited it through their cruel murder of the town where Shechem lived. Ephraim could have been the leading tribe. It was from them that God gave the leader, Joshua. It was in Ephraim that God set up His Tabernacle at Shiloh. It was Ephraim that He expected to provide leadership and remain true to Him among the tribes. But what do we find in the days of the judges? Ephraim refused to go help Jephthah fight against God's enemies, the Ammonites (Judg. 12:1-4), and even was jealous and fought against him. In chapters 17-18 it was Ephraim where the idolatrous shrine and image were built in Micah's house and his Ephraimite neighbors who gathered together to try to recover it. **Verses 9-10** are evidently true of them and so God's judgment was to move them out of preeminence. He chose another tribe, the tribe of Judah and brought His real king out of that tribe. He moved His dwelling to Judah and plunked it down on Mt. Zion where His Son would be crucified. The lesson is that when you forget what God has done for you and rebel against Him that His judgment will fall. He will remove you from the place of usefulness and service and give that blessing to others. Thus the:

(1-8) Preface - Our responsibility to teach our children so they will not experience the judgment of God, because God's judgment of His people is continual. We can break the cycle of it by bringing our children to know Him and to raise their children to know Him. That's what Israel was to do but they failed and so their whole history is the story of repeated failure and judgment in the face of the grace of God. We must not only remember, but teach our children to remember, God's goodness and respond with obedience. The pattern below outlines the rest of the Psalm:

WHAT HE DID

12-16 delivered them from Egypt
 23-29 provided manna and quail

38-39 was patient with them

42-55 redeemed/gave them Canaan

65-72 gave them victory/the tabernacle on Zion/King David

WHAT THEY DID

17-20 grumbled and complained

no repentance

32 more sin/refused to go into the land

34-37 hypocrisy

40-41 rebelled against Him

56-58 tested Him by idolatry

GOD'S JUDGMENT

21-22 He became angry

30-31 He judged them

33 He killed the generation in wilderness

59-64 delivered them to the nations

The pattern is always God blesses, we sin, He judges. Over and over again. The Psalm ends, leaving the question, "What will they do next? Walk with God or sin against Him and bring more judgment on themselves?" Do you see the point? God's judgment is continual. He applies it to His people again and again and again when they rebel. You can't beat it! You must learn to obey and God is more stubborn than you are!

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 79 - God's Judgment Has An End

This Psalm is another prophetic Psalm; it looks ahead to events that are still future but talks about them as though they are present or past. Asaph lived around 1000 BC in David's time, yet the judgment he predicted in this Psalm did not occur until 587 BC, when Babylon did the very things he prophesied. They also happened again in 70 AD when Jerusalem fell to the Romans. One thing is for sure, Asaph saw that judgment was coming.

I. The Judgment Coming to God's People (1-4)

1. invasion by Gentiles
2. defiling of the Temple
3. destruction of the city of Jerusalem
4. slaughter of the inhabitants
5. their lack of burial
6. the mocking of the enemies round about

Notice how completely all of this was fulfilled and how God knew all that was going to happen! But notice also that in the midst of the conviction that judgment was going to come, Asaph also was sure that that judgment had to have an end. And so he makes the following pleas, echoing Israel's feelings during that time.

II. The Reasons God's Judgment of His People Has An End (5-12)

1. God's righteous anger has a point of satisfaction (5)
2. God must be just even when He uses others to punish His people (6-7)
3. God will not refuse to forgive (8)
4. God must maintain His testimony among the heathen (9-10)
5. God hears the groans of His people (11)

III. The Promise of Praise (12-13) When God's judgment is over, God's people will praise Him. This hasn't happened yet either for the Jews nor us. It is still prophetic. It looks to the return of Christ and how we will praise Him that His judgment of His people cannot last.

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 80 - God's Judgment Can Be Reversed

This Psalm is still another prophetic Psalm, that is, it looks ahead to events that are still future but talks about them as though they are present or past. Asaph looks ahead to Israel's situation after the Babylonian Captivity; nothing from Asaph's own lifetime matches the circumstances of this Psalm. It also has a melody indicator listed, "to the tune of the lilies of the covenant". Nobody is really sure what that means but as I look at the Psalm, its whole theme seems to be that God's people are still His people; His covenant with them still stands and because of that His judgment can be reversed! Compare the four cries in verses 3,7,14,19; "Restore us..restore us.. return to us..restore us!" Israel has been disciplined by her God but His judgment on His people is not final; it can be reversed and their relationship with Him restored! Now in verses 1-7 you have the:

I. The Cry for Reversal (1-7) God used to lead Israel like a shepherd but now He is angry and won't listen to her prayers. He has fed them with sorrow and tears by the bowlful. He has made them a mockery before their neighbors. That was His judgment on them as His people. But they cry out to Him to reverse it, to make things as they used to be, to once again be led into green pastures in the light of His favor and blessing instead of His anger. And Asaph is confident that God will eventually do this. To make application, this is true for us as His sheep and His people. He may discipline us when we sin

and backslide but when we wake up and realize our desperate condition and long once more to know the blessing of His presence, it can be ours! And in the next section He tells us why:

II. The Basis of Reversal (8-19) He uses a parable about a vine. God took Israel like the shoot of a vine out of Egypt and planted it in Canaan and it grew and spread and filled the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. But then God broke down the wall around the vineyard and a wild boar named Babylon came and rooted up the vine. So the cry is this (15), "We are your vine, your planting. Watch over your vine; watch over your son." Now Israel is called God's Son at least twice (Hos. 11:1) which may indicate that God's relationship with Israel is more than that of an owner; it is that of a father! But it also may be an allusion to Christ, the real Son of His right Hand (17), the Messiah who was to come. God had to watch over and restore Israel because it was of Israel according to the flesh that Christ had to come. In preserving her, He was guarding Him! And my friends, that is the basis of the reversal of our discipline too! Not only did God save us from our Egypt at one time, redeeming us so that we belong to Him and He must watch over what is His, but He also planted His Son in us! The Son of His right hand lives inside us. In watching over us He is watching over His Son in us! And our relationship with Him is as sure as that of the Son. So on that basis we can always return to Him with surety! We can always experience a renewal of blessing after discipline. We are not like the wicked. His judgment for us can always be turned into joy once again!

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 81 - God's Judgment Can Be Avoided

This is identified as a Psalm of Gittith. Now nobody really knows what that means. The root of it has to do with the winepress, so perhaps it is the name of a certain tune or perhaps indicates a song of joy, which this certainly is. It was written to be sung on the day of a particular feast (5). Some older commentators identify it as the Passover because of verse 5. But the context seems more to be that of harvest time (verse 10 says "fill it", verse 16 mentions "wheat") which would make it the Feast of Tabernacles. Now Tabernacles remembers the Wilderness experience, how God led Israel through the wilderness and provided for her needs. But it also had to remind them of Israel's repeated failures in the wilderness where God had to discipline and judge His people. God's cry in this psalm is repeated three times: verse 8, "if you would but listen", verse 11, "But my people would not listen", verse 13, "if My people would but listen"! Judgment could be avoided if we would just listen!

I. The Praise God Wants (1-5a) He wants it all, singing, shouting, music, the rhythm of the tambourine, the melody of the strings, the blast of the trumpets. Some of us would make awfully poor Jews. They did it on every appointed occasion, new moon, full moon, plus the 7 appointed feasts. God deserves it for redeeming us!

II. The Warning God Gives (5b-10) Here's a technical note. Verse 5 divides in half. After the word *Egypt* (despite the NIV), everything changes to first person, using "I" instead of "we". It is God speaking as in verse 6 and following. God says "I heard a language (literally a *lip*) I did not know, I took Israel out of slavery. You called and I answered." The two phrases are parallel. The language God heard was the "groaning of the Israelites in bondage". It was then He rescued them out of distress and led them into the wilderness and tested them there. But He also warned them, "Have no other gods! If you would just listen, you would open your mouth as wide as you like and I would fill it. I redeemed you! I want you! If you would just listen and not run after other gods I would bless you"

III. The Story God's People Repeat (11-16) Israel didn't listen in the wilderness and judgment came. They didn't listen in the days of the judges and judgment came. They didn't listen in the days of the kings and the captivity came. So God let them run their course, let them have what they wanted without Him. That's the worst discipline! Israel would be fed and satisfied instead of being judged, if only she would listen. We can't claim these specific promises (material blessings) but we can claim the principle. We can avoid the disciplinary judgment of God if we would just listen to Him. But how many times does God hang His head over us and say "If you would only listen..."

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 82 - God's Judgment Is Just

You'll notice the word "gods" here is in italics. It is the Hebrew word *elohim* which is not only the title of God but can also refer to human judges. Compare Ex. 21:6, 22:8-9. The gods he's referring to here are not idols and false gods but human judges who have been given responsibility to take His place in judging men. And the one thing that God chided Israel for repeatedly before the captivity was for perverting justice in the land. That is the message of this Psalm. And what it tells us is that God's judgment is truly just, not arbitrary or influenced like human judgment is. The first thing we see is that:

I. God Judges Judges (1) - God pictures Himself presiding over the human judges of Israel, those who are supposed to be "little gods", to take His place as His representatives judging the people. And now the Great Judge is passing judgment on the judges! What a wonderful thing to remember. There may not be justice many times on earth. Maybe the judges will

rule that abortion is legal or that prayer cannot be held in public schools. But that is not the end of the story! God judges judges! And in the body of the Psalm we have:

II. God's Indictment of Judges (2-7) Here we see what God expects not only of judges but really a picture of what true justice is. It is:

- **defending those who cannot defend themselves**
- **maintaining the rights of those whose rights are being violated**
- **rescuing those who need help against the wicked**

I wonder if God would indict us. Are we doing these things? Many times we are apathetic and unconcerned about these very issues. But God isn't. He is greatly concerned to see justice done. But here's what was going on among the judges of the land (5):

- **they do not understand justice**
- **they are walking in darkness**, that is, actively doing evil, perverting justice
- **they are shaking the very foundations of the world system**, the way God made the world to work. We live in a moral universe!

And God chides them saying (6-7) "I called you *elohim*, gods, those who rule in My place my 'sons'. But I will judge you and you will die like men!" To be one who gives judgment is a high and lofty calling and will result in greater condemnation! By the way, Jesus quoted this verse in Jn. 10:34 to defend himself against the charge of blasphemy. If God could call human judges "gods", then He who really was God was not blaspheming to call Himself God! But the Psalm ends with:

III. Asaph's Call For God To Judge (8) You can almost hear the sigh. Asaph can't wait for real, true justice to come, for God to rise up and set up His kingdom where justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. If there's one thing that the injustice all about us should do, it is to make us long for a better day, the day when a King shall reign in righteousness! Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

THE SONGS OF ASAPH: The Judgment Of God

Psalm 83 - God's Judgment Avenges His Own

This Psalm is either a prophecy given ahead of time by Asaph himself or it is a prayer by one of his descendants mentioned in 2 Chron. 20:14. Notice the situation of the Psalm. Israel is opposed by a confederate enemy composed of Edom, Moab, Amalek, and cronies from the surrounding area, including some support by Assyria. Well, since both Amalek and Assyria ceased to exist by the time of the Captivity, this situation must reflect something in the biblical record before that time and the only thing close is in the time of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chron. 20:1-4. This vast confederacy was closing in on them just a day's march away. And they all prayed to God. Perhaps Ps. 83 was the very prayer they prayed in that day. At any rate, Jahaziel, one of Asaph's descendants got an answer from God in verse 14 and following that God would fight this battle for them. So they went out praising God and God raised the factions up against each other and they slew each other. All Israel had to do was pick up the spoils. With that situation and the answer in mind, perhaps you can now appreciate Ps. 83. First notice:

I. The Hatred of the Enemies of the People of God (1-8) Even though all of these were blood relatives or near neighbors of Israel, they always hated her for some reason. They wanted to see her wiped out and remembered no more. That hatred began even in the day she came out of Egypt when they wouldn't let her pass by. Jesus said we are not to be surprised if the world hates us; in fact, we are to expect it! And He gave the reason: we are not of the world, that is, we are not like them; we don't act like them. If things go well for us, they are jealous. If things don't go well, they make fun and try to make them worse. There is a supernatural Satanic hatred of the people of God that exists in this world and always will. But notice also:

II. The Vengeance of God on His People's Enemies (9-18) In Barak and Deborah's day, God avenged Himself on the Midianites by flooding the Kishon River. In Gideon's day God again smote the Midianites causing confusion and routing the army and letting Gideon's 300 kill their nobles Oreb and Zeeb and their princes Zebah and Zalmunnah. So Asaph prayed on that basis and asked God to confuse and terrify and destroy them as before. You see, vengeance belongs to God. God has set Himself up to be the protector and also the avenger of His people. So they pray for God to act and because we read the story, we know He did, in just the same marvelous way. I would only point out one thing. Everybody wants to get rid of their enemies. But Asaph wanted more than that; he wanted the whole world to know that the Lord is the only true God and to seek Him (verses 18,16). I think there is something in this for us. We ought to pray for our enemies to be saved but there is nothing wrong with praying for our enemies to be stopped and for praying for God to get all the glory and draw people to Himself through it!

But the truth is here that God avenges His people. Even in the Book of Revelation, the souls under the altar cry out, "How long, O Lord..." All the enemies of God must recognize that God is the avenger of His people and that they are the apple

of His eye and on their oppressors His judgment will fall. Even Jesus said it would be better to have a millstone around your neck and to be cast into the sea than to offend one of the little ones who believe in Him!

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PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 1-8 The Word and the Heart

Ps. 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible and the longest of the Psalms. Its subject is the Word of God and really it is written in praise of the Word. It is also a prayer; written in the first person as the Psalmist pours out his thoughts about the Word to God Himself. It is also an acrostic Psalm, which doesn't mean much to us in English, but its verses are in groups and the first word of every verse in the group begins with the same Hebrew letter, *aleph*, *beth*, etc. At first sight they seem very repetitive but when I read through it in devotions earlier this year I discovered that each group seems to stress somewhat of a different aspect of just how wonderful God's Word really is. Read (1-8).

Twice (verses 2 and 7) the Psalmist mentions the heart. If I could leave the poetry and summarize the thought, he Says, "People who live according to God's Word are blessed or happy, but it must be more than just an outward keeping of rules. It must be motivated out of seeking God with the whole heart. It is an upright heart that God wants!" There is a trap we must be careful not to fall into. It's so easy to do what our Bibles say to do in a grudging or unwilling fashion, not because we want to, but because we have to! But walking in God's Word has to become more than that. Heb. 4:12 says the Word is to penetrate deep all the way to the intents of the heart! The really happy person is the one who is having his heart changed and molded by the Word!

Now having said that, the Psalmist immediately realizes that his own heart is not there yet and beginning with verse 5 prays that he might find it true in his own life and pledges himself to try to have an upright heart and therefore life with God's help. Think about that in your own life. Does God's word really affect your heart? Do you really want and love to obey it from the heart?

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 9-16 The Word and Purity

I. The Principle (9) Living according to the Word of God will keep you pure and if you start it when you're young, it will keep you all the way.

II. The Process:

1. seeing the Word as an extension of God Himself (10) The motive for purity has to be love for God Himself; I must want to be pure because God is pure and I love Him.

2. hiding the Word in the heart, knowing it thoroughly (11) I must know it so well that I remember it when I need it, so it is there for God to bring it to mind. That means constant reading and memorizing.

3. depending on the Lord to teach it to us (12) Knowing and especially understanding the Word is a big task. We must be leaning on God to help us.

4. repeating the Word with the lips (13) That's how you memorize the Word but that's also how you share it with others. In sharing it you learn it more deeply than ever.

5. realizing the value of the Word (14) It is more precious than treasure; to know the mind of God is an infinite blessing.

6. meditating on the Word with our mind (15) We must think about the Word, ponder what it means and why God says what He says.

7. continuing in the Word without neglect (16) When you slack off, you lose it. You must continue the process all your life.

When you do all these things, then the Lord will help you live according to His Word and your life will reflect it and thus be pure. Jesus prayed for His disciples, "Sanctify them through thy Truth; thy Word is truth."

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 17-24 The Word and Life

Verse 17 indicates that the Word of God is vital to our lives here on earth. There is a wonderful part that the Word plays in the life of the child of God that is absolutely indispensable. These verses seem to form four couplets of two.

I. It is our desire (17-18) The two verses seem to be parallel; the good he wants God to do is to open his eyes that so that he may see wondrous things in the Word and obey them. He had a desire to understand more and more of the Word of God, to understand things that stand out, things above the ordinary, things one does not see at first reading. So should we. Most people have nothing to live for, no goal to pursue in life beyond the usual eat, drink, and be merry stuff. But we do, to know more and more of the Word.

II. It is our desperate need (19-20) He is a stranger, literally a sojourner, an alien in a foreign land upon the earth. He needs the word. He needs it so desperately that his soul is consumed with desire (the KJV says it is *breaking* with desire) for the Word. David saw that need. Oh without the Word where would we be? We would not have the mind of God, would not know how to live. Just as a traveler in the desert needs water, so we who are pilgrims and strangers on the earth need the Word!

III. It is our defense (21-22) Wicked men who ignore God's Word stand under His curse; they are in line for His rebuke. If I keep the Word, I stand in line for His blessing. What a secure feeling to know that I am in God's favor because I have kept His Word! It is my defense; it shelters me from the things that fall on the wicked. Without it, I would be going down the same path, in line for the same condemnation as them.

IV. It is our delight (23-24) It is literally our *enjoyment*. Our joy does not come from being popular and having others speak well of us. In fact, the Word is our joy in spite of others who may slander us. When I am opposed and persecuted, I can meditate on the Word and find joy because it is my counselor. It gives me good advice, God's advice, and tells me what to do.

So the Word is my desire, my desperate need, my defense and my delight in life. Others have put other things in that place in their lives like money, another person, a child, a position, etc. But only God's word is a fit subject to fill that place. What are you in love with?

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 25-32 The Word and Strengthening

These verses all begin with the Hebrew letter D (*daleth*) and in English you find four "D" things here also:

I. Depression - The Psalmist is depressed (25a) Literally, his soul clings to the dust. The Hebrews had a custom of casting dust on their heads and sitting in ashes when some sorrow arose and they were sad. He feels as though his very soul is clinging to the dust which is probably a metaphor for the idea that he feels like dying, like he is almost in the grave. A graphic description of that is plain in 28a; his soul literally "drops" because of grief and sorrow. It feels as though his tears are dripping away his very life. But in the midst of depression, there is also:

II. Devotion - He continues to be devoted to God in spite of his sorrow; he does not blame God. (26-7) He has been open and forthright with God and confessed all his sin. He has had God answer his prayer. He is confident of being forgiven. He wants to learn more about God's Word through the suffering he is in. He wants to meditate on and contemplate God's working so he can learn and grow, even in his sorrow. But there is also:

III. Dependence - He knows he cannot do this on his own, so he offers three petitions to God:

1. Preserve me (25b) Literally, revive or quicken me. Give me life and keep my sorrow from leading to death.

2. Strengthen me (28) Give me the strength to endure this sorrow and suffering as you have promised in your Word.

3. Keep me (29) from falling away from the Word and into sin through this depression. Sorrow and suffering can often lead us to sin. Instead of profiting, we can depart from the word.

We need God and His word when we suffer but we must also have:

IV. Determination (30-32) Notice the "I's". I have chosen, I hold fast, I will run. He has determined that no matter what, he will not depart from God's Word, that he will not become disobedient, for he is confident that God will set his heart free from its suffering and pain, literally, that God will enlarge his heart.

So when you suffer and are burdened with sorrow, depend on the Lord and determine that you will follow Him. Cling to His Word and you will find your heart enlarged.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 33-40 The Word and Perseverance

This section contains three promises and eight petitions. Look at the promises; they have to do with perseverance, with sticking it out:

I. I will obey to the end (33), that is, of life without giving up or quitting.

II. I will obey whole-heartedly (34) not just half-heartedly or in the letter, but in the spirit.

III. I will obey delightedly (35) I will love it while I am doing it, not just because I have to, but because I am happy to.

Now those are heavy promises and the Psalmist realized it was only God who could help him to persevere. So he fashions eight simple sentence prayers. If we are to persevere in walking according to God's word, we need to pray like this too. They are in two sets of four. The first one shows in detail how God must help us relate to the Word:

1. help me see the Word with my eyes (33) Literally it says to *point out*. We need help in seeing and recognizing God's commands.

2. help me understand the Word with my mind (34) We need the help of the Holy Spirit to understand what it means in our lives.

3. help me obey the Word with my feet (35) We need help to have guts to translate it into action, to do it.

4. help me love the Word with my heart (36) Literally it says to *bend* or *incline*. We need God to change our hearts to love the word; it doesn't come naturally.

Then he goes back with four more petitions for these same points:

1. help my eyes ignore the world (37) We need help not only to look at the word but to look away from the world and its alluring things.

2. help my mind recognize your working (38) The NAS says, "Establish thy Word to thy servant as that which produces reverence for thee". That is, we need to recognize God at work fulfilling His promises. Our mind needs not only to understand the word, but to recognize when God is fulfilling it and that builds reverence and trust that will see us through..

3. help my feet resist temptation (39) The disgrace he dreads is sinning, disobeying; he's really praying for help in resisting temptation.

4. help my heart desire the Word (40) or "revive me with your righteousness". Sometimes our heart begins to bend back, to re-incline the wrong way and we need a fresh vision of God's righteousness to rekindle that desire and longing for the Word again.

In all, we only persevere when we depend on the Lord.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 41-48 The Word and Confidence

The verses of this section all start with the Hebrew letter W (*wau*) which is by itself a conjunction meaning "and", "also", "but" or "so". Here the Psalmist speaks of the confidence he has in God's word and what it means to him. Verse 41 shows the source of that confidence, the unfailing nature of God. As long as God does not fail, His Word cannot fail and if the Word cannot fail, then I can have confidence in at least five areas:

I. confidence to answer my enemies (42) I can speak back to those who taunt and mock with truth and the confidence that I will not be proved wrong by them. I think of the evolution theory: we can stand on the Word, in the end science will vindicate it!

II. confidence for future hope (43) Hope in the Bible is always looking to those future certainties which await the believer. Through the Word I have confidence that there is a heaven and I will be there, etc.

III. confidence to obey (44) Because God's Word is true and unfailing, I know that I am acting right when I obey it. Regardless of how others may act or even if I am called into question for my act, I can act with confidence and know I am doing right.

IV. confidence to live (45) I have nothing to hide; I have nothing to fear. I can live freely for I know that I have been walking in the right path.

V. confidence before all (46) It doesn't matter how important the person is, whether king or president. I can speak of God's Word to them and know it is true. My very life may depend on its outcome but I need not fear because it is true. To get that kind of confidence the Psalmist loved the Word so much that he did three things:

1. he delighted in the Word (46) It means to look at something in love, the way you look at your kids.

2. he lifted up his hands to the Word (47) That means to perform it, like you would set your hand to the plow, to start an important action.

3. he meditated on the Word (48) He thought about it and reflected on it and let God speak to him.

And as you do those things the Lord will give you great confidence as well.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 49-56 The Word and Comfort

Hebrew Z (*zayin*) words start these verses, like *zachar* (Zechariah means God remembers). But the word that appears twice in these verses is the word *comfort*. In Hebrew it means to sigh, like a sigh of relief, a relaxing because everything is OK. We can derive comfort from the Word of God and from obeying the Word of God. You have probably experienced that at certain times in your life; maybe you were in a time of need and God comforted you through a verse. The Psalmist mentions three times when he found special comfort in God's Word:

I. Comfort in suffering. (49-50) His comfort was this: that God would remember to keep the promises in His Word. And that gave him hope. When we are sad, we can know that God has not changed His mind; He has not forgotten the promises in His Word. Phil. 4:7 and 4:13 and 4:19 are all true and when you have problems with worry, circumstances or finances, they will comfort you, if you but remember and think about them!

II. Comfort in mocking (51-53) His comfort was this: no matter what the mockers had to say He was doing right according to what God had to say. He remembered the Word and was comforted that he was pleasing God. In fact, it went beyond that. As he remembered the Word he became incensed at the way the mockers were breaking and disregarding it. He realized it was they who had the problem, not him!

III. Comfort in lodging (54-56) His comfort was this: wherever he traveled God was with him. No matter where he went or what he did, he remembered God's Word and because of that He knew God was with him there. He did not have to fear and be afraid, but if he began to be like that, he simply remembered God's Name and His promises and was comforted. Even in the night when things get scary and fearful and even much more so in those days, he was comforted and could rest secure.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 57-64 The Word and Obedience

The Hebrew letter *Heth* is a hard *kh* sound and other than the fact that all these verses start with it, that has nothing to do with the fact that they all deal with the subject of obedience to the Word. The Word is not a static thing that just kind of sits there. It must be reacted to. It must be accepted or rejected. It must be obeyed or ignored. So first of all obedience is:

I. promised (57) It is inherent in the concept of Lordship. If Christ is our Lord then we have promised obedience to Him and we ought to repeat that promise regularly. But that obedience can't be mechanical, it must be:

II. whole-hearted (58) There has to be in us a real desire to obey God's word, planted by the Holy Spirit.

III. considered (59) It means a willingness to examine our ways, the ways in which we are acting right now. So many times we keep on in our set of habits and actions because we're used to them without any thought of considering them or

weighing them. Jesus talked of looking for the beam in our own eyes. We must consider and evaluate whether we are truly being obedient.

IV. immediate (60) Without delay. When you know to do good, do it. There should not be hemming and hawing around. It should be a natural instantaneous response.

V. determined (61) It will not be stopped by anything, by intimidation, by fear. Obedience must be bull-headed, willing to do right regardless.

VI. constant (62) Any time, night or day. It should not be on-again, off-again but the same regardless of time and circumstance.

VI. shared (63) Something you do with others who are also obedient. An obedient person recognizes the necessity of good company because he realizes how evil company corrupts good morals. So he companies with other obedient folks.

VII. progressive (64) He feels the need to be taught still. No matter how obedient we are, there is still room to understand more and thus to obey more completely.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 65-72 The Word and Trouble

The Hebrew T (*teth*) starts all 8 of these verses. The KJV has all but two start with T in English and Spurgeon says you can make it all that way if you start 67 and 71 with "Until" and "Tis" respectively. However, for our purposes it is more important that you remember T standing for Trouble! Note that the Psalmist has passed through a time of affliction and may still be; compare verses 67 and 71. Part of that affliction had to do with the lies of enemies. But what the Psalmist gives us here is a glimpse of how the Word affects the way we react to our times of trouble.

I. It changes our perception of trouble (65) Both the KJV and NAS render this in the present, not the future "Thou hast dealt well..." This is not a request of God asking Him to do better in the future but a statement of faith that even as He promised in His Word, God has dealt well and done good by sending the trouble. You see, when we really understand the Word, then we will understand that trouble is not bad; trouble is good. Verse 68 affirms it again. God is good and always does what is good for us. And if to us it appears as trouble, its nature is still good! That sounds like Rom. 8:28!

II. It reveals the purpose of trouble Two are listed here though there may be more:

1. it drives me to the Lord (67) Haven't you found that true in your life? When the going is easy, it's so much easier to forget the Lord and let your spiritual life get lax. But trouble drives us to God. Trouble is the goad that gets us moving spiritually.

2. it drives me to the Word (71) It is in times of trouble that we really dig into the word and find there new insights and meanings, new understandings, new promises. Haven't you also found that to be true?

III. It demonstrates its real value through trouble (72) When I am in trouble I realize the true value of the Word. It is more important to have a word from God, to have His assurance, His promise, than to have all the gold in Fort Knox.

And so the prayer throughout the Psalm is, "Teach me more of the Word". Compare 66, 68b. "Help me to understand your Word that I might better profit from my trouble." Trouble broadens the contrast between the righteous and the wicked.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 73-80 The Word and Others

The Hebrew Y (*yod*) or J starts all these verses. It is just a little squiggle of a letter that Jesus mentioned when He said "Not a jot will pass..." For us the Y will stand for YOU because the gist of these verses is that the Word of God is not given to us for ourselves alone but for the benefit of others, of those around us. First notice two groups to whom we relate:

I. "Those who fear You" or other believers (74, 79) As we walk in understanding of and obedience to the Word, it serves as an example to our fellow believers! Verse 74 says it brings them joy and teaches them to learn to trust God. It is particularly valuable (75) in times of affliction. Others watch us trust God and recognize that God is faithful to us in spite of the problems we have. The second group is:

II. "the arrogant" or unbelievers (78) and the result of his continued trust in and obedience to the word is that they will be "put to shame". Unbelievers also watch us and are shamed by our conduct in comparison to theirs.

So because our following the Word has such a profound an effect on others, there are some things which the Psalmist is concerned about:

- 1. that he know enough of the Word to be a good example (73)**
- 2. that he might see God's love and compassion in the midst of his affliction so that he will not fail (76-77)**
- 3. that he would be kept from sin and so not have himself or the Lord put to shame (80)**

So next time you read your Bible, remember it is not just for you; it is for others. The person you become through it will impact them!

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 81-88 The Word and Waiting

The Hebrew letter K (*kaph*) begins these verses. They say it represents the cupped hand. Here it seems that the Psalmist is waiting with his hand cupped to receive God's help but nothing is forthcoming. He is obliged to wait and so are we, many times. First see:

I. How He Feels

- 1. his soul faints with longing (81)** He's got that yearning in his heart for God to do something about his problems but nothing's happened and he can hardly keep on longing.
- 2. his eyes fail with looking (82)** He's looking for God to do something, thinking "maybe this will be the answer, maybe the answer will come now," until he can hardly keep on looking.
- 3. his body grows frail with testing (83)** In a shepherd's tent there would often be a fire but no chimney, which made it a smoky experience. Wineskins hung from the poles and the smoke would dry and crack and dirty them until they were parched and worn out. His body was weary and tired and felt like one of those wineskins.
- 4. his life passes with waiting (84)** Literally it says, "How many are the days of thy servant?" He feels his life slipping away and his days growing short to see God work. Sometimes you may feel that way when you have to wait for God to act.

II. Why He Feels That Way (84b-87) He's been persecuted and almost lost his life. You might picture David in the wilderness running from Saul year after year and no answer comes.

III. What He Does When He Feels That Way Two things:

- 1. he remains obedient (83b, 86a, 87b, 88b)** He doesn't give up and forsake the Lord and become wicked. He continues being obedient in spite of his feelings and:
- 2. he keeps on praying (82b, 84b, 88a)** He keeps on telling God his problem and asking for His help.

That's the way to wait. Keep on obeying and keep on praying and in the end you'll find it was the best course!

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 89-96 The Word and Permanence

Let's let the Hebrew letter L (*lamed*) stand for LONG! Verse 89 tells us how long: the Word is eternal, forever. In other words it is permanent. Now if you would like some visible assurance of that, just look around. Heb. 11:3 tells us that the world was brought into being by the Word of God. The Psalmist sees:

- 1. the heavens still continuing firmly above (89)** The Hebrew verb can mean to put in array or rank. The stars all stay in place; the sun still rises and sets.
- 2. the earth enduring firmly below (90)** Generation after generation lives and dies but the earth continues the same, rivers still flow, crops still grow.
- 3. the laws of nature continuing (91)** Gravity still works, seasons still change on schedule, birth and death still happen, and so on.

All of these things exist by God's word and since they've been happening for centuries, they are evidence that God's word is eternal. It does not change or wear out. Its promises are as good today as they were 4,000 years ago. For example, if I promise to help you move any time, that might wear out 20 years from now, but God's word never wears out. Now to apply that to us:

1. the word brought deliverance in past problems (92-3) He was in a situation where he feels that disobedience would have cost him his life. But his obedience to the word meant that God delivered and preserved his life. He will never forget it. He owes his life to the Word. Consequently:

2. He can count on God in his present problem. (94-5) God has not changed. His promise to bless and reward obedience was still the same. So it didn't matter that enemies lay in wait. God's Word would be true.

Now we don't have that same promise that God will bail us out of trouble if we obey, but the principle is ours. The promises we've seen at work in the past remain sure for the present. We can count on God's word always. He sums the matter up for us nicely in verse 96. The best of human perfection is finite. God's Word has no boundaries, no limits. It is eternal.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 97-104 The Word and Enjoyment

Let's let the Hebrew M (*mem*) stand for Mmmmm...Good! Did you notice how many times in Scripture God has somebody in a vision eat the Word, eat a scroll, etc. It symbolizes internalizing it, ingesting it. Often reference is made to the taste as here in verse 103. They are sweet as honey is to the physical taste. For the Psalmist, the Word is not dull and boring. Reading it is not just a daily ritual he endures. He has a love affair going with it. Compare verse 97. He doesn't just put it in a corner of his life; he thinks about it all day long. I've got a long way to go on that one! But here's why he loved it so much:

I. It made him wiser than his enemies (98) He didn't have to worry. He could tell the truth from lies. He knew he didn't have to fear those that only kill the body. Because he knew God's truth, he was one up on them; let them do what they will. And the Word was with him constantly so he was never off guard.

II. It made him wiser than his teachers (99) Teachers make mistakes. They teach wrong things. They ALL do. But he could be wiser than them by going to the Word. He could check out what they had to say against the Word.

III. It made him wiser than the elders (100) He didn't have to live to a ripe old age to get wisdom. He could have it now through the Word. Plenty of elders had more years of experience but still wrong behavior. He was ahead because he obeyed God's Word. You see:

IV. The Word is our way of being taught directly by God. (101-102,104) And when you are taught directly by God, that steers you into behavior that you know is right and then you are genuinely happy. Not that men don't contribute to your understanding of the Word; they do, of course. But you have an unchanging Rock of wisdom from God to explore for yourself that can never fail you or be wrong. So fall in love with the word. Learn to enjoy it, to delight in discovering new things in it each day, in hearing God speak to you about your life as you read.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 105-112 The Word and Guidance

Ps. 119:105 is a verse you've memorized from little up. The image is that of trying to walk on a path in the dark. To carry a lantern or lamp and hold it in front lights the path so you can see the next step to take and not get off the path. The Word performs the same function in our lives. It illuminates God's proper path for us to walk on; it gives us guidance as to what God would have us do in every situation. Now if the Word is our lamp, then I see three things worth mentioning here in terms of application:

I. The Principle (106) I must be committed thoroughly to following it. The light does no good if we step in some other direction. As each step is illuminated, we must have a ready commitment to take it, no matter what.

II. The Process – Here are the places the path leads:

- **through suffering (107)** Here's an easy place to make a misstep. But we must follow the Word even when we hurt.
- **through joy (108)** The Word is important in good times too, times of praise, times of joy and plenty.

- **through risk (109)** Sometimes following means risk, means doing things that may cost us money, friends, or even our lives. But the Word lights the way and we can count on it.

- **through danger (110)** They did it to Daniel but he followed the Word right through the lions' den.

III. The Point (111-112) We follow it all the way, to the end. That's the only way it works. Guidance is only as good as our commitment to follow it.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 113-120 The Word and Separation

The Hebrew letter S (*shin*) is convenient to stand for the content of these verses. S can stand for Separation. The Word of God has a lot to say, not only about the subject of loving God but about separating ourselves from sin. There are three kinds of separation that appear in these verses.

I. Separation from wrong thinking (113-114) Compare the KJV and NIV here and you get confused. One has vain thoughts and the other double-minded men! The Hebrew root of the word means a forked branch or bough, a place where the tree splits. A derivative of the word occurs in 1 Kings 18 where Elijah says "How long halt ye between two opinions?" So neither men nor thoughts are in the verse. Literally, it says, "Dividedness I hate but your Law I love". He wanted his thinking to be based on the certainty of the Word of God, not the shaky opinions the world had to offer. Wrong thoughts would keep him from trusting the Word of God, so he wanted to be separate from them and we too must separate ourselves from wrong thinking.

II. Separation from wrong-doers (115-117) Wrongdoers might keep Him from obeying the Word of God. He does not trust himself. He knows he needs God's help to sustain him in continual obedience. And he knows that evil company will corrupt his good morals. I am reminded of 2 Cor. 6:14 and following. There is a fine balance between loving the unsaved and witnessing to them and becoming yoked with them. We must learn where to draw the line of separation.

III. Separation from God (118-120) Here's his motive for separation. He knows that God rejects the wicked and they will ultimately be discarded by Him. On the basis of what? God's Word. So he is awed by the Word, by how powerful it is, dividing men asunder, sorting out the whole race like dross from the silver. So he loves the Word and separates himself from anything that might hinder him from loving it.

That might be a good test for us. Does this thought help me love the Word of God or keep me from it? Does this person help me love the Word of God or keep me from it? If anything keeps us from God or His Word we must separate ourselves from it.

PSALM 119 THE WORD OF GOD

121-128 The Word and Deliverance

The Hebrew letter Ayin has no English counterpart. It is a silent letter and takes on the sound of whatever vowel is placed with it. But these verses are not silent. They are a cry of the Psalmist. He's crying out unto God in a time when he's being oppressed by enemies (121) and he's waiting for God to do something and growing weary (122) but nothing has happened yet. Now let's look at what he prays for:

I. His prayer - He asks for five things you want when persecuted or oppressed:

1. for God's presence (121) He doesn't want God to leave him. Compare that with God's promise in Heb.13:5.

2. for God's guarantee (12:2) The KJV says, "Be surety". Surety is like our concept of a cosigner who agrees that the other man's debt is his own. He wants God to guarantee his well-being, literally his good. Compare that to Rom. 8:28.

3. for God's intervention (123) He wants God to step in and do something now, to change his situation, to keep His promise. Compare that to 1 Pet. 4:12-13.

4. for God's love (124) He wants God to shower His love upon him and teach Him His Word. Compare that to Rom. 8:36 and following.

5. for God's wisdom (125) He wants to understand God's Word. Compare that to Jas. 1:5.

All these things that he wanted, we already have in God's Word. When you need deliverance or suffer oppression you can rest because of God's Word. Now see:

II. His motives (126-128) He can't stand to see God's law broken. Most of the time we want out of trouble because we want relief. It troubles him that his enemies would trample God's Word under foot in doing what they're doing to him. It is time, not simply to deliver him, but because of God's great Name. See:

1. he loves the Word more than gold (127)

2. he believes the Word is true (128)

When you are in trouble like that, cling to the Word. Hold fast to it and wait to see what God will do. Love the Word more than the very deliverance you seek!

Psalm 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 129-136 The Word and Direction

Verse 129 tells us the Word is wonderful. Now that is true in many ways. It is wonderfully accurate. It is wonderfully recorded. It is wonderfully powerful in its effect on people. But the reason the Psalmist calls it wonderful here is because of the direction it gives in our lives. Now verses 130 gives us:

I. The Precious Fact (130) The word means to unfold or open up. When the Word is unfolded it gives light (understanding) to the simple. That's us! It brings us understanding of how things really are and what we should be and do. And it applies in every situation. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a how-to manual that covered all of life and you could turn to it? For example when getting fired, tolerating a tough boss, and so on. That would be impossible in a regular book. But you have it! The Word of God gives understanding for every area of life! However, in order for it to do you any good and for you to use it to take your steps in life, there must be:

II. The Personal Appropriation Some things you must have to make it work for you:

1. desire (131) He panted like a thirsty animal. There must be a longing to know it, to have the Word unfolded.

2. trust (132) You must trust that God will give you the wisdom He's promised. Don't come doubting. You must believe that it's there and that He will unfold it to you because you love Him. This is the Jas. 1:5 of the Old Testament!

3. submission (133) Have a readiness to take your steps in life in accord with the unfolded Word, a commitment to do what God shows you.

4. prayer (134-135) Guidance from the Word usually does not come without prayer. First, we have the opportunity to obey the Word. Sometimes the Lord has to change things so that we have the opportunity to do what He wants us to do. But there must also be prayer to understand the Word. It is not enough simply to desire to understand. It is a gift of God and we must ask Him for it!

5. regret (136) It sounds like it is others who are doing the disobeying and maybe so, but it could be ourselves in view here. There has to be regret and remorse for disobedience as well. There will be times for all of us when we disobey, but in order for God to keep on unfolding His Word, we have to be repentant about the steps where we faltered!

PSALM 119 – THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 137-144 The Word and Rightness

The Hebrew letter *Tsadhe* has a TS sound as in Hertz car rentals. The thing that makes the Word of God so valuable to us is that:

I. The Word is Right (137) Literally, it is straight, level, like a row of bricks all plumb and flush. In other words, it is accurate and correct and true. You don't have to come to it to sift out the true from the false, the good from the bad, as you do any human book. In fact you can't come at it that way. You approach it knowing it to be true and if it doesn't seem that way, then it is your understanding or perception that is messed up; the Word is right.

II. The Word is as right as its Author (137) It's right because its author is perfect and flawless and holy and pure. It proceeds from Him and so is as perfect as He is.

III. The Word is trustworthy (138) Because it is right, you can stake yourself on it, your life, your eternity. And after all, as Christians that is what we are really doing. We are staking our all on the validity of this Book, but we can do that because it is trustworthy.

IV. The Word does not depend on human effort or acknowledgement (139) It is no more true because I believe it or less true because someone else doesn't. It is factually true all by itself, with or without human belief.

V. The Word has been proved by testing (140-141) The Word is not only true in fact, but it has been proved true by centuries of testing by countless numbers of people who have trusted it and found it to be so. The Psalmist also means that he had tested the Word and proved it true in his own life. That proof is available to all.

VI. The Word is true eternally (142-144) It is as eternal as God Himself. It will never go out of date, never have to be revised, never be any less true than it is right now. We can count on it forever, through trouble and distress, through joy and blessing. Circumstances never affect it. It is true forever.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 145-152 The Word and Prayer

The Hebrew letter *Koph* has a hard K sound. We'll let it stand for the word *call* or *cry* which occurs in each of the first three verses here. The Psalmist is here relating an experience of prayer, of calling out to God and telling us the relationship of his prayer to the Word of God. And that's valuable for us too, because we recognize and practice these two things in our devotional life. But they are not separate elements; they are inseparably intertwined. First see:

I. How he prayed (145) With all his heart. It is 6 words, 3 phrases, 2 words each, in Hebrew (no "and"). They are earnest cryings out to God but note how it ends. It is not, "if you will, then I will obey". Rather he is coming to God in prayer with a heart that stands ready to obey.

II. What he prayed for (146) Help with his problem. He prays because he knows God is the only one who *can* help him. But again he proclaims his readiness to obey God. Don't go to God for help with anything unless you go with a heart that is ready to obey the Word of God.

III. When he prayed (147) He rises early for prayer. That's not a bad habit. But notice the only reason he has that kind of hope or trust that God will help him is because of the Word. It is the Word that is the foundation of his trusting in God and thus praying.

IV. How long he prayed (148) He's still praying through the night, all night long; the need is so great but as He prays He meditates on the Word so that his praying is filled with the Word itself. He thinks about it and turns his thoughts back to God in prayer.

V. The basis of his praying (149-152) It is the Word of God. He comes to God on the basis of what he has read in the word. He is convinced of two facts about the Word. Verse 151 says it is true; verse 152 says it is eternal. And so he comes back to God and asks God to keep His Word. He's a promise claimer. He finds something God has said in the Word and asks Him to make good on it because he is trusting the Word.

Prayer is inseparable from the Word of God. People that mouth prayers but never spend time in the Word or study it are missing its real basis.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

153-160 The Word and Deliverance Again

The Hebrew letter R (*resh*) can stand for "repeat" for us. The Psalmist already showed us under *Ayin* (verse 121) how he prayed for God's deliverance and pleaded the Word of God. Here we find the theme of deliverance repeated.

I. What he prays for: There are four things he wants God to do for him in his situation of being persecuted.

1. for God to notice his suffering (153), to pay attention to his problem and not overlook it.

2. for God to take his side (154a), to stand up for him, to plead his cause, to be his protector and defense lawyer.

3. for God to spare his life (154b, 156b) He is about to lose his life for God's sake; he prays he might live.

4. for God to express His love (156a), to demonstrate His compassion by delivering him.

But I want you to notice there is an interesting symmetry here. The Psalmist also shares:

II. What he has done: Note the correspondence:

- 1. he has remembered God's Word (153b)** He has not overlooked or forgotten to do what God commanded.
- 2. he has taken God's side (158)** He has not even desired to take the other side, to throw in his lot with the wicked. He has loathed that idea.
- 3. he has risked his life (157)** He persisted in obeying the word and would not give it up even to preserve himself.
- 4. he has loved God's Word (159-60)** He knows it's true and eternal and he has loved it with all his heart.

I think there's a truth here: what you want God to do for you, you have to be willing to do in return. If you want God to be committed to you, then you must be committed to Him. Then you can rightly call on Him to deliver you.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 161-168 The Word and Peace

The Hebrew letter is S or SH (*shin* or *sin*) depending on whether a little dot is on the right or left at the top. It stands for *Shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace. Verse 165 is the theme verse for the section and tells us that if we are to have great peace in our lives, it will only come to us through loving the Word of God. Nothing can make us stumble, compare Phil. 4:13. This is a corollary that goes with Phil. 4 which teaches us that great peace comes to us through prayer! I think we all know that the Scriptural concept of peace is not the absence of trouble but a tranquility or calm of heart and mind that is undisturbed by the troubles and problems that come our way. Now right away in verse 161 he tells us he's got problems; he's persecuted, not just by insignificant people, but by rulers. He has reason to fear and to worry and yet he has peace because of the Word. Now let's look at the various ways the Word contributes to inner peace:

I. It removes fear (161) Instead of trembling at the thought of his persecutors, he trembles in awe of the Word. When you know what the Word says, you don't need to be afraid.

II. It gives rejoicing (162) Not a likely thing to find when trouble comes, but the Word helps us to do what Phil. 4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always". If you stay in the word you can find joy like the man who struggles to victory in battle and finds great spoil waiting.

III. It keeps from falling (163) The greatest temptation when trouble comes is to fall into sinful behavior. Loving the Word keeps you from that. It secures your peace.

IV. It moves you to praise (164) This is a level higher than plain rejoicing. Rejoicing is finding joy even in the midst of problem. Praise is focusing on and worshipping God in the midst of the problem. It happens to him seven times a day!

V. It gives you patience to wait (166) Peace includes the ability to wait long for the resolution of a problem or the keeping of a promise. It is the Word that keeps us going in the interim, that helps us to hold on instead of giving up.

VI. It keeps us obedient (167-168), not only from love of the Word but from the knowledge that God sees and knows all my ways. This is the other half of verse 163. The Word keeps us from falling into sin but it also keeps us motivated in doing right. We don't give up and slack off to zero and sit there. We keep on obeying and serving.

In effect, the Word forms the factual basis for our peace. Without it peace would be a feeling or an emotion or an attitude. Because of the Word it is an attitude based on fact.

PSALM 119 - THE WORD OF GOD

Vs. 169-176 The Word and Praise

With Hebrew letter T or TH (*teth*) we come to the end of the alphabet and to the end of the psalm. TH reminds us of thanks or praise which is what these verses emphasize. But notice that the praise here has a special connection:

I. For understanding of the Word (171) He had prayed back in verse 169 for understanding of the Word. Now he says that when he gets it, it always moves him to praise. What a wonderful thing it is, this process of illumination that God uses to make us understand His Word.

II. For the character of the Word (172) It is righteous, holy, true. It is everything God is. What a wonderful thing to have God's own Holy Word. That should move us to praise.

III. For the effect of the Word (175) The ordinances had been sustaining him (KJV helping) and he asked to continue to live that he might give praise for the way God had brought the Word to pass in his life. He had seen its effect.

So often we praise God only for nice things that happen to us; how often do we praise Him for the very Word He has given us?

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THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 120 - A Psalm of Comfort in Distress

These Psalms were sung by Jewish pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem for the Feasts three times each year, so as pilgrims traveling through this life on our way to heaven, they can be our songs of Thanksgiving too. Ps. 120 is the first and is a Psalm of comfort in distress.

I. The Source of Our Distress (5-7) Meshech was a barbarian tribe in northern Asia Minor; Kedar is in Arabia to the South. Now the Psalmist was an Israelite, so he didn't actually live outside Palestine, nor in two places at once. He is using these as derogatory terms for the people around him. There have been lots of people in his life who have distressed him. He has tried to be peaceful and accomodating but they look for occasions to make trouble. They tell lies and slander him (verse 2) for doing good. If the Psalmist was David, just think how true this was in his life! O haven't there been people in your life who have distressed you, opposed you and created trouble without cause? What do you do? The Psalm writer longs to be in a better place, in Jerusalem. So do we!

II. The Prayer For Comfort (1-2) Of course he prays to God on these occasions to be with him and deliver him from their attempts to harm him. That's what you do when you're distressed; you pray, ask God's help and you'll find that He gives it. He gets you out of those messes; He gives comfort to your very heart. But be careful as you pray:

III. The Final Answer (3-4) God has arrows, painful arrows, for those enemies in this life but also burning coals, coals of the broom tree that burn hot and long, the fires of hell waiting in the next! If your enemy will not turn, he will burn! But in the end God does not forget; He answers your prayers even though it be long in coming.

But O thank God tonight for the many times He has comforted you when others have put you in great distress! Isn't He a wonderful God?

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 121 - A Psalm of Safety in our Journey

Now that journey may be a literal one like the pilgrims would take on their way up to Jerusalem to worship or it may be the whole journey of life.

I. Our Action (1-2) Going up to Jerusalem is a literal thing. It sits upon the mountains and the ascent from the Jordan valley is steep and long. But on top is God's Temple. So the weary pilgrim lifts his eyes to the hills, that is, to the Lord whose Temple is there. We lift our eyes to Heaven where the Lord is enthroned! He is the only one who can help us and keep us safe in life. So all we need do is lift our eyes to Him, place our trust in Him!

II. Our Assurance (3-8) Now the Psalm switches from "I" to "you" as though someone is telling us these three special things about God:

1. His care is constant (3-4) It is not now and then, on again and off again. He never slumbers nor sleeps, even though you do. One of a traveler's biggest fears is being attacked at night while asleep. Ours too, but listen: we can be asleep; it's OK. God isn't; He's awake! He neither slumbers nor sleeps, neither the little dozing off kind nor the "out like a light" kind of sleeping!

2. His care is complete (5-7) Any possible danger that may come up He is both aware of and big enough to handle. He keeps feet from slipping on the path (3). That's accidents. He protects from sun by day and moon by night, sort of like the pillar of cloud which shaded Israel by day and of fire which warmed her in the desert nights. Those are natural stresses. He protects from all harm; that's attack by others. There is no aspect of our lives that is not safe with Him.

3. His care is continual (8) It will not come to a point and then stop. It is everlasting. It continues through to the journey's end and then forever!

Isn't it good to know that we are kept, to know Heb. 13:5 and Jn. 10:28-30.? Do you want peace? Lift up thine eyes!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 122 - A Psalm of the Beautiful Destination

David wrote this song to be sung by pilgrims going up to the Temple when they arrived and were standing inside the gates. What joy they had on reaching their destination, the earthly Jerusalem. It leads us to think about the joy we'll have on reaching our heavenly destination!

I. The joy of arrival (1-2) At last their feet were standing in the place their hearts had longed for and oh, what joy flooded their souls to be in the presence of God's Temple. What a little foretaste of what John must have felt when the voice said, "Come up here" and immediately he arrived in glory! We will have it too, the joy of being there at last!

II. The joy of fellowship (1) The point is that the pilgrim was with the others whom he had started out with; all their feet were standing there! What a joy to be together in heaven, not saved alone, but together with those who have been our co-laborers in this journey, now seeing heaven together!

III. The joy of the sight (3) They are stunned by the symmetry of Jerusalem compared to their small village back home. She is a city joined closely together, put together just right. Read Rev. 21 sometime!

IV. The joy of worship (4) The purpose of their coming was to praise the Lord and now they would go into the Temple and do just that. In Revelation we see how often the 24 elders, which represent the church, fall down and worship the Lamb. We will fall down in joy before Him!

V. The joy of justice (5) They may not have gotten true justice back in the village, but in Jerusalem they could get true justice from the King. There are thrones set in heaven! Justice will be done at last from there; there will be no more longing for judgment to come!

VI. The joy of answered prayer (6-9) Now David breaks into prayer for Jerusalem to have peace. As beautiful as she was, there was always the realization that she could be overrun by enemies, so prayer was needed. When the pilgrims arrived and found her intact, in a sense they were finding their prayers answered. In the earthly sense we should pray for the peace of Jerusalem too, for when she has true peace, Jesus will have returned! But in the heavenly sense, what a joy it will be to step into heaven and realize that all our prayers have been answered. She stands secure.

Compare Col. 3:1-4. Now I grant that the overall meaning of the passage is to change behavior, but just take these verses for what they say. We need to do that from time to time. Think of heaven, of Christ seated there, how we will be seated there with Him!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 123 - A Psalm of Strength Amid Scoffing

As the pilgrim worshippers went along their way up to Jerusalem, there was a problem they faced that was in some ways more discouraging to them than the dangers of travel. It was people scoffing at them along the way. The problem is detailed for us in verses 3-4:

I. The Problem We Face (3-4) There were, I'm sure, plenty of people who chose not to go up to Jerusalem and who felt that those who did go were ignorant and wasting valuable time and goods. They scoffed and mocked. So it is with us. There are many who mock and make fun of our faith along the way, who ridicule us for what we believe and for worshipping God as we do. Who are they? The proud and arrogant! The KJV and NAS say those who are "at ease" in 4a, people who feel secure and have material things and seem to have no trouble, so they think they don't need God and pour contempt on those who do. And it was discouraging. Remember Nehemiah's wall! Three times the Psalmist says, "much contempt, much ridicule, much contempt". The KJV says "exceedingly filled with contempt" twice. You get the idea. When you've been scoffed at and mocked at, it is so discouraging to you that you can scarcely go on sometimes. But look at:

II. The Remedy We Have (1-2) The travelers had a remedy and so do we!

a. looking to God In Ps. 121 he lifted his eyes to the hills, that is, to God's temple on Mt. Zion. Now he lifts them all the way to God in heaven! He remembers that God is on His throne up there! God can handle this discouragement and these mockers! And so in verse 3 when he looks to God, he prays for Him to have mercy and help. That is our first line of action: when discouraged or scoffed at, pray! Look to God for help. But there are two thoughts about how we must look:

b. looking carefully to God, like the eyes of a servant carefully watch his master for any gesture or sign that he is to obey. We have to watch, ready to obey His slightest command, but I think the idea here is that we focus our complete attention on Him. We don't get sidetracked in the things of this world or look for help in human sources. So we must look to God, depending on Him for help.

c. looking patiently to God A servant watches expectantly, patiently waiting for the signals. So we must keep looking to God patiently, waiting, keeping on with our journey until He does something about those who revile us.

I'm reminded of Heb. 12:2-4. When you're discouraged, lift your eyes to Jesus!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 124 - A Psalm of the Sparing of Life

This Psalm was originally penned by David and no doubt grows out of his experiences of God's protecting hand in the days when he fled from Saul or from Absalom and it is applied nationally to Israel. But I bet those pilgrims were glad to have it to sing as they journeyed up to Jerusalem to remind themselves of the protection of God from the things that might befall them. And we too should rejoice in God's protecting care of us. It seems to fall in three tenses:

I. Past Protection (1-5) If God hadn't been with David, Saul or Absalom would have killed him for sure. If God hadn't been with Israel, their enemies would have wiped them out many times, from the Egyptians to the Philistines! And if God hadn't been with you, there are times you would have been swallowed up too! It may have been on a battlefield in a war or in a hospital bed with a dreadful medical problem or in a split-second on a highway. Sometimes you may not even have been aware how close to death you were. But if it weren't for God's sparing of life, most of us wouldn't be here today! Hence, we'd better remember to give thanks!

II. Present Protection (6-7) The image here is of a little bird caught in the snare of a bird-trapper. It is so easy to get in. You can be lured by bait or by a decoy bird or by settling on a natural resting place. But once in, the bird is not strong enough to break loose. He must have a rescuer on hand to loose him or he is lost. The Lord is that rescuer. There are so many ways Satan can use to destroy us and kill us but we have a deliverer on hand. We can rejoice that we stand here today alive and well.

III. Perpetual Protection (8) Here is the confidence that based on past protection, we can know that the Lord will be our Helper in the future as well. He made heaven and earth and nobody traps birds on His property without His knowledge and permission! Nothing can come to us without His permission and if we die, it is only in His will and for us to be with Him!

Jesus used a different analogy, one with which every child is familiar. "My Father is greater than all and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's Hand!" Nobody can pry open God's protective canopy over us unless He lifts it! What confidence we have!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 125 - A Psalm of Security in Testing

This Psalm is built very much around the geographical imagery of Jerusalem, which would be quite evident to any pilgrim going up there. It seems to come from the time after the captivity when Jerusalem was under the rule of Gentile nations. But its purpose is to show us that even though God permits testing in our lives, we have perfect security.

I. The Security (1-2) Those who trust in God are said to be like Mt. Zion, the mountain which cannot be moved! The city has been destroyed several times but the mountain is still there! You are as secure in God's hand as it is! In prophecy we see it abiding, being the capital of the world during the millennium, still standing after the nations of the world have directed all their fury against it! That's how secure you are. Now if you look around Zion you find it surrounded by other mountains which serve as a protective guard to prevent attack. The Psalmist likens those guard mountains to the Lord. It is not merely that the angels of the Lord encamp round about those who fear Him, but the Lord Himself! The Lord surrounds us with Himself! He really is our shield! Nothing can penetrate Him and we cannot get out without penetrating Him.

II. The Testing (3) It seems, however, that Gentile power is dominating Jerusalem as the Psalmist writes. The KJV *rod* can be a rod for discipline or a ruler's sceptre. The double imagery is appropriate. God allowed invincible Zion to be trodden by her enemies for a purpose. Their rod of authority was His rod of discipline and correction. God keeps us secure but He also allows testing to come for our discipline and correction. But with this comes a word of comfort. He won't allow the testing to continue too long lest it backfire and drive the believer to sin through its severity! There is our

security. With any testing God allows in our life He always limits it and will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear!

III. The Sifting (4-5) That testing, however, serves another purpose. It sifts those who merely profess from those who really belong to God. Those who really aren't His fall away under the testing but the righteous continue on and are blessed! Jesus spoke of this in the parable of the sower as those who are shallow soil and fall away under trial or affliction! God will use that testing to demonstrate and prove that you are truly His!

But thank God that you are secure in every test in Him!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 126 - A Psalm of Encouragement

It is almost certain that this Psalm comes out of the experience of the joy of those who had been carried off to exile in Babylon returning home to Jerusalem. They were like men who dreamed (verse 1), literally it is like the NIV margin "men restored to health", that is, after some great affliction. They laughed and sang uncontrollably. Their return was a testimony to the nations (2b), but they prayed that God would complete the process (4), that He would restore the glory of Jerusalem and fill it with people like He does the empty streambeds in the dry Negev to the south. Now the real meaning of the Psalm can best be seen by comparing it to Ps. 137 which explains the state of the exiles while they were in Babylon. There they wept and cried. They could not sing; their joy was gone. Their lot was to weep. But they were patient; they waited 70 long years and God finally brought them home, now rejoicing at last and they would go out and till the land, plant crops, and reap a harvest (5-6).

So the great lesson in this Psalm is that of encouragement as you find it stated in 5-6. Put simply, weeping will turn to joy, suffering will turn to victory, labor will result in harvest. The experience of the captivity and return was an encouragement to the farmers to now take their precious seed carried with them from Babylon and go out and labor to till the unworked overgrown soil, to invest their tears in the knowledge that out of it would grow a harvest. It was an encouragement to later pilgrims making their long journey up to Jerusalem to keep on plodding, no matter how difficult, for they would arrive and great joy would be theirs. And it is an encouragement for us to keep on serving the Lord, to suffer whatever is necessary to get a taste of what it will be like when we finally reach our heavenly homeland. The message of the Psalm might well be summed up by 1 Cor. 15:58.

The second thing we might find here in 5-6 is something that has been treasured by all soul-winners who have seen it as the commentary to Jesus' parable of the sower. We sow the Word; it falls on different types of soil. Sometimes we wonder if there will be any harvest. This Psalm encourages us to keep on taking the precious seed of the Word of God and planting it in lives, to weep and cry and labor at it because there will certainly be a harvest! We will return with songs of joy carrying sheaves with us, those who have come to Christ!

So endure hardship, keep on sowing. One day you too will enter Jerusalem's gates and sing in inexpressible joy!

The Pilgrim Psalms: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 127 - A Psalm of Family

This Psalm was written by Solomon and, in that case, you can quickly see what "house" he's talking about building. Solomon built the Temple at God's direction and God's glory filled it. Imagine this Psalm sung by the pilgrims as they arrive in Jerusalem and see the Temple rising in its magnificence before their eyes. Solomon reminds them of a basic truth: the vanity of human effort without God. Their thoughts turn in natural progression from the Temple (1a) to the city walls (1b) and then application is made to their own lives (2) and then to their families who have come with them (3-5). The words for son, daughter and house all come from the same Hebrew root, to build!

I. God built the house. Bigger and better temples had been built but are no more. Even this one was destroyed when God deserted it. Effort in any enterprise that God is not in is useless! Any enterprise that you succeed in is only a blessing of God.

II. God gives protection. There might be watchmen galore, but the Lord is the only true protection. Only the blessing of God has kept you thus far!

III. God supplies needs. Human effort in burning the candle at both ends and self denial does not meet your needs; God does. In fact, God's design is to give you proper rest and sleep!

IV. God gives children. Sons and daughters alike are only a gift from Him, not a sign of your own virility. God opened and shut the womb in case after case in Scripture. Children are God's favor and blessing to you. Now sometimes they may seem like God's punishment, but it is not so! Two reasons they are a blessing seem to be in view. (1) Verses 4-5 say that, like a warrior shoots a quiver full of arrows, you can send them forth and cause a tremendous effect far beyond your own individual limitations; they are your arrows to change the world. And (2) verse 6 says they will be a benefit to you later on. Here he's thinking of their defense in the civil actions at the gate (seat of town government). But you've, no doubt, found them a blessing in many ways! Just remember every good and perfect gift is from God.

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 128 - A Psalm of Daily Blessings

The Pilgrims coming up to the Temple came with their families and as they rejoiced in God it was only natural that their thoughts should turn to the daily blessings that God had bestowed on them in their home together. And it's only natural that we should be thankful for those daily blessings too.

I. The Blessings Acknowledged (1) They come from God and are a result of walking in His ways. Now remember that material blessings are not promised to God in the same way that they were to Israel but generally speaking we too are blessed as a result of our obedience and walking with God. At any rate these things are from God, not merely the results of our own hands!

II. The Blessings Enumerated (2-4) He lists the things that God blesses those who fear Him with:

- **material blessings** like being able to work and to enjoy the fruit of it, or having a house to live in and food to eat and clothes to wear and for us a car to drive. Appreciate those things, the taste of good food, the warmth of your nice coat, the clean smell of fresh sheets; many in the world are not so fortunate!

- **your spouse** When did you last thank God for your godly husband or wife. The emphasis here is on fruitfulness, that is, her child-bearing. Think of not only what a good partner he/she is to you but what a good mother/father to your children. That's from God; I know a lot of people who don't have it!

- **your children** They're like olive shoots springing up around the table. Just be thankful to God for them; many would give anything to have them.

To the list you might add your good friends, your freedom, and a host of other things we often take for granted.

III. The Blessing Pronounced (5-6) The Psalmist prays that what He has others might too. He prays they may have prosperity, long life, and peace. Perhaps we ought to pray for others in these realms also. Too often we pray in crisis emergencies. Why not pray for their blessing in daily things as well?

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 129 - A Psalm of National Survival

The key to understanding this Psalm is in verse 1. "Let Israel say." The person in the Psalm is not a single individual but the nation of Israel collectively speaking about her own past and how God had delivered her time after time. What better thing for Israelites on their way to the Temple to sing!

I. Her attitude toward the Lord (1-4) She had been oppressed from her youth. She was born in Egypt and oppressed there by Pharaoh. She was oppressed time and again in the times of the judges by foreign powers. It was the same in the days of the kings. They plowed furrows on her back. Maybe that's an image of being whipped, scourged and the furrows of flesh it makes, or it may be a reference to the time of the captivity where the scripture say Zion will be plowed like a field. Perhaps they're thinking of enemies plowing on their land. But whatever the case, it happened repeatedly. Yet God was always there to deliver. No matter how much oppression, there came deliverance. The survival of national Israel is nothing short of a miracle of God. Isn't the same thing true of the church? From her very birth she has been persecuted; kings and emperors have tried in vain to rub her out, but to no avail. The church continues on until Jesus comes! What a blessing that God has watched over His people thus!

II. Her attitude toward her enemies He prays three things about them:

- that their attempts at violence fail (5)

- that their numbers dwindle instead of multiplying (6-7), like grass growing in the dust of a housetop (a rain gutter?), it can't multiply to a harvest in the shallow soil.

- that no one would bless what they're doing in the name of the Lord (Hitler tried to get the church to do just that!) We can love our enemies as individuals and pray for their salvation, but as enemies of the Lord we should certainly pray against their success! Those who would attack and oppress the church of the living God need to be prayed out of the way!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 130 - A Psalm of Forgiveness

This Psalm touches on one of the most blessed truths we celebrate as pilgrims on the journey to heaven. Certainly the Jews going up to the Temple were rejoicing that their sacrifices would be accepted by God and their sins forgiven. But they also looked forward to the day of full redemption when the kingdom of God would come at last. So do we.

I. A cry (1) The Psalmist feels himself in the depths of trouble, almost overwhelmed by it and cries to God for His mercy. But when you consider the content of the rest of the Psalm, maybe it is not so much a time of personal disaster that is in view. It appears from verses 7-8 that the nation is in need of full redemption. She has been forgiven but seems to still need deliverance from oppressors. Isn't this where we find ourselves? In the middle, forgiven by God but not yet delivered in the body!

II. A fact (3-4) If God wrote down our iniquities and held them against us, none of us could stand before Him. But He is a forgiving God, a pardoning God! What a blessing it is that our sins and iniquities God remembers no more! That enables us to adopt:

III. A posture (5-8) It is that of watchmen standing on the city wall eagerly watching for the first rays of dawn so they in their weariness can be relieved! The Psalmist is waiting eagerly for God to finish what He started and has confidence that if God forgives now, He will finish later! If God forgives Israel for her sins, He will fully redeem her and bring the Kingdom one day. So we have confidence that He who has begun a good work in us by forgiving our sins will continue it to the day of redemption! So we wait and watch eagerly, knowing that what God has said, He will do. Our attitude should be that of John, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!"

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 131 - A Psalm of Simple Trust

This Psalm is a prayer of David with an admonition tacked on at the end. It is a prayer prayed after much heart searching, not one prayed lightly. It is a prayer that comes out of great maturity and is born of suffering and deprivation. David has learned two great things about himself and he is telling them to God.

I. The smallness of himself (1) He has learned just how little and helpless he is. He is not proud, does not overvalue himself nor feel sufficient for anything. He does not try to get into things that are beyond him, to meddle in the realm of things that belong only to God. He is far beyond telling God what He has to do, but concerns himself simply with his own responsibilities of obedience. He has a right estimation of himself.

II. The sufficiency of God (2) He compares himself to a weaned child. Weaning is a difficult process. Orientals left it go much later than we do and so it was much harder. The child is being denied what he wants so very much and there is much fussing and crying. But when he is fully weaned, he is stilled and quiet, content that having mother is enough, even if he doesn't get what he wants! It is a level of maturity. David is no longer crying and complaining to God about what he wants. He has stilled his soul and is content that it is enough to have God!

What a way for Israelite pilgrims to come to worship God in the Temple, knowing who they are and who He is and humbly coming to tell Him that they trust Him; He is enough for them! No wonder David admonishes all Israel to place her hope and trust in God always (3). What a way for us to come to God in prayer too, to tell Him that we know who we are and that we are content to simply trust Him!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 132 - A Psalm of God's Faithfulness

This is definitely a Psalm where the worshippers are taken up with the Temple and the promise connected with it concerning the coming of the Messiah. The Temple standing there reminds them that God keeps His promises and so they look to Him to keep the greatest promise of all, confident that He will be faithful. Analytically the Psalm divides into two parts:

I. David's Promise to God (1-10) Here Israel is remembering David and praying to God, actually reminding God of His promises.

II. God's Promise to David (11-18) Here God is speaking to Israel in the first person, telling them He will keep everything He has promised!

The two halves are built in a parallelism. For each section of Israel's speech, God has a corresponding answer to them. There are five sets of matching statements here:

1. the promises (compare 1-5 with 11-12) David made an solemn oath to God to build Him a permanent dwelling place for the ark. God didn't let him do it but told him that it was well for it to be in his heart and promised him in return a solemn oath that David's descendants would sit on the throne forever. God assures them this promise still holds true.

2. the place (compare 6-7 with 13) David and Israel went down to Jaar (Kireath Jearim) to fetch the ark up to Jerusalem because that was the place God had chosen to put His Name. God in turn assures them that Zion is still the place He has chosen.

3. the permanence (compare 8 with 14) Jerusalem would be the permanent resting place for the Ark. That's why Solomon took out its carrying poles when it was put in the Temple. God assures them that Zion is still His resting place; it is permanently chosen and will be so forever!

4. the pleasure (compare 9 with 15-16) This recalls the joy of bringing up the ark and David dancing before it, the holiness of the priests carrying it on their shoulders. God assures them that that joy will again be restored; Zion's saints will sing with joy permanently (in the Millennium of course).

5. the Promised One (compare 10 with 17-18) Israel reminds God not to forget His promise to David to set a descendant on his throne. God assures them that that promise will ultimately be fulfilled in the true Anointed One, the Messiah. He will reign.

The general point of the whole Psalm is this: God is faithful; He keeps His promises. Though the time be long, they stand as sure as ever. Aren't you glad for God's faithfulness in keeping all the promises He's made to you?

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 133 - A Psalm of Unity

Whether on the trail to Jerusalem or in the Temple, the pilgrims were always together with like-minded brethren who loved the Lord. The Psalmist exclaims what a blessing that is in verse 1. What a blessing it is that we are not left to travel the Christian road of life alone but are one body with many brethren! If we can learn to live every day in the same kind of unity we have when we're together in church, what a good and pleasant thing it will be! The Psalmist uses two images to describe how pleasant it is: (1) the special anointing oil that was used to consecrate Aaron as High Priest the first time and (2) the dew of Mt. Hermon in the north falling upon the lesser mountains of Zion.

I. It is sweet The oil was a perfume, pleasant to senses. So unity feels good to us!

II. It is unique None could be made like it. So unity is a special commodity.

III. It is holy Holy anointing oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Unity is of God and a product of the Holy Spirit.

IV. It is flowing It ran down Aaron's head to his beard and down onto his collar and shoulders and breastplate where the stones with the names of the 12 tribes were. As the oil thus covered the whole nation, so unity should engulf the whole church! Also like the dew-laden clouds of Mt. Hermon are sometimes blown down over the mountains of Israel and drop some of their precious moisture, unity begins with one and reaches out to include the whole!

V. It brings God's blessing Just as things grow where the dew is, God blesses where there is unity among brethren.

VI. It is a foretaste of eternal life The dew brings life! Unity doesn't save in itself but it is here and now a foretaste of what the forever life will be like!

So thank God for the brothers and sisters you have and what they have meant in your life and for the kind of relationship you have with them!

THE PILGRIM PSALMS: Ps. 120-134

Psalm 134 - A Psalm of Joy in Serving

This is the last of the Pilgrim Psalms. It seems as though they are now ready to go home. It is still night as they rise and prepare to leave and pass by the Temple where the guards still stand upon the Temple wall and the priests and Levites on night duty still minister. The Psalm is a benediction to the Pilgrim Psalms and, though it is short, it seems to have two parts:

I. The encouragement of the pilgrims (1-2) They chant these verses to encourage those who serve within to serve well, to appreciate the great privilege they have of worshipping God and serving in His Temple. They are admonished not to allow their natural tiredness to cause them to cease their worship, but rather to lift up their hands and bless the Lord continually through the night.

II. The response of the servants (3) The guards chant back a blessing, "And may God bless you for your devotion to Him". This could also be a Psalm used by the Temple priests on the night watch, sung antiphonally by the high priest and replied to by the others.

At any rate, the point of the Psalm is that there is great privilege in serving God, even though it is the middle of the night, and also that there should be great joy in it! Sometimes our service grows seems to grow long and weary, just as the night watch must have. We "grow weary in well-doing". This Psalm reminds us to remind ourselves that service is a great privilege, wearying or not, and in the midst of it we should thank God and He in return will bless us! The hymn writer said, "There is joy in serving Jesus!" And there is. What a privilege we have that our service is neither slavery nor drudgery but genuine worship!

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PSALMS 120-134: THE PILGRIM PSALMS or 15 Things To Thank God For On Your Journey Through Life

Psalms 120-134 all have the same heading, "A song of ascents" and they were placed together in the Book to form a group. *Ascents* means *goings up*. You remember that three times each year all Israel would "go up" from their homes to Jerusalem to worship at the great feasts centering on Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Those traveling to Jerusalem we would call pilgrims, that is, worshippers on the way to their holy place, people on a journey to a better destination. Isn't that what we are, pilgrims and strangers on the earth, taking our journey to the New Jerusalem above? Perhaps that's why God made them travel three times a year, to remind them that this world is not their final home. At any rate, as they walked along, they would sing and these Psalms were the pilgrims' songs. They would sing of the blessings God had bestowed and would bestow. Now we obviously won't take time to examine each of the 15 psalms in any detail but a verse or two from each will show us what kinds of things a pilgrim is thankful for. Thus, we'll end up with 15 things to thank God for in our journey through life:

PSALM 120 - COMFORT IN DISTRESS (1,5-6) Meshech and Kedar were hostile neighboring areas to the north and south. Sometimes we get distressed living among people who don't love the Lord, who always wait to press their own advantage. So we call on the Lord and what does He do? He answers us! With what? Comfort! How many times have others brought you into distress and God has given you that inner comfort, that inner peace?

PSALM 121 - SAFETY ON THE JOURNEY (1-3,7) Those pilgrims were not in cars traveling 55 mph. They walked and every step of the journey could prove hazardous, slipping off a trail, being attacked by robbers, or experiencing physical exhaustion. But God watched over their journey and He watches over ours too. How many times has God kept you safe, spared you from accident, healed you of disease?

PSALM 122 - THE BEAUTY OF THE DESTINATION (1-4) Perhaps this one they sang when they entered the city gates (2) or perhaps earlier in anticipation of Jerusalem, the beautiful city, the city of God. O we have a glorious destination too, heaven where the real Temple of God is. We have a place to go to, a place so beautiful that eye has not seen or ear heard what lies in store for us. We have something to fix our sights on!

PSALM 123 - STRENGTH AMID SCOFFING (2-3) There were those ungodly types who laughed and scoffed at the pilgrims on their journey, who showed contempt for them and their God. So, they lifted their eyes to God for His mercy and He gave it. In what way? He gave strength to endure the scoffing and keep on. People ridicule our faith on every hand, in the news, on TV, sometimes at work or in own families. Some might turn back over that and some have, but God gives us the strength to keep on our journey, to anticipate by faith what lies ahead for us.

PSALM 124 - THE SPARING OF LIFE (1-3,6) Sometimes opposition goes beyond scoffing to actual attack. This could be

the nation attacked by its enemies but I bet some of those pilgrims were attacked on their journeys too by highwaymen. But God delivered and rescued them. Some of you have been attacked and would have died but for the hand of God. Some of you fought in wars where your life was on the line. Some of you have been in the hospital where your life hung in the balance. Some have been within a split-second of death on the highway. If the Lord hadn't been on your side, you would have died. Praise Him for deliverance!

PSALM 125 - SECURITY IN TESTING (1-3) This Psalm and the next may date from a later period when the exiles had returned from the Babylonian captivity, but were included for later generations of pilgrims to sing and bring an added depth of understanding about pilgrim life. This one says God may discipline us and bring testing into our life, but limit it to the place where the righteous can handle it and remain secure without falling. How many times have you been tested in what seemed to be beyond measure, but God kept you through it and you were able to bear up! Circumstances went all against you and it seemed as though life had fallen apart but God brought you through!

PSALM 126 - THE ANTICIPATION OF ARRIVAL (1) Here's a song by the returned exiles rejoicing in their arrival home but still looking for a fuller future restoration (4). So the pilgrims each trip could anticipate the joy of arrival and look to the future Kingdom. But we too can anticipate our arrival in heaven and sense the joy of that moment. It will seem like a dream, a dream that has come true and is real! Thank God there will be a moment of arrival.

PSALM 127 - THE JOY OF CHILDREN (1,3) The pilgrims naturally traveled as families and so thoughts would turn to the joy of the children clustered with them going up to the House of God. Children were a special blessing then because of their protection of the parents as they grew older. They still are. What a joy to travel to Zion with your children; what a blessing they have been in your life and will be!

PSALM 128 - THE BLESSINGS OF HOME (2-4) It's just one step from children to think of that godly wife or husband, the whole family, the material prosperity, the peaceful life you have. The pilgrims were bringing with them their lambs or the first fruits of their harvests. They were conscious of God's bounty. Hasn't God blessed you abundantly in your home?

PSALM 129 - BEING BRUISED BUT NOT BROKEN (1-2) Of course, this is the nation Israel looking back over her history, but some of these pilgrims also had personal histories of abuse, no doubt. So have some of you. Abuse as a child whether mental or physical, abuse in school, at work, or wherever. God allowed you to be bruised but not broken! Further those who hurt you will have to answer for it!

PSALM 130 - THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS (3-4) Certainly the pilgrim going to the Temple was glad that his offerings would be accepted, that he could be forgiven for his sins. Aren't you? Aren't you glad God has provided a way and will not hold your sins against you? Think of the sins of the past year. It's hard even to remember them though they were there and you confessed them. God has forgiven them!

PSALM 131 - THE SIMPLICITY OF TRUST (2) These pilgrims were not great scholars; they were not kings and princes. Most were farmers or tradesmen or shepherds who lived simple lives and had a simple trusting relationship with God like that of a young child with its mother. Aren't you glad for your relationship with God, for the simplicity of talking to Him and obeying Him and being close to Him every day?

PSALM 132 - THE TRUTH OF GOD'S PROMISES (6-9,11,13) Now the pilgrims have arrived. They seem to be in the Temple and see the priests and hear the singing of the Levites and worshippers. So they thank God for His true promises to put a descendant of David on the throne and to dwell there forever. They are thankful to see the Temple there and functioning and the King on the throne. Has not God made some wonderful promises to us, promises that have been tried and tested and proved true? When we get to heaven, the first thing we'll see is a rainbow around God's throne (Rev. 4) to remind us that God has been faithful!

PSALM 133 - THE UNITY OF THE BRETHREN (1) Whether it was on the trail to Jerusalem or in worship in the temple, the pilgrims traveled together, had the joy of being with like-minded brethren who loved the Lord. What a joy that God has not sent us on this journey alone! What a blessing many of you have been to me personally and I'm sure you feel the same about many! What a joy it will be to be in heaven with our brethren in God's presence!

PSALM 134 - THE JOY OF SERVICE (1) This is a song the pilgrim sings for those priests and Levites on duty in the Temple at night, keeping watch and serving God. The song reminds them to praise God for the privilege of serving Him in an hour when they might otherwise forget. What a joy it is in life to serve God, whether it is in the daylight of public visibility or quietly in the shadow of your own home. There IS joy in serving Jesus!

INDIVIDUAL MESSAGES ON PSALMS (21, 23, 66, 90, 100, 133, 145, 150)

Ps. 21 - The Exaltation Of The King

We have often thought about Jesus' life on earth. We read the Gospels and contemplate the story of everything from his birth through His death on the cross and His resurrection. In Acts 1 we even get a glimpse of His ascension to Heaven. But there the record stops, or so we think. Have you ever thought about what happened after the clouds caught Him out of the disciples' sight, about what happened as He entered the halls of glory once again? God did write about that scene, but He did it 1000 years ahead of time through David in Psalm 21. This is a Psalm about the King. But by the time you hit verse 4 you realize that the King in view isn't really David. Peter preached a sermon on Pentecost and he quoted another of David's Psalms (16) where it says God would not allow his body to see decay. And he said: *Acts 2:29-33 (NIV) "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God,..."* In the Psalms David wrote about Jesus! And in Psalm 21 He wrote about:

I. Jesus the King Exalted At His Resurrection (1-6) Think about it, imagine it, and it will bring this Psalm to life for you. Imagine after all the agony of the cross and the rising on Easter Sunday:

1. the joy He experienced on His return to glory (1) that is, the victory of the Resurrection, the great triumph over all the power of the enemy. **Heb. 12:2** says that He, *for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* That joy was set before Him all the way through the cross and when He set foot in glory that joy was His. You see, in that moment:

2. the desires of His heart that were granted (2) Everything Jesus really wanted, everything He asked the Father for, the very desires of His heart were all granted in that moment. But what were they? Well, they are recorded for us in John 17 as He prayed to the Father just before the cross. What did He pray for?

a. He prayed to return to the Father's glory - Jn. 17:4-5 Before He came to earth, He had enjoyed eternal glory in fellowship with the Father and He earnestly desired to return there and be restored to it. Just look at **(3, 5)** Oh, imagine the Father's welcome for His Son; imagine the homecoming! Not just a ring and a fatted calf but a crown of gold and a throne from which to rule the universe! All the riches of glory bestowed upon Him! Imagine His joy. Then:

b. He prayed for life (4) He no doubt prayed to the Father to be restored to life after the cross, and He certainly has life forevermore; having died once He will never die again. But it's not just life for Him that's in view; compare **Jn. 17:1-3**. It was eternal life for us that He bought at the cross, the life that was in Him He desired to give to us. How do we know?

c. He prayed for all who would believe to be with Him - Jn. 17:24 That was the joy that was set before Him for which He endured the cross, that all of those He died for, all of those He loved so much that He gave His life for, that all of us would be there to enjoy glory with Him. That life was obtained for us! Then He asked for one more thing:

d. He asked for the nations of earth to be His inheritance - Ps. 2:8 And the Father said He would grant it. All the peoples of the earth to belong to Him. And you'll see how that will be answered in the second half of the Psalm. But notice:

3. the continual joy He has in the Father's presence (6) Can you imagine His joy as we are saved one by one and then as we arrive in glory? His joy there in heaven only grows and grows as little by little the reward of His suffering is brought in! In case you think I'm reading in, what lesson did Jesus teach three consecutive times in Luke 15 through stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son? There is JOY in heaven when someone lost is found, when a sinner repents and finds life. There is REJOICING in heaven. There is a party in heaven and the chief partier is the King Himself. His joy is continual and it's growing! But now in the second half of the Psalm David speaks of:

II. Jesus the King Exalted At His Return (7-12) You see:

1. He will never be removed from His throne (7) Nothing will ever shake Him. Nothing will ever unseat Him or threaten His authority and power. In fact, He will stay seated there. David says: *Psalm 110:1 (NIV) The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."* and so:

2. He will destroy all His enemies (8) There is coming a day when it will happen, when all those who have said, "This man shall not rule over us", who've raised themselves up and thought to unseat Him, will be destroyed. When?

a. He will do it at the time of His coming (9) The time of His appearance, His personal presence, when He literally shows His face on earth once more. All His enemies will be gathered before Him and destroyed by the word from His mouth. And:

b. He will do it completely (10) Not one will be left. Their destruction will be complete; not one overlooked; not one to continue their rebellion. They will be entirely consumed. And:

c. He will do it despite all their efforts (11) It doesn't matter what they think of Him now, how they plot and plan and think they can escape His rule. Just turn back and read **Ps. 2**. Those who stand against Him had better think twice now because in that day:

d. they will be powerless to resist Him (12) The image here is that when He draws His bow against them, they will turn their backs as willing targets, as backstops for His arrows. They can only say, "Where would you like to shoot me, Lord?"; they are powerless to resist Him!

Oh, our King is a strong King. Our King is a powerful King. Our King is a mighty King. And as David closes, we see:

III. Jesus the King Exalted In Our Praise (13) David breaks into praise as he thinks about the might of His glorious King and so should we. Our King is on the throne forever! Our King will appear one day to rule the world! Our King is waiting for us to join Him in glory!

He is exalted,
The King is exalted on high;
I will praise Him.
He is exalted, forever exalted,
And I will praise His name!
He is the Lord;
Forever His truth shall reign.
Heaven and earth
Rejoice in His holy name.
He is exalted,
The King is exalted on high.

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Ps. 23 - The Great Shepherd (Church Devotional)

Here's the great Shepherd Psalm. Many times Jesus described us as His sheep and the New Testament calls Him the Shepherd. I want you for a moment to think like a sheep about your Shepherd. That's what David was doing in this Psalm. Here's what God our Shepherd does for us:

I. He feeds us (1-2a) It is not the sheep's business to find pasture, to provide for himself. It is the Shepherd's business to find the pasture and put the sheep in it. The sheep's business is to eat what's under his nose. And as long as the sheep obeys the Shepherd he can lie down and rest secure knowing he will not be in want. The Shepherd won't let him go hungry. That has been a promise I can attest to as being true in my life. There has been some concern about us being behind in our budget at this point. Of course, it is up to us to give responsibly and sacrificially as God brings income to our hands, but if we are being obedient, we can rest and trust in God. We will not be in want. We have never yet and won't be as long as we are carefully following the Shepherd.

II. He leads us (2b) In the east sheep are not driven ahead of the shepherd as they are here. Rather, the shepherd leads and calls to the sheep to follow and they recognize his voice and respond. And that is their responsibility, to follow. So, our Shepherd is responsible for guiding in the circumstances of our lives and we have to be listening for His voice and following His direction at every step. But at the bottom line, it is up to Him where He takes us. I have some dreams for us as a church. There are things I'd like to see. But this is His church and I must trust the future to Him. We have to be careful to listen to Him in every decision we make.

III. He revives us (3a) Palestine is not all covered with grass. There is a lot of sand. To get from green pasture to green pasture the sheep have to pass through the desert sometimes, through hot, dry, thirsty places but eventually the shepherd gets them to the green pastures and still waters and they are restored, refreshed, and revived. So, God does not promise us that we will not pass through difficult times, that we will always see growth all the time, that we will never have any problems. But He does promise that we will not faint, that if we follow, He will see that we are revived and refreshed in the

end.

IV. He disciplines us (3b) My Hebrew dictionary says guide means "an orderly conducting of animals or people to an intended destination either by forcible driving or leading". Now when the shepherd takes the sheep from place to place, especially in the mountainous regions, it is his job to make sure they stay on the right path. If they will not follow him of themselves, he will have to drive them back onto the path. In our case that path is "righteousness". He sees that we stay holy and pure, by not only showing us how to live, but by dealing with us and disciplining us when we get off the path. So we as a church can be thankful for that. We may sometimes be wrong. We may sometimes become complacent or lax. but He will deal with us and get us through to His intended destination!

V. He protects us (4) A sheep has no defenses of its own and in those days lions and bears and wolves were still present in the land. There might be grave danger in passing through certain areas where a predator might dart out and grab a sheep. But the shepherd is equipped to protect the sheep. He has a rod and a staff (and a sling!) And so, the sheep need not fear but can be comforted in that knowledge. What a comforting thing to know that we can trust the Shepherd. There might be those along the way who would try to harm us and tear us down. We saw a hint of that in the very process of our formation but God brought us through. We saw God's protection again in the zoning issue. We don't need to worry. Wherever God leads us will be OK. He's the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

Ps. 90 "The Eternity-Driven Life"

Most of you have read Rick Warren's book, "The Purpose Driven Life", and been blessed as it forced you to think about and answer questions like, "Why am I here? What is my purpose in life?" Well, 3500 years before Rick Warren appeared in Southern California, there was a man of God by the name of Moses who faced and answered those same questions. He traded life as a prince in the palace of Egypt for the life of a poor shepherd, first leading sheep in the wilderness and then, after God really stepped into his life, leading 2 million complaining backsliding people through the wilderness for 40 years to the edge of the promised land. His life has impacted the lives of more people on this earth than any other person in history except Jesus Christ Himself, and the fact that we are here this morning talking about him proves my point. Wouldn't it be nice to know what made Moses tick? To know what drove his life? Well, Moses not only wrote for us the first five books of our Bible where we can read about and learn from his life, but he also wrote down a prayer that was later included for us in the Book of Psalms as Psalm 90. I think this Psalm reveals what made Moses "tick"! If you read it closely, you'll see that Moses had what I'm going to call "an eternity-driven life". In the first half of the Psalm, we can see:

I. The Facts Of Life That Moses Learned (1-11) *[read all]* The whole Psalm is a prayer and these verses are Moses' confession of faith, Moses confessing to God what he had learned to believe. There are three very, very important facts here. First, as he contemplates God, he stands in awe of the fact that:

1. God's life is eternal Verse 2 says *from everlasting to everlasting you are God*. Have you been on vacation this summer? Have you driven through the mountains? Before any of those mountains were formed, God WAS. Before the first human beings ever existed, before the very earth you're standing on, before the sun and all the stars, before anything in the entire universe existed, God already WAS. You see, this phrase really means:

a. He has no beginning and no end (2) That's incomprehensible to us. Everything we know and experience has a beginning; it started somewhere. But the beginning of all things is God Himself and He is without beginning. He simply has always existed and will always exist. That's what *eternal* means. And because of that, verse 1 tells us that:

b. He has been "home" to generation after generation of believers (1) Moses looked back to Joseph and beyond him to Jacob and to Isaac before him and back to Abraham who was God's friend and beyond him to Noah and to Enoch and to Seth and finally to Adam. Every one of them knew God and walked with God. Generation after generation God was always there and drew them to Himself and they placed their faith in Him. He was their "home", their dwelling place, the center of their lives in whom they placed all their hope as they lived and died and passed off the scene. And 3500 years later that is still true. He has been "Home" to generations from Moses to David to the early church and down through the centuries; generation after generation of believers has found their rest in His eternal presence. So, when He thinks about time, verse 4 says:

c. He sees a millennium as we see one day or part of a night (4) To us a day is nothing. A week from now we'll hardly remember it and a month from now it will be forgotten altogether. Do you remember the stretch of hours in your life last night from midnight to 4 in the morning? That's a "watch in the night". It's gone and past and doesn't even register on the scope of our lives. Well, that's how a thousand years must seem to the eternal God. To us a thousand years is too long to comprehend; whole nations and empires rise and fall. To imagine life before the middle ages is so far back it seems like a fairy tale but to God the time since them passed like yesterday did for you and I. Moses, after walking with God many years, began to grasp something of the fact that God is eternal but in contrast with Him:

2. our earth-lives have an end In verse 3 Moses confesses that:

a. God has decreed that we all die and our bodies return to dust (3) God declared it to Adam, *By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.*" - *Gene 3:19 (NASB)* It happened to Adam; he died and his body disintegrated into its elements and returned to the dust. Moses saw that it happened to every generation before him; they died and returned to dust. And he was wise enough to know it would happen to him also. Another Psalmist said, *But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish* - *Psalm 49:12*. In fact, Hebrews 9:27 puts it like this: *it is appointed unto men once to die*. You know, it always seems to us like our lives go on and on. One day follows another and we cannot imagine that one day it will all end, but it will. You can't beat it or get out of it. Your life on this earth one day will come to a screeching halt and be no more. So will mine. Why? Well, Moses understood the reason:

b. we die because of God's righteous anger at our sins (7-9, 11) *The wages of sin is death....* Romans says that *death came to all men because all sinned*. The reason we die is that sin dwells in us, in our bodies, in our lives, and it makes itself known through us. Our earth lives have to end or sin would go on perpetuating itself forever. So, from a New Testament perspective God dealt with our sins at the cross and He takes us out of these sinful bodies and presents us perfect to Himself. But Moses' point is that God is right in limiting the length of our time on this earth. In fact, he says:

c. God has limited our time to an average of 70 or 80 years (10a) That was written so long ago and it's still pretty much an average lifespan even today. Our bodies wear out and give out usually somewhere in the 7th or 8th decade of life. Now all you have to do is subtract the fact that you're 52 like me or 32 like many of you and you can see that no matter how you cut it, life isn't going to last much longer. The end is coming and every day it is one day nearer. And it's a good thing it is, because as a general rule:

d. all our lives contain much labor and much sorrow (10b) A lot of hard work and sweat and toil and a lot of sad things happen along the way. Life on this earth isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Sure, it has its wonderful moments, but when you've been around as long as I have, you begin to realize that the great times really aren't in the majority. So, the point that Moses is making is actually a good thing:

3. our earth-lives pass extremely quickly Look at the images he uses. Our life on earth is:

a. like a flood that sweeps everything away (5a) Think of the tsunami in south Asia in 2004. In a matter of moments, a wall of water swept in from the sea and completely washed away everything in its path for a mile inland. That's how death is with the human race. It washes over us all like a flood and sweeps us away in an instant. Or, Moses says, we are:

b. like the desert grass that withers in a day (5b-6) In some of these drier climates like the wilderness the Israelites were going through in Moses' day, grass might spring up green and new in the morning dew but under the blazing heat of the sun it withers by mid-day and is dead by evening. That's our life from the eternal perspective; we're weak like the grass; the span of our life isn't even a day in the scheme of things. It goes by so quickly. James uses another metaphor in the New Testament. He says it is:

c. like the morning fog that vanishes - James 4:14 *...What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.* Ever been out driving at sunrise and you go through a low area where there's a creek and the mist is rising and fog spreads over the road? Then the sun comes up and by 9 or 10 o'clock it burns off all the fog. That's about how long our lives last from the eternal perspective. They may seem to take forever, but they pass and are over almost before you can blink.

So here stands Moses, himself probably more than a century old when he wrote this, and this is what he learned: Life is short and it goes quick. Therefore, in the second half of the Psalm we have:

II. The Four-Fold Request That Moses Made Of God (12-17) From that perspective of our brief life held up against the eternity of God, Moses asked for four things and, by example, He taught us to ask for four things. First, he prayed:

1. give us wisdom to use this brief life rightly (12) In other words, teach us to see how brief our life is and how quickly it passes, so that we can use it in a right way. One writer painted it this way: *Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out every cent, of course! Each of us has such a bank. Its name is TIME. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back.* When you know you don't have much time, you don't waste it; you make the most of it; you do the things that are important while you can. "So Eternal God, please teach us to see how short our life is and how important it is to use it well." I can just see Moses looking around him and thinking of all the people he had known, whom he had led out of Egypt, whom they had buried in the wilderness. I can see him thinking:

a. keep us from wrecking it by yielding to sin Every time they rebelled against God and did things their own way, hundreds died, thousands died, a whole generation! What a waste, to be set free from awful slavery only to wreck the opportunity of a purpose-filled, blessed life by choosing to rebel against the One who set you free. Moses himself felt the sting of that lesson. A fit of anger in which he dishonored God kept him from crossing the border with the rest. David, in a fit of lust, wrecked his family and brought untold depths of suffering upon himself and them. "Lord, life is short, keep me from wrecking the opportunity I have; keep me from yielding to sin so I don't waste the time I have caught up in all the destructive consequences of it!" But there's another way to waste life. We may find strength to say no to outright rebellion and our life might look pretty good outwardly but we can take that precious bit of time we have and use it for our own purposes instead of God's. So, we should also pray that God will:

b. keep us from wasting it by living for self. In **1 Cor. 3:10-15** Paul said that everything we do in life, all our works, everything that we have invested our lives to build, gets tested and he used the symbolism of fire. If what we have done with our lives is all wood, hay and stubble, it burns up. The flammable, temporary, cheap stuff all goes up in smoke. Only the gold, silver and precious stones, the things that have true enduring value, remain. Read that some time; it's a sobering passage. You can go all through life and have a nice job and acquire a lot of money and have a nice home and a pleasant family and go to church on Sunday, but if you have not invested your life in the purpose of building His Kingdom, of furthering the Gospel and building His Kingdom in the role that He's given to you, you'll be left empty handed on that day. And these 50, 60, 70 years that He's given you will be wasted, used for nothing that has enduring value. *Management consultant Antonio Herrera asked the participants in a seminar he conducted on time management this question: "If we had to buy time, would there be any difference in how we would spend it? What if you had to pay in advance \$100 an hour for the time allotted to you? Would you waste it?" The answer is obvious.* Time is free, but it is still precious, simply because we have precious little of it. That's why Moses prayed about that! He prayed, "God keep me from wasting my life on self; keep me from wasting it in sin; make me wise enough to know my time is short and invest it for YOU!" Then he prayed a second thing that we should pray:

2. make our relationship with You to be our highest joy in life (13-15) "Your steadfast love, Your *agape* love, Your great unending, unfailing love which sent your Son to the cross to save me....THAT love:"

a. may it be what truly satisfies us and fills us with joy. Look at what David wrote in **Ps. 63:3-8**. He knew the joy of knowing that great love of God. The Psalms are the intimate record of the tremendous joy he found in walking with God, in experiencing Him, in worshipping and praising Him. GOD, not being king, not having money and privilege, not winning battles, but GOD HIMSELF was the thing that satisfied his soul, the thing he longed for like the deer who pants for water. Moses prayed, "Satisfy me with that! Fill me with that! Every day! Create in me a longing for YOU that saturates every day of my life and satisfy it with the experience of Yourself every morning!" That's what got Moses through 40 years in the wilderness with hundreds of thousands of complaining Israelites! His joy wasn't in the desert land around him; it surely wasn't in the miserable experiences he had there as a leader. It was in God alone and, he prays:

b. may it be what truly sustains us in our afflictions From his perspective this reads like, "Lord, after these days of trouble in the wilderness, give us an equal number of glad days to enjoy!" and it could mean that. But from Jesus' New Testament perspective and Peter's and James' and Paul's, we can pray more clearly, "Lord, IN these days of trouble, may our joy in YOU be what sustains us! May our days of joy be the very days of trouble that we experience in this life because our joy is in YOU." That's why Paul and Silas sang in prison at midnight with their feet in the stocks after a beating! Their highest joy was in their relationship with Him and their experience of His love. The very first of all God's commands is to love Him with all our heart. It's what He wants most of us. To go through our brief lives barely thinking of Him, trying to find satisfaction in anything else but Him is a true waste. Then Moses asks a third thing, Lord:

3. show us Your working in our lives (16) "Lord, let us see You at work; let us see what You are doing, what You're about!" Why would Moses ask that; why would we ask that? Well, first I'm sure it is:

a. so that our own faith will be firm and grow There is nothing that touches us like seeing God at work, like seeing Him answer prayer, like seeing Him do what no one could do. Manna from heaven and water from a rock will make you want to see more of Him! But Lord, it is not only for us, it is:

b. so that our children will follow You "Lord, I want them to see You at work too and be drawn to You. I want them to know You the way I know You; I want them to experience You the way I do. I want You to be their highest joy too; I don't want them to waste their lives, so Lord show THEM Yourself at work the way you've shown me!" Truly there is no greater joy than to see your children own true faith for themselves and follow the Lord on their own. Soon I will not be here. I am temporary. A few more years and I'm out of the picture. They need to know God for themselves; they need to walk with Him themselves. I want Him to do for them what He did for me! So I ought to pray that like Moses did! Then finally He prayed this:

4. please do Your work through our hands (17) Significance is one of the two basic human needs. At the core of my being, I want to know that I matter. I want to know my life counts for something, that it has purpose, that it will be remembered. That's why we need to pray that the true work that we are giving our lives to is HIS work, to plead with Him daily to work through us:

a. so that our brief lives have genuine significance when we're gone Absalom built himself a monument in the King's valley to make sure somebody would remember him after he was gone. You can try that but I can assure you that you'll be quickly forgotten here, no matter what you do. Two generations from now you'll be a name in a historical record as far as this earth is concerned. But we pray that God will work through us and establish the work of our hands:

b. so that our lives have an impact that is eternal, one that will last forever, one that will be known and celebrated in heaven. You see:

Moses lived an "eternity-driven life". He said goodbye to living life the way he planned it and invested the few short years he had on this earth doing the things of God that matter forever. I don't know about you, but I may only have 20 or 30 years left and I want them to count; I want my life to matter in God's eyes. I want to impact this world for Jesus Christ. *Harold L. Fickett, Jr., wrote about a wealthy businessman who on his deathbed was filled with deep remorse. When his pastor called, he opened his heart and shared the burden he was carrying. He said that 10 years earlier he had been given the opportunity to teach a Sunday school class of 9-year-old boys. Thinking he didn't have the time, he declined the offer. Now, however, deeply conscious that his life would soon be over, he confessed to the pastor that his most painful regret was that he has missed such a golden opportunity to serve the Lord by investing his life in the lives of those 9-year-olds. He estimated that at least 100 boys would have passed through that class. "My investments in stocks and bonds will stay behind when I leave," he declared. "What a fool I have been."* I don't want to be that fool. That's why with Moses I want to pray, "Lord, teach me to number my days aright, that I may gain a heart of wisdom, a heart that beats for YOU." Will you join me?

Psalm 100

As I was reading this Psalm to begin my devotions the other morning something about it struck me and I thought I'd share it with you tonight.

Verses 1-2 are a command, not just to us but to all the earth. All human beings should worship God, should come before Him with singing, should shout for joy to Him. We've been doing that to some degree, more or less, tonight.

But verse 3 is the reason we should worship. First, there is something that we have to KNOW. *The Lord is God!* Now what does that mean? Look on. *It is HE who made US* and (one manuscript says) *not we ourselves*. We didn't make us; He did. But other manuscripts say the result: *WE ARE HIS*. If I make something, it belongs to me! It's mine. I have a right over it by creation. And it has no right over me. Listen to **Rom. 9:20**, *But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"* And now look at **Is. 45:9-12**. Do you hear it? He has made us; we are His. He is the Potter; we are the clay. He has the total right to do what He chooses with us! And that grates heavily on our flesh. But now go on to the next phrase: *we are his people, the sheep of his pasture*. Usually we get all warm and fuzzy about this, thinking about how good a shepherd He is and how he loves us and all. But that's not what this is saying. This is Hebrew poetry. It is parallelism. The second phrase is repeating and emphasizing the meaning of the first.

He has made us so we are HIS. YES, we are HIS people and the sheep of His pasture. That means simply that He owns us! We don't own ourselves. We belong to Him by right of creation and ownership. Now why do you buy sheep and put them in your pasture? For pets? No, for a purpose. You get wool from them and meat from them. God created us and put us in His pasture to use us for His purpose! How preposterous it is for a sheep to tell his master he wants to change owners or to demand that the owner do something for him or to think in any sense that the owner is there to please and serve him! Yet isn't that what human beings do with God? We act as though our lives belong to us and He is there to serve us! But it's the other way around! And that's why we should worship Him. It is only right for us to do so. We are, at best, creatures and He, our Creator.

But now look at the One we belong to in verses 4-5. *The Lord* (our Master and Owner) *is good and His love endures forever* and He is always faithful. If you're going to pick someone to belong to, He's the One. How wonderful that we don't belong to a God who is selfish and evil and forgets about his sheep or simply uses his sheep without regard for them. We're sheep; we're possessions, but hallelujah we've got a great owner. No wonder we should praise Him!

Psalm 133 - A Psalm of Unity

Psalm 133 is a Song of Ascents. It is also known as a Pilgrim Psalm. Three times a year Jews from all over the land of Israel would go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feasts of the Lord, at Passover in the spring, at Pentecost in early summer and again in the fall for the feast of Tabernacles. As they were ascending the trail up to Jerusalem, they would travel in groups and they would sing and they would celebrate and they would praise God. And Ps. 133 is one of about 15 Pilgrim Psalms that we have and it celebrates one of the things these brethren were thankful to God for. *READ*. Whether on the trail to Jerusalem or in the Temple, the pilgrims were always together with like-minded brethren who loved the Lord. The Psalmist exclaims what a blessing that is in verse 1. What a blessing it is that we are not left to travel the Christian road of life alone but are one body with many brethren! And David said it in a special way in Hebrew that doesn't appear in the English. He slipped in a conjunction which means *even* or *also* before the word for unity or togetherness. He didn't just say, "How good it is when brethren dwell together." He said, "How good it is when brethren dwell even (also) in unity". You all know situations where brethren dwell together but there is no unity. You all know churches who are both evangelical and love the Lord but who will have nothing to do with each other. You all know believers in the same church body who worship together and serve together but who have something between themselves personally and aren't united at all! How thankful I am tonite that that is NOT the case between Faith Community Church and Glenside Bible Church, that we are brethren who have been dwelling together in a particular way for the last eight months! Faith Christian School and GBC have lived together in the same building, in the same rooms, have worked together side by side in adjacent offices and I can truly testify, and I think Peter Bogert would echo it, that we have experienced nothing but unity with one another. And it has been a wonderful and pleasant thing to have served the Lord together in unity.

Now the Psalmist uses two graphic images to describe how wonderful this kind of unity is. He mentions first the special anointing oil that was used to consecrate Aaron as High Priest the first time and second, the dew which falls on Mt. Hermon. And the oil and the dew tell us seven wonderful things about the kind of unity that we've been experiencing. First of all:

I. It is good God looked at the creation when He was all done with it and said, "It is good." What did He mean? I think He meant, "It is the way I intended it to be, the way I have designed it with all of My wisdom and knowledge to serve My purpose." And God looks at brethren dwelling together in love and unity and says, "It is good. It is right; it is the way I intended it to be to serve My purpose." God didn't make the parts of your body to clamor and fight and struggle with one another or to ignore one another and do their own thing. If they did, we would say, "It is not good!" And He didn't create a Body for His Son, the Church of Jesus Christ, to act that way either. The unity that we have with one another is good and right. It's the way God intended the church to be. It's the fulfillment of His most important command: *Love one another*. Then second:

II. It is pleasant The anointing oil God prescribed to be used on Aaron was made of a combination of myrrh, cinnamon, sweet cane, and cassia in an olive oil base. Every one of those is a fragrant spice, so this oil was a perfume. It was sweet-smelling, pleasant to senses of the person who was anointed with it and those who were around him. The unity of brethren is like that! It is a wonderfully pleasant feeling. You have no idea how good it felt that first morning after our fire when Drew walked up and said, "Look, we know you're going to need a place to worship long term and we want to offer you the facilities of Faith Christian School for as long as you need them." And then to have Pastor Krueger stop by and extend a hand and repeat the same thing. And then to go up to the school and get a tour and meet Pastor Bogert and hear him say, "We want this to be home to you; we don't want you to feel like guests here; treat it as you would your own!" Oh that feels so sweet and so good! It's such a joy to be accepted and to feel one with other brethren every day! Thirdly:

III. It is unique No oil could be made like it. It was not to be copied or duplicated. It was unique and

special, one of a kind. So the unity of brethren is a special commodity in this world. It's rare and precious. In the world all around you people take advantage of one another and use one another and think of themselves first. Even in the world of Christendom, you so often find Christians divided from one another and criticizing one another and competing with each other. God calls unity like we have felt with one another precious because it is unique. And fourthly:

IV. It is holy This was holy anointing oil. Everything it touched was made holy. And of course, oil in Jewish ceremony always symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Unity is not a humanly produced product. It is divinely produced, a product of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote that we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body. He wrote that there is one body and one Spirit. The factor that produces this kind of unity in the Body of Christ is the same Holy Spirit who indwells each one of us! When the Holy Spirit is in control of your life, you are one with your brothers. The first fruit of His control is love. It is not just the milk of human kindness which has produced this unity between us; it is the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives and it is a holy thing! Fifth:

V. It is flowing This oil, when it was put on Aaron's head, was not just a dab. It was poured on in such quantity that it ran down to his beard and down onto his collar and shoulders. And on those shoulders were the two stones with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. And no doubt some ran down his chest onto the breastplate where the stones with the names of the 12 tribes were. As the oil thus covered the whole nation, so unity should engulf the whole church! Mt. Hermon is a 20 mile long mountain about 120 miles north of Jerusalem, northeast of the Sea of Galilee with three peaks that reach to 9,000 feet. Its summit is covered with snow during much of the year and during the summer the snow evaporates and then condenses at night producing a heavy dew so that the mountain itself is always well-watered even though the surrounding area is parched. And now and again the dew-laden clouds of Mt. Hermon are blown down over the mountains of Israel and drop some of their precious moisture. God wants unity to flow, to spread among brethren, to fill the true church of Jesus Christ. My friends, it is the fourth of July. If there has ever been a time when America needs to have a spiritual awakening, it is now. We are headed down a path that to me looks disastrous. And there is only one thing that I know of that could affect that path and change it and that is for the Church of Jesus Christ to lay down its petty differences and unite and rise up in unity to declare the Gospel of Christ in the common power of the Holy Spirit. Every revival in the history of our nation has been borne out of unity between true brethren where all God's people together sought His face and declared His love. And if it is to happen again, it will come to birth the same way. Unity will have to flow down until the whole church comes together on its knees! Sixth:

VI. It brings God's blessing Where the dew falls, things grow. The dew brings the blessing of crops. And folks, God blesses His people where there is unity among brethren. The church succeeds in its task, not when it is self-centered and self-seeking and competing between its own members, but when it is united in love and the watching world can look on and say, "See how they love one another!" And finally:

VII. It is a foretaste of eternal life The dew brings life to the parched crops! Unity doesn't save in itself but it is here and now a foretaste of what the forever life will be like! This past year has been just a little foretaste of the unity we'll have in glory around the throne.

George Whitefield and John Wesley were two giants of the faith in the 1700's. Both were great preachers and won thousands to Christ. They began their ministries together, but later Wesley developed and grew into what became "Methodistic doctrine," while Whitefield was a staunch Calvinist and their ministries went their separate ways. However, Wesley attended George Whitefield's memorial service and a woman asked him, "Do you expect to see dear Dr. Whitefield in heaven?" He replied, "No". She said "I was afraid you would say that," but Wesley quickly responded, "Do not misunderstand me. George Whitefield will be so near the throne of God, that men like me will never even get a glimpse of him!" Despite their differences these two men had a unity that could not

be shaken. I don't expect any two Christians to agree on everything, much less two pastors or even two churches. But we can have a unity in our hearts that will last for eternity. And I for one am glad to be experiencing that right now.

Psalm 145 - DAVID'S PRAISE

This Psalm is a very special psalm. It is the only one in the whole Hebrew Hymnbook with this inscription, *"The Praise of David"*. Charles Spurgeon wrote, *"It is David's, David's very own, David's favorite. It is David's Praise just as [Ps. 86] is David's Prayer...David had blessed God many a time in other psalms, but this he regarded as his peculiar, his crown jewel of praise.... It is not for any one of us to render David's praise, for David only could do that; but we may take David's psalm as a model, and aim at making our personal adoration as much like it as possible; we shall be long before we equal our model.* Now David evidently had that idea of it being a model for others in mind when he wrote it because he used a memory tool that we still use on occasion, the acrostic. The first word of each verse in the Hebrew begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet so that they could be easily remembered. Now there is absolutely no way to translate that into English, first because the Hebrew alphabet is much different from ours and only has 21 letters, and then, of course, because you can't always find an English word that starts with the right letter to translate the Hebrew word. But to give you the flavor of it, I've made an attempt at a simple paraphrase of the psalm using the English alphabet. The first segment displays the nature of:

I. OUR PRAISE

- 1 A lways will I praise You**
- 2 B oth every day and forever**
- 3 C omparing You to anyone else is impossible**

David's heart was wrapped up in love to God. He could not imagine anyone or anything to which God could be compared. The wonderfulness of God moved him to want to tell God how great He is every day of his life and he just wanted to keep on doing it forever and ever. Man, that's convicting. Most of the time I treat God with this "OK, let's get down to business; I want to talk to You about this or that problem" attitude, rather than being enraptured with His person.

II. OUR PRIVELEGE

- 4 D elight will be mine to tell my children of you**
- 5 E ach of us will speak of Your splendor and meditate on Your works**
- 6 F reely will we proclaim Your greatness**
- 7 G ladly will they celebrate Your goodness and righteousness**

Telling our children, the next generation, how wonderful God is is not just a responsibility; it is a privilege. Convincing our children of God's great power and goodness and righteousness is an honor we should look forward to. Too often for us it becomes a chore, or at worst a neglected duty. It is not enough for me to praise God. I want my children to praise God with me and to keep on doing it when I'm gone and their children to praise God after them.

Now David begins to celebrate the wonderful things he loves about God. First he extols:

III. GOD'S GRACE

- 8 H ow gracious and patient You are**
- 9 I ncluding all is Your love**

Haven't you ever marveled at how patient God is with you, how slow to anger He is, how He puts up

with you and your failures time and again? He has compassion on us because He knows we are dust. He is so good and loving to us and not only to us but to all, to everyone. None of us gets what we deserve, really. Every one of us experiences the grace of God and His goodness.

IV. GOD'S GREATNESS

10 Just men will extol You along with all You made

11 Kingly glory and power they will ascribe to You

12 Let all men know Your Kingdom's power and splendor

13 Measureless is Your Kingdom in its duration

Just as David was a King sitting on the throne of a Kingdom, so is God. Only God's Kingdom is the whole world, the whole universe. He controls it all. All men should know that and recognize it. There is not a thing that happens in this world that is not under His authority. Right now it doesn't look that way. You have only to read the paper or watch the news to see the men of this world seemingly do what they will. But one day at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every dictator, every criminal, every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

V. GOD'S GOODNESS

13 Never do Your promises fail

14 Only You help the fallen and oppressed

15 Provision comes to all from Your hand

16 Quite amply You supply every living thing

17 Righteousness and love characterize all Your ways

18 So near You are to those who call on You

19 Timely help comes to those who fear You

20 Under Your watchcare are all who love You

This is a list of all the good things that God does for us. Promise-keeping, providing for our needs, protecting us from harm, helping us, answering our prayers. So many times we get busy going about life and forget that all these things are going on; they are all His goodness to us. And they are happening many times without our even recognizing it.

The Psalm closes with a benediction:

21 Very much will I praise You forever

Psalm 150 - PRAISE

Years ago, I attended a couple of Pastors' Days at Lancaster Bible College with Dr. Lloyd Perry, a retired and well-known professor from Trinity Seminary. Before each seminar he would get up and say, "Well, if you want to get anything out of the well, you've got to prime the pump!" and then he would give the most beautiful five minute devotional exposition of some text that had absolutely nothing to do with the subject at hand, but it put you in the mood to study the word of God! That's what I'd like to do with this Psalm: prime the pump on the subject of praise to God with this little look at this Psalm. Psalm 150 is an orphan Psalm; it is neglected by everybody because it doesn't seem to say very much, or at least much that you can talk about! You might call this a Hallelujah Psalm because it begins and ends with the same Hebrew expression. *Hallelu-jah* means *Praise the Lord*. Psalms 146-7-8 and several others do the same. But did you know that Hallelujah is not really an expression of praise but a command? In Hebrew it's an intensive imperative. It means, "Do something and really do it!" The Psalmist is giving you a command: *You praise the Lord!* So, it's not just something you should do when you feel like it. God expects it; God wants it! Now this little Psalm answers all your questions about praise:

I. Who to Praise (1, 6b) None other than the Lord Jehovah Himself! Every good and perfect gift we have comes down from Him. We certainly should be grateful to others when they help us, but our ultimate praise today should always be to the Lord!

II. Where to Praise Him (1b) It's not talking about where we are, but where He is. He is In two places, first, in the sanctuary, the Temple; That's where God manifested His presence in the midst of His people Israel. Oh, we ought to praise God for His working in the midst of His people, for the people that have been saved and changed right here through this body of believers. Second, He is in the heavens. God manifests His presence in nature and in ruling the world and we ought to praise Him as He works there.

III. What to Praise Him For (2)

- **for His acts of power**
- **for the things He's done**, for the times He's provided and healed and helped and saved and delivered and rescued.
- **for His surpassing greatness**
- **just for being who He is**, for being a God of love and justice and might and power and truth!

IV. How to Praise Him (3-5)

- **with music** All the instruments they had are listed here. We're not the first ones to think of an orchestrated background, Charles Stanley is not the first to have a full orchestra in church. Israel had one in the Temple long ago! And whether you sing like a professional or even if you can't carry a tune in a bucket, lift up your voice in praise to God.
- **with dancing** we've never thought about a dance team, have we? The idea is not so much that you have to dance but that when they praised God, they got their hearts in it and danced for joy. Do it wholeheartedly.

V. Who Should Praise Him (6) It's not just for the young or the old; it's for every living being. If there's still breath in you and they haven't closed the lid on you yet, then you should be praising God!

PROVERBS

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Prov. 1-9: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life The Principle Of Wisdom

To really deal with the pressures of life you need one thing above all else: you need WISDOM. Now picture this: How many times have you seen a commercial or something on TV where some guy is reclined in a chair in a campsite, drink in hand, with his feet propped by a fire, watching the sun go down on the lake while something delicious cooks on the fire and his buddy makes that insightful comment, "Man, you really know how to live!" On a more serious note, maybe there

have been people that you've admired, godly examples who have lived the kind of moral and spiritual life you wish to aspire to and, even though you might not use these exact words, your evaluation of them would be, "They really know how to live!" Well, let me ask you, Who *really* knows how to live? Ultimately, it's God, isn't it? Even the best human being, the Job of whom God says, "There is no one like him in all the earth!", even he does not know how to live as well as God does. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom!* and to the Romans he added, 16:27 (KJV) *To God only wise, [be] glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.* God alone is truly wise; He alone truly knows the right way for us to be and to live. So, from a human perspective:

I. What Is Wisdom - 1:1-6 It is simply this: ***Being like God***. If I could be completely like God, I would be truly wise, so the closer I am to being like Him, the wiser I am. Now being wise relates primarily to the mind and to the will, both of which then govern the way we act. And the purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to help us become wise, to become like God and Solomon spells out five particular areas which are aspects of wisdom. First, Wisdom is:

1. thinking like God thinks (2) It is having a Divine **viewpoint**. What does God think about something? How does He see and understand it? How does He view it? A dictator rises to power or maybe a loved one dies. How does He view those things? It may be totally different from us. I may see a tragedy in Iran, but the Ayatollah Khomeini did more to bring Iranians to Jesus than any missionary ever did by driving them away from militant Islam. My loved one dies and I hurt and feel it's not fair, but He sees it as blessing His child and rescuing them from this earth to a safe home with Him. Isaiah said, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* - Is. 55:8-9. Wisdom is having a Divine viewpoint, seeing and understanding and thinking like God, and we desperately need that! But it is more. It is:

2. acting like God acts (3) It is having Godly **behavior**. God always knows and therefore does what is just and right and fair. We've got the force or the power of sin dwelling in us. We've got flesh patterns that we've developed that pressure us toward what is unjust and wrong and evil. And very often it is hard for us to be disciplined enough to act like God acts and every time we don't, we suffer for it. Acting like God acts is the wisest, safest, most beneficial, best way to act and it is so contrary to the actions we see around us that we need Divine wisdom to recognize it and Divine strength to do it. Wisdom is acting like Jesus! But it is more:

3. choosing like God chooses (4) Discretion means to make wise choices. In order to live the way we ought, we need God-like **decision-making**. We need to learn to choose like God chooses. We constantly face choices in life between wisdom and folly, obedience and disobedience, right and wrong. This is especially important for two groups, the simple (the innocent, those without experience) and the young, those who are unaware of the danger of the snares that Satan has laid all about us. They need to learn to make godly choices, to choose what God says to choose. All of us do. Life is filled with choice points and to choose what God wants us to choose is wisdom. But it's more. It is:

4. knowing like God knows (5) This has to do with **information**. We have but limited knowledge. We can't see into the future. We can't see into other people's minds. We can't know what's out of our sight or reach. And it's hard to live life right that way. Somebody does something and we jump to conclusions about their motives or we interpret it differently from the way they meant it. But God knows everything! We may have a number of good options in front of us and no way to distinguish which is the best, but God knows. We desperately need to get hold of His knowledge, to get the information that He has. Wisdom is increasing your learning, getting more and more complete information. But it's more. It is:

5. reasoning like God reasons (6) There's lots of stuff in this world that is confusing, that doesn't make much sense. There are problems and roadblocks that seem to have no way around them. There are paradoxes and riddles that the finest minds can't solve. Wisdom also has to do with **problem-solving**, learning to reason the way God reasons. Dave Givens sent this testimony from one of the new Chinese believers he is discipling: *"After I married Xiaomei, we always have argument with each other. I think I should be a little bit tough so that Xiaomei will obey me. The result is that whenever I am tough, she become more tough. Whenever she is tough, I become more tough. Finally, an avoidable argument turns to be a "world war". After reading the Promise Keeper book, lots of stories and facts have taught me that being humble actually benefit yourself. I decide to try it. To my surprise, I find whenever I humble myself to Xiaomei and take care of her no matter how she treats me, she becomes tender and starts to care me. I never feel so happy these days living with her. I also learn to "close my eyes" to her shortcoming and "open eyes" to her good indeed. This is what I learn from Bible book and share this with you."* Isn't that beautiful? You see, God has a whole different way of right reasoning and problem-solving that is just so much wiser and better than ours that we need it to live right. So, if to be wise means that we need to think like God and act like God and choose like God and know what God knows and reason like He reasons, then just take a wild guess at this question:

II. Where Do You Get Wisdom -1:7, 9:10 The Hebrew uses the same word, *hokma*, wisdom in both verses. I don't know why the NIV didn't, but the word *beginning* is actually more important. It means that:

1. the source or fountainhead of all wisdom is a relationship with the Lord It is the third word in the entire Bible: *in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. It means the source. The Hebrew root is *rosh* which means the head, the headwaters of the river, the spring from which the river flows. God alone is wise, so the source of all wisdom for men is found in a relationship of reverential trust in Him. Outside of that you may gather some experience and information that are really helpful in life, but you can't know Divine viewpoint and Godly actions and choices and all the rest unless you know God, period! Paul spoke of Christ and said, *In [Him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. - *Col. 2:3*. So, the source of wisdom is knowing Him, entering by faith into a relationship of knowing Jesus and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit who is sent to guide you into all truth. But there is a corollary truth to this. If a relationship with Him is the source, the means by which wisdom flows to you, then it follows that:

2. the deeper and more intimately you know Him, the wiser you become, the more you think like Him and act like Him and choose like Him, and so on! The closer your walk with Him, the more time you spend in His presence, the deeper you delve into His Word, the more you are in the fellowship of His people, the closer you grow to Him, the more mature you will become and the wiser you'll get. The more of His wisdom will invade and control your heart and mind. When we got married 21 years ago, I knew LuAnn; but oh, how much better I know her after walking through all the experiences of these years together. I know how she thinks, how she feels, how what I say and do affects her and how she'll react to certain things. Now, I'm not saying I have her all figured out, mind you, but time and experience grow any relationship, even our relationship with Christ. Oh, how I thought I knew what He thought about everything when I was a young pastor of 20; how I was sure I had His complete wisdom on every subject! But oh, how much more I know of Him now; how much more of His heart for the world and His love for broken people I've discovered, and how much more I'm able to live His way than I was then! How much more of His viewpoint, His wisdom I've gotten. And I want more! Listen, if you want wisdom, sure, you can go to college or get a graduate degree or take a study course and get lots of information and that's all good, but if what you want is not just information but true wisdom, then you've got to invest your life in developing a bedrock deep relationship with Him to where you consciously walk with Him through every hour of the day; that's the only way to get it! Now why would you want it; what are:

III. The Benefits Of Obtaining Wisdom - 2:1-15, 3:13-26 First off, Solomon points out that:

1. it is freely available, but you must want it (2:1-6) It's available; you can have it! God wants to give it to you. Look with me at **James 1:5-7**. God gives it generously if you simply ask. He delights in sharing Himself and His wisdom with His children but you have to want it. You have to set your heart on it. You have to ask in faith, not doubting at all, saying "I want it" today but tomorrow chasing after something the world has to offer you instead. You've got to count it as more valuable than silver and gold, as the supreme treasure, the thing you'd rather have more than anything else. Otherwise, you don't get it! Paul said, *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,...* - *Phil 3:8 (NIV)*. That's how you get wisdom! But you'd be a fool not to want it! Why?

2. it will result in your moral protection

a. God will guard your path as you seek Him (2:7-8) The word *victory* in the NIV is literally *sound wisdom*. God Himself will protect you. From what? Not from all harm, in case that's what you're thinking. Let me say up front that there is NO promise in Scripture which says or means that God will not ever let anything bad happen to His children. Job proves that once and for all. He was the wisest, most righteous man on earth in his day and God allowed terrible tragedy in his life to make him even wiser, to give him more of Divine viewpoint! What then are you protected from? If you are pursuing a relationship with God, He will personally guide you in such a way as to protect you morally, keep you from thinking wrong and acting wrong and choosing wrong and understanding wrong and reasoning wrong. He will personally be involved in guiding you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake! You see:

b. His wisdom will guard you from paths of sin (2:9-15) Knowing Him and gaining His wisdom will guard you from stepping into those paths of sin that others pursue. He is able to keep you from falling, Jude said. Literally, He is able to guard you, to keep you *without* falling. But there's more:

3. it will bring you tangible benefits (3:13-17) Getting His wisdom and living His way will often cause you to live longer or, to put it in the reverse, you can cut years off your life through wrong choices and sin. It will tend to bring success and honor much more than sin will. Those that get trapped in it don't tend to succeed in their lives, in their jobs, or in their marriages and nobody much honors them. Now there are exceptions. Some Christians die young and many sinners make it big in business. These proverbs are probabilities, observations of general fact, not promises for each individual. But you will find that living God's way is overall more pleasant and will bring you peace of heart and mind. Your life on this earth will tend to be tangibly enhanced by the wisdom of living God's way! *One Sunday morning a husband and wife were sitting at home before church and the husband mentioned the sum he was going to give that day. The wife was a worrier and said, "It seems we have lost a great deal by our religion." The husband said, "Yes, we have. Before I was saved, we had one room with one decent chair and a bare floor; now we have a nice home. Before, I had a dreadfully evil habit and used to come home and beat you but we've lost that. I wore rags most of the time and you were always cold, but now we are well-dressed. I was in debt, ashamed to look men in the face; now we have a*

savings account. Shall I go on?" "No, the wife cried. "How ungrateful I have been!" Living wisely can't help but bless your life in tangible ways. In fact:

4. it is God's source of life for you (3:18, 21-22) The wages of sin is what? Death. Ultimately if you do not get wisdom, if you do not get a relationship with the Lord, you will die forever. And every time you choose sin, it is a step of damage and destruction and death in some way. Getting God's wisdom is a source of life, not only eternal life, but the full and abundant life that He planned for you to have on this earth. And lastly:

5. it will give you confidence and security (3:23-26) Again, this is no guarantee that nothing bad will ever happen to you. Rather, if you are walking by His wisdom, you will have confidence and security knowing that He is in control. His peace, the knowledge of His sovereign control, will give you an unshakeable security that no matter what happens, your loving Father has it all in hand. Paul said, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [i.e., Develop a deep, daily, moment-by-moment relationship] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* - Phil. 4:6-7 (NIV). That's wisdom. You'd be a fool not to want it! In fact, Solomon graphically declares:

IV. The Danger Of Refusing Wisdom - 1:20-33 And once again he points out:

1. it is freely available, so no one has an excuse (20-23) Nobody will stand before God with an excuse. His invitation is always open: "Come to Me; know Me; I want to know you! I want you to give you My wisdom and show you how to live; if only you would turn and come!" But many don't so:

2. deliberate rejection inevitably leads to disaster (24-27) Now don't take this picture wrong. I don't think God sits around laughing at the wicked and zapping them with disaster. Here wisdom is pictured as though it were itself a personal being who invites men but who also mocks those who reject. The point is that wisdom will be proved right. You can be pretty sure that rejecting wisdom, rejecting a relationship with God and living according to the world, will inevitably lead to calamity and disaster. Again, this is not a 100% prediction but an observation of probability. Why is that so, because God sends catastrophe as punishment? No, primarily because:

3. it eventually bears the fruit of pain and suffering (28-31) You reap what you sow. That is God's immutable law. If you sow to please the flesh, you will reap corruption. The consequences of what you choose, how you live, will fall upon you and you will know pain and suffering. Look at David's life. Look at the peace he had while walking in wisdom, even though it was a difficult life. Yet after he rejected God's wisdom in that major sin in his life, look at the rest. His child dies. His son rapes his daughter. Another son kills that son and later leads a rebellion. He becomes too weakened to do anything about any of this and the suffering and damage in the life of his family and the kingdom is tremendous. And if continued:

4. it ultimately leads to destruction (32-33) Rejecting a relationship with Christ will kill you forever. And even as a believer, continually rejecting His wisdom will destroy and ruin and wreck your life. That has been proved over and over again. Some years ago, I read this testimony in Our Daily Bread: *I remember my 9 yr. old cousin who refused to heed his mother's warnings about hitching rides behind cars in his wagon. He would grab the rear bumper as a car pulled out and be towed for a block and then coast a long distance at high speed. One day he was late for dinner and grabbed the back of a huge dump truck which he thought was going his way. The driver couldn't see him and shifted into reverse. It happened so quickly that he had no chance to move and the double wheels of the heavily-loaded truck rolled over him, killing him instantly. He had been told of the terrible danger of this practice but failed to heed his mother's warnings.* How many have lost even their lives by failing to heed Our Father's warnings!

You can't reject wisdom and live well. You can't afford to ignore your Father's warnings! He's the only One who truly knows how to live and He stands with open arms saying, "Come to Me; Know Me; I will give you My wisdom. I will show you how to think and live and choose and reason. Just come with all your heart!" Wisdom is life. Set your heart to know Him and you'll find it!

Prov. 1-9: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life The Pressure Of Peer Influence

One of the biggest waves of influence that crashes against our lives and tries to push us off the way God intends for us to walk is what we've come to call peer pressure. You know what I'm talking about. If you're a kid it sounds like this, "But all the other kids are doing that." Substitute "going to that", "wearing that", "saying that", "listening to that" or any similar phrase you like. If you're an adult it sounds more like, "What will the others think if I do that?" or "if I don't do that" or "if I object to that". Human beings are communal creatures; we have a need to belong. Not many of us are loners who are willing to step out and do something on our own and by ourselves. We want, we crave, we need the support, approval and acceptance of our peers and sometimes are willing to pay an awfully high price to gain it. Jacob Aranza writes, *My parents separated when I was 9. Eventually, I moved into a house that adjoined a bar. I became a member of a small street gang*

called the Devil's Children. We did a lot of crazy things and the main reason, at least for me, was peer pressure. The Devil's Children was not like your basic boy scout group. In order to get initiated they told me I had to go beat up this guy who was a lot bigger than I was. I was scared. But more than being afraid of the fight, I was afraid of not being accepted. I just wanted to be a part. I took drugs from the time I was nine until I was almost 15...I got started in drugs by sniffing gasoline. Now I never sat down and said, I just think I'll sniff some gasoline today. It was all my friends saying, "Hey man, this is cool; this is really rad; you've gotta do it, man." And so I did. We all did--that is until a kid in the neighborhood died doing it. Just about everything I did, especially the bad stuff, was because of peer pressure." [Making A Love That Lasts - p. 29]. The pressure of those around us is, without a doubt, one of the most powerful forces in our lives and it is often one aimed by Satan to drive us off of God's righteous path for our lives. Now how are we going to deal with this force? Well, we must begin by:

I. Understanding What Peer Pressure Is - 1:10 The dictionary says that a *peer* is one who has equal standing with another. Now here's how we tend to interpret that:

1. we tend to see peers according to circumstances For example, our peers are people who are our own age; our peers are those who are our fellow-students at school, our fellow workers at the office, the fellow-residents of our neighborhood. Because we see other people in the same situation as ourselves as peers who have the same standing; we sense this need to fit in, to be accepted by them. But God doesn't see the world that way.

2. God sees peers according to spiritual condition The only people on earth who are your true peers, who have the same standing as you do, are fellow-believers. The church of Jesus Christ is your true peer group! You see, God has a relatively simplistic view of the human race. To Him:

a. all human beings fit into one of two categories. **All are either believers or unbelievers, righteous or wicked, sheep or goats.** Jesus Himself tells us in Matthew 25 how simple this is going to be. When He returns in His glory, every living human being is going to be gathered before Him and He is going to separate them into 2 groups. It will be simple. All those who believe in Him stand on the right. They are His sheep. They are righteous. They are invited to come inherit the Kingdom. All the rest who have not trusted Him as Savior, no matter how nice they are, whose mother or father they are, whose friend they are, stand on the left. They are the goats and He says to them, *Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire...* It's simple; there's them and us, sheep and goats, righteous and wicked. The people on the other side of that sheep/goat line are NOT OUR PEERS! Paul laid this out very clearly for us:

b. **we are not like unbelievers and should not "join" up with them - 2 Cor. 6:14-16.** Do you see the contrast? We are not alike. Our hearts are full of righteousness; theirs are full of wickedness. We are indwelt by God; they are unknowing servants of Satan. We are true worshippers of God; they can only worship some form of idol. We live in light; they live in darkness. Why on earth would we want to join up with them in what they're about? Now I'm not saying we shouldn't love unsaved people; we certainly should. I'm trying to help us see:

3. the true nature of peer pressure It is not pressure by those who are really like me; in fact, I'm not like them at all:

a. **it is usually pressure by unbelievers to join in their wickedness** That's why Solomon says, "if SINNERS entice you, don't give in..." Teens, maybe you're feeling pressured to engage in premarital sex because all your friends are doing it and they make fun of you for not joining in. Businessman, maybe the guys at the office are encouraging you to join them in some escapade, to cheat on your wife, to drink with them and get drunk. Wait a minute! Think about who it is that's pressuring you! See them as God does. Usually it's people who are lost, who are blind, who have no clue what life and true happiness are really about, who are desperately casting about in the experiences of life trying to get their own needs met and to feel good and who stand right now under the wrath of Almighty God and, unless somebody shares Jesus with them, will spend eternity in hell after they're done suffering through this life! Why on earth would you want to go hook up with somebody like that and do what they do to be accepted by them? Now as soon as I say that, I know somebody's going to say, "Yeah, but the pressure I'm getting is from people who say they're Christians" or "people right in the church"! Well:

b. **it is sometimes pressure by believers who are acting like unbelievers** How many times is somebody having trouble in their marriage and it's their Christian friends who are all saying, "Well, get a divorce; find somebody else!", instead of encouraging them to get help and stay together. Or a woman finds herself separated from her husband and it's the Christian guys who hit on her just like the unbelievers at work. Why? Because sometimes believers act just like the rest of the world! Lots of us have already given in and, for all intents and purposes, have joined the other side or never left it when it comes to our behavior. We do what everybody else does, think like they think, listen to what they listen to and operate the way they do! Paul has a term for that: **1 Cor. 3:1-3.** And you and I need to learn to recognize that too! When we are getting pressure to do wrong things from people who claim to be Christian, they are CARNAL, still operating in the habit patterns of flesh like an unbeliever. And just like the unbeliever, they are not the ones we should be listening to; they are not the ones who should be setting standards for us!! So, let's turn to Chapter 2 for some help in:

II. Identifying Persons Who Practice Wickedness For What They Are - 2:12-15 How can you recognize when people are pressuring you away from God's path into things He considers wicked? There are usually three things that point out that they are different from you:

1. their words are perverse: *they speak against what you know is true* (12) You've been taught the truth. You know what God says about right and wrong. But what they say is against that, contrary to what you know is true. Listen to the words they're saying; compare them with God's truth. "Go ahead, it's safe, nobody'll ever know, everybody's doing it..." God didn't write that kind of stuff in His Word, so guess who its author is! Now at the same time:

2. their behavior is crooked: *they act in ways you know are wrong* (13, 15) Look at their lives. You know the kind of holy and pure behavior God asks us to have in His Word. But they intentionally do things you KNOW are wrong, that aren't of God. Oh, they might be nice and kind sometimes but then they do something that just shocks you. Jesus said you can tell a tree by its fruit; you can who people are by the way they act. As I heard one wise man put it, "If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck and swims like a duck, it's a duck!" If a person talks and acts in ways contrary to God's Word, they are engaged in wicked behavior and encouraging you to join them. And here's another tipoff:

3. their delight is unnatural: *they enjoy things you detest* (14) When you hurt somebody, you feel guilty and want to make it up. They might hurt someone and smile. They might enjoy picking on little kids or humiliating and making fun of people or lying and getting away with it. When you find somebody that gets joy out of things you would feel bad about, you know you're dealing with somebody that's walking on the other side of that line!

It's important that you know who you're dealing with, who's pressuring you, that you see it for what it is. It's not some innocent thing called peer pressure; it is people who practice wickedness, who practice things that God hates, trying to get you to join up with them! But why would you want to? Let's think about:

III. Why The Temptation To Join In Wickedness Is So Powerful - 1:11-14 There are three primary reasons:

1. it offers a sense of power over others (11-12) There is something in human flesh that loves and craves and enjoys power, that longs to control. How on earth could a carload of teens beat one kid to death with baseball bats? Why in school do bullies pick on weaker kids and steal their lunch money? Power, control! And the sick part is there is a little piece of that in all our flesh. It likes to be one up on somebody else, to control them, to have power, or at least to avoid being the victim of that. Oftentimes the people around us appeal to us because they entice us with a sense of control and power. Often because we're falling in with a group that has that. That's what forms street gangs and some college fraternities. But it also forms business alliances in the office. Or:

2. it offers an opportunity to profit for self (13) Wickedness offers a chance to get something, to make money, to have nice things, to enjoy pleasure. It appeals to greed, that desire in our flesh to have more or to have what somebody else has. People appeal to us with, "Just do this and look at all you'll get out of it!" "Look how much you can save, if you just don't report this income!" Or most often:

3. it offers a sense of acceptance by others (14) "You'll be one of us..." We have that need to belong and so many people don't. They have no group that accepts them; they've been rejected over and over. They've been rejected at home, rejected at school and here comes somebody who says, "You're in!" And so they do whatever those people are doing simply to belong, to be accepted at last!

But there's a price to pay:

IV. The Ultimate Result Of Joining In Wickedness - Self-Destruction - 1:18-19

1. you always pay a high price for choosing sin God has laid down a law and nobody escapes it. **Gal. 6:7-8**, *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* If you choose wicked behavior, you'll pay for it and the price will always be way higher than the reward, maybe not at first, but sooner or later. You get involved in sexual activity because everybody's doing it or because your boyfriend or girlfriend is pushing you. But they don't tell you about all the guilt and shame that come or about the diseases you can catch or the seriousness of pregnancy or how desperately you'll wish you hadn't when you marry somebody else! You start into the appearance craze and your friends give you ways to lose weight and look better and you start skipping meals or try a few pills or learn to throw up and you get control over your body for a while, but they don't tell you how quickly the whole thing becomes your master and you become a slave to it and can't stop and how you eventually ruin your body and lie to all your friends and parents and your husband, and wind up in a hospital half-dead from malnutrition! The truth is this:

2. ultimately when you choose to practice wickedness, to join up and go for power, or for greed or for acceptance, you are choosing to injure yourself; you are taking a step toward the ruin and destruction of your own life. That's why God wants to keep you from it in the first place! He knows what's good for you! So, here's:

V. The Important Lesson We Must Learn - 1:15-16 First:

1. we must not walk with persons who urge us to evil Recognize people who call themselves your peers for what they are and if you're being influenced to do wrong by them, then quit walking with them. Change your company. Get some new friends! Paul warned us in **1 Cor. 15:33**, *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."* If you spend a lot of time around unbelievers or carnal Christians who practice wicked things, they'll entice you to do the same. You will feel that pressure and will likely yield to it. I'm not telling you that you shouldn't love and care about those lost folks, but when they're pulling you down instead of you pulling them up, it's time to move out and find some new peers! Get yourself a peer group who are believers who love the Lord, who have the same heart as you and then, as a group, reach out to others to join you! Second:

2. we must not adopt their behavior, not take a step on their paths. The price is too high. And you can't undo it once it's done. *A young lamb and its mother passed by a pigpen each morning on the way to pasture. Watching the pigs wallow in mud seemed like fun, and on one hot day the lamb asked his mother if he could wallow in the cool mud too. "No", she replied, "Sheep don't wallow." The lamb was indignant and hurt and the sight of the pigs enjoying themselves was too much for him. So, as soon as his mother was out of sight, he ran to the pigpen and jumped the fence into the cool mud. Well, it was fun but after a few moments he began to worry about getting caught and decided he'd better go back to his mother, but he was stuck. Mud and wool don't mix; the heavy mud was in his fleece and held him fast. His pleasure had become his prison. He cried out and was rescued by the farmer. After he was cleaned and returned to the fold, his wise mother turned and said once more, "Remember, Sheep don't wallow." You're a sheep, not a pig. Wallowing in sin looks so nice, so inviting when we see others do it. And we think we can escape when we wish, but it isn't so...pleasures become prisons. The price is high. REMEMBER: Christians do not wallow!*

Solomon has his own proverb to remind us with in **v. 17**. No bird would ever fly down into a net that he watched the hunter spread out in plain view to catch him! No fox would ever step into a trap he watched the trapper set for him. So:

3. a wise person does not step into a trap he can plainly see! (17) God has made the trap of sin plain in His Word. He's shown us what peer pressure really is and where it leads. Surely, you're wiser than a bird or a fox!

Prov. 1-9: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life The Pressure Of Cultural Influence

Nobody lives in a vacuum. All of us live in the middle of a culture which has a profound effect in shaping us. The dictionary says that a culture is: *The arts, beliefs, customs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought created by a people or group at a particular time.* In Eph. 2:2, Paul talks about the way that all of us...*used to live when you followed the ways [or paths or patterns] of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.* Those ways or paths or patterns are what we call culture and they are specific to any given people and place and time. And the patterns of culture are shaped by Satan as a force round about us to keep us from loving and serving and obeying God. For example, if you were born in Iran, you would have grown up believing in a god named Al-lah. Five times a day you and all your family would stop what you are doing when you hear the call and get on your knees to pray. When you grew up you would do the same, even at school or work. You would dress the way the people around you dress and if you are female, you would wear all black and never venture out from home. You would not think in terms of falling in love, but your parents would pick your marriage partner. You would have been taught that Christians are despised enemies. And so on. Imagine how hard it would be for you to even consider becoming a Christian! Every message your culture sends you says YOU ARE MUSLIM and if you change, you will be a traitor to your family, your people. Now consider this: you also were born and raised in and live every day in a culture that is sending you powerful messages about the values by which you should live. They are not the same ones but they are just as strong. They are pressures designed to keep you from serving and obeying God and you absorb them unconsciously all the time. And the message our culture does its best to impress on us is this: self-centered individualism. YOU are the center of your own world. Value yourself above all else! Today I'd like us to go to Prov. Chapter 3 and compare God's principles to the various messages which our culture sends us. I've put them in a handy chart for easy reference. **Read 1-4.** God has two primary values, in fact they are the two primary aspects of His character: love and truth (NIV faithfulness - this word is translated *truth* everywhere throughout Old Testament). And these He wants us to practice. *Micah 6:8 says, He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* But this is the exact opposite of the values our culture tries to instill in us. So, let's consider some specific values and first of all let's talk about:

Our Culture's Message Vs. God's Enduring Principles

I. Principles That Affect Our Thinking About God (3:1-12)

1. I am in control! Vs. Trust God for direction! (5-6)

In some cultures, your life is programmed. Your job is determined by your caste or your parent's trade or the government. Who you'll marry is arranged. Your culture controls your destiny. We recoil against that, so what do we tell our

children? "You can be anything you want to be, if you set your mind to it! You can choose in life whatever occupation you like, live wherever you want, marry whoever you want. Your life is whatever you choose it to be, whatever you make it to be. Your job in life is to figure out what you really want and go after it! You are the master of your own destiny!" The result? I grow up and live my own life and who is God? Somebody who's out there to help me over the rough spots but I am in control! Isn't that how most people, even believers live? But two things are wrong with it. First, it's not true; you are not in control, of anything! God is! And second God doesn't exist for you; you exist for Him! That's why Solomon says, "Depend on the Lord, not on your own understanding. In all your actions in life, literally, KNOW Him and He'll direct the course of your life the way He wants it, the way He's planned it to be!" We ought to be teaching our kids and ourselves, "You're a creature of God; God has gifted you with certain gifts and placed you exactly where He wants you. Your responsibility is to know Him so you can discover His gifts and find His will and grow up to be what He wants and marry who He wants and live where He wants!" That's what's true. Jesus said in *John 15:5*, *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* How do you live? Who makes the choices in your life? You or God? Do you go to Him for direction about everything in life and acknowledge His will over your own or do you just live and make all your own decisions and ask for help now and then? If so, your culture has gotten to you! The wave has already knocked you off course without you even realizing it. A similar value that our culture feeds us is this:

2. I know what's best for me! Vs. Don't be wise in your own eyes! (7-8)

In some cultures, the need to seek wisdom from others is built in. They regard those who have lived the longest as wise and seek out advice on important matters. We've gone the other way. "Nobody really knows my exact situation. Nobody feels what I feel. Nobody lives with what I live with. My life is so unique that only I can know it and everybody else just doesn't understand! Older people are outdated, behind the times and can't function in this high tech, high pressure world. So, I have to trust in myself. Only I know what's best for me." Oh, what a dangerous assumption and it impacts our thinking about God. His Word may say something but somehow He wasn't aware of my situation and that's not for me! I know better how to live right now in my circumstances than He does. So, I ignore or rebel against what He says because I know best! That's why Solomon warns, *Don't be wise in your own eyes!* Paul said in *1Cor 8:2*, *The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.* The wisest man on earth is the one who knows that he doesn't know! Only a fool thinks he is omniscient! Rather Solomon says: *Depend on the Lord*, trust what He has to say and shun evil. That's what will be healthy for your life! **James 1:5** says, *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.* The wise man falls before God all the time, confessing his lack of understanding and begging for wisdom to know how to proceed. How about you? Are there areas in life where you're deliberately ignoring God's Word and putting it aside because you think that somehow it doesn't apply, that you know better, that you have a better way? Do you seek advice and godly counsel about problems and situations in your life and pray for God to reveal what you should do? Have you fallen into this cultural trap of thinking that you know what's best for yourself? *When Harry Truman was thrust into the presidency by the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a friend took him aside: "From here on out, you're going to have lots of people around you. They'll try to put up a wall around you and cut you off from any ideas but theirs. They'll tell you what a great man you are, Harry. But you and I both know you ain't."* When you're tempted to think that you're great and wise, just remember: you and I and God all know you ain't! Now here's an example of it:

3. Me first! Vs. Honor the Lord first! (9-10)

Money is an American god of sorts. And what we've been taught from little on up is "What's mine is mine!" In some cultures, they see it very differently, "What's mine is ours! What I have is for the good of the family or even the community and there is free sharing." But not here. Especially with our money it is, "Me first" and if there's anything left, then you! And that carries over again into how we think about God. What we have, what we earn, is ours and we "give something" to God, whatever we feel we can afford. The real truth is that God gives YOU everything you have including your next breath, your food, strength and every dime you ever earned. What you have is not yours but His! That's why Solomon says, "Honor the Lord with your wealth!" Remember whose it is! And then do what He says with it! Give the first portion of all He gives you to His cause. Then, when He knows that you'll do what He wants with your money, He'll meet your needs. Some of you sitting here today have bought into the "Me first" thing. You can't figure out why God doesn't give you enough to pay your bills. You are always worried about finances. But you've been dishonoring the Lord and ignoring His instructions. You pay all your bills and buy what you want and look at what's left and decide what to give to God instead of coming to God and saying, "Thanks for what you've given me; now what do YOU want me to do with it?" People say, "I can't afford to tithe, to give away a significant part of my meager income!" The truth is you're not willing to give that part of your life to the Lord. Paul knew the root of the problem, *For I testify that [the churches of Macedonia] gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.* - **2 Corinthians 8:3-5**. If you give yourself first to God, you will honor Him with your finances! Then there's a fourth concept we've been sold:

4. I can do whatever I want! Vs. Thank God for discipline! (11-12)

Nobody has the right to tell me what to do! I'm free. Ultimately, I belong to myself and nobody has a right to infringe on that. I resent it when they do, when they exercise authority over my will. How many times has it come out of your child's mouth? "You can't tell me what to do?" And when they get angry enough, it gets applied to teachers and youth leaders, and ultimately to God. Even HE doesn't have the right to tell me what to do, to correct me, to limit me, to determine things for me. God set up this whole bunch of rules to limit me and to keep me from what I want! But Solomon says we should not hate and resent the Lord's discipline and correction in our lives. He loves us and does all this for our good, like a loving Father. The writer of Hebrews picked up this thought and explained, *because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.* "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" - **Hebrews 12:6-7**. I love my children and I limit them and correct them and train them and sometimes punish them so they will learn to live and think in ways that are good for them. And God does the same with all of us. How many of us are secretly upset with God for some hard circumstance He has allowed or brought into our lives. We're sick, we're burdened with the care of someone else, we're alone, we're single, we're in an accident, we lose a loved one, or whatever; just fill in the blank. Or we resent the boundaries God has set for our behavior or the fact that we're far from family, instead of saying, "Thank you, Lord, for loving me and limiting me for my good and doing in my life that which will produce Your character!"

That "I" thing which we get from our flesh but which is emphasized and reinforced by our culture, affects us so profoundly, coloring even the way we think about our Creator and Father and we don't even realize it! But it also affects the way we treat other people and Solomon talks about that later in Chapter 3.

II. Principles That Affect Our Treatment Of Others (3:27-35) Really there are not six individual principles here but three with illustrations and reasons given.

1. Look out for Number One! Vs. Fulfill your obligations! (27-28)

How many times have you heard that advice? Do what's in your own best interest. Worry about your needs before others because after all, you are what's most important. But God's values are different. He wants us to fulfill our obligations to others rather than seeing how much we can selfishly get away with. He literally says, "Don't withhold good from the *owners* of it," that is, those to whom you owe something. And really verse 28 is an illustration of what he's talking about. If you hire your neighbor to do some work for you and he comes to get paid, don't say, "Come back tomorrow and I'll pay you," when the money's in your pocket today!" Don't keep for yourself what you know you owe to someone else for your own advantage. Fulfill your obligations! Paul put it this way, *Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue [i.e., payment], then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.* - **Romans 13:7-8**. Whatever you owe, fulfill it both financially and in terms of personal relationships. If you make a promise, keep it. If you pledge your help, carry it out. If you are responsible for something, take that responsibility and carry it out! Don't let our culture's self-centered irresponsibility creep into your life!

2. Sue them! Vs. Put off deception and speak truth! (29-30)

We live in a society that encourages us to seek to deliberately take advantage of others. If you sell things, charge whatever you can get, not what the item is worth or a fair profit. If you have a service, sell them something whether they need it or not. Find something wrong to fix! If you have a claim against them of any sort, inflate it to get all you can. And if you are hurt or slighted in any way, intentional or unintentional, sue them! Take advantage of the opportunity. A friend was involved in accident some months ago where he was turning right in his oil truck and a lady who had no insurance decided to illegally pass him on the right while he was doing it and ran into the side of his truck and then hit another car. He goes to court next Monday because the lady who hit him is suing him and his employer. The passenger in her own car is suing her and my friend and the company. And the lady she hit is also suing everybody though she herself was driving uninsured. The constable who delivered the papers said, "You wouldn't believe how much of my time is taken up with this stuff!" We are advised by everybody to deliberately take advantage of one another and rapidly we are learning not simply to be suspicious of everyone but to take advantage of people who have a trusting attitude! But God says no! Never intentionally plan to harm or take advantage of someone, not even a company. Don't put blame or accusation on someone else for your own profit. Paul reiterated, *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood [or deception] and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.* - **Eph. 4:25**. Sadly, this carries over even into the church! At Corinth the brethren were taking each other to court to settle their arguments instead of settling them directly in a scriptural way! How quickly we absorb our culture's values! How many Christians sue for damages they don't deserve or inflate their insurance claims? That standard of being honest and trustworthy so others can live and work with us in safety and security without fear of us, is not just for fellow believers; it is to be toward all men. There must be transparency and trust before they will ever believe the truth we tell them about Jesus! How about you? How's your honesty?

3. Nice guys finish last! Vs. Consider others better than self! (31-35)

How many times have you heard things like that! Do whatever it takes! Only the strong survive. And we look around and see how people push their way to the front of the line, how they scream and complain until others get out of their way, how they even get violent and forceful and use whatever power they have to get what they want. And sometimes

that can make us envious or jealous. It can cause us to consider the possibility of taking some of the same steps, being ruthless, sweeping aside the feelings of others. But Solomon warns: You'd better not! Why not? He gives four reasons in 32-35. 1) God is disgusted with the life of that man and won't have anything to do with it but He's intimate with you; He shares with you things that man will never know. 2) God's curse is on him and his house. The consequences of sin are going to get him sooner or later. But God's blessing is on you and yours. 3) God is going to have the last laugh on his pride and mockery; we'll see how it ends one day! But you get His grace to meet every need. And finally 4) Eventually that guy will bear his shame before everyone but you will be honored. Do you still want to trade places? Do you even want to be like him? You can bully your way to the top but sooner or later you'll meet Somebody who's bigger. Don't take a step on that path. Don't take up that forceful, pushing, shoving, manipulating, controlling, get your own way, kind of lifestyle! Believers do that and you know some of them! God has a better way to live, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* - **Phil. 2:3**. Live a life of love, deliberately choosing to put the needs of others ahead of your own, stepping out of the way for them, boosting them higher, tending to them first instead of yourself. *Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus...* and you know the rest!

Our culture says "Enthroned yourself; be your own god. Think about yourself before God and before those around you." And it creeps in and we don't even realize it. Sometimes it's in small ways but it can grow like cancer and fill you before you know it. *Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour a day to drain the fluids from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation. And every afternoon when the man in the bed next to the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed would live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the outside world. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake, the man had said. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Lovers walked arm in arm amid flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man could not hear the band, he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Unexpectedly, an alien thought entered his head: Why should he have all the pleasure of seeing everything while I never get to see anything? It didn't seem fair. As the thought fermented, the man felt ashamed at first. But as the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, his envy eroded into resentment and soon turned him sour. He began to brood and found himself unable to sleep. He should be by that window--and that thought now controlled his life. Late one night, as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on the fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help. Listening from across the room, he never moved, never pushed his own button which would have brought the nurse running. In less than five minutes, the coughing and choking stopped, along with the sound of breathing. Now, there was only silence--deathly silence. The following morning the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and called the hospital attendant to take it away, no words, no fuss. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed.... It faced a blank wall. Two men; two ways of life. One man used his feeble ability and imagination to enrich the life of another; the other focused on self to the exclusion of the other's needs and killed him, just as surely as if he'd pulled a trigger. Culture says, don't be a fool, live like the second man. God says what Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose!" Trust God for the grace to not bow to the pressure!*

Prov. 1-9: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

The Pressure Of Parental Influence

Proverbs are not just witty sayings; they are principles for living well and wisely, principles that will help you as you face all the pressures of life. I don't know what you do on your vacations, but each summer our family loves to go to the seashore and the kids especially love our time on the beach. And the thing that fascinates them most (when they're not burying one another in the sand up to their necks) is the waves. And I've noticed some things about kids and waves. When they're little they like to stand in the surf just to go with the waves. When one comes in, it pushes them toward the beach and when it goes out it pulls them out with it. Whichever way the wave goes, the child goes. But then they get a little bigger and can stand up against the waves. And for a while the favorite pastime becomes fighting the waves, kicking and chopping them, just proving that you can stand in one spot and the waves can't move you. Did you know that's a picture of life? Paul described spiritual maturity like this in *Eph. 4:14, Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.* There are waves, powerful pressures that crash against us in life, and if we are immature, they will push us this way or that way, wherever they want us to go. Maturity is being able to go the right way in life, God's way, no matter which way

the wind is blowing or the waves of life are pushing. Proverbs are principles you can absorb to help you become mature, to stand against those pressures of life. Now what my older kids enjoy most at the beach is riding the waves, boogie boarding. And the secret to that is learning to pick the right wave, the one which has the power to take you where you want to go, fighting all the rest to stay where you are, but when that one right wave comes, doing everything you can to yield yourself to it and unite yourself with it and let its force push you all the way into shore. There are lots of pressures in life that you must choose to fight, that will only bury your face in the sand at your feet and we'll talk about those in the next few weeks. But there are some that are the right waves, the ones which will take you where God wants you to go, and you need to yield to them, let them push you in God's direction. And one of those powerful waves you really want to ride is:

I. The Power Of Parental Influence - 4:1-4 How did Solomon get to be such a wise man? Admittedly part of it was a Divine gift, but he himself traced some of it back to the tremendous power of parental influence in his life. His father David, from the time he was very young, spent time with him and taught him principles for living. Now think about where David was in life when Solomon was born! He had lived through the young shepherd stage and the lessons of the lion and the bear and the giant! He'd spent 10 long years in the wilderness being hunted as a fugitive by his enemies. He had been made king over Judah for 7 years and then, at long last, king over all Israel. But his heart had become proud and he committed a great sin and covered it. Then God uncovered it and he learned the tears of repentance and sorrow over the loss of a child. All these years of deep lessons had produced a man of uncommon maturity who walked with God and then along came Solomon. And David poured those lessons into his son. Solomon grew up wise, grew up wanting to honor and serve the Lord because He listened to His father. He himself wrote down the principle of:

1. the life-long impact of parental influence in the early years - 22:6 The proverbs are not promises to be claimed. They are not magic formulas that guarantee a particular result. They are observations about the way life is and wise principles to follow in living it. This verse is not a tonic for distraught parents which says that if you raise them right and they wander away, that God guarantees they'll come back! It simply says that the impact of parental teaching and training in the early years of a child has a tremendous life-long impact that will shape of his or her future as an adult. The things learned in youth carry through for a life-time. A childhood full of love, affection and wise teaching and examples will shape a person's whole life. It is a powerful pressure, a current that sweeps a person along in the direction of obedience and maturity. However, right here I have to express two things. First:

a. a word of sympathy for children of dysfunctional parents I am one. And in case you're a child sitting here thinking, "Yeah, right, my parents were neglectful, alcoholic, abusive, self-centered; if I'd done life on the principles they taught and the example they set, I wouldn't be here today! The way I was trained is NOT the way I should go!", you're absolutely right! Not all parents are Davids! Or anywhere close to it! There are a whole bunch of us sitting here today who are in our 30's and 40's and beyond who are struggling desperately to escape the emotional damage done and the habits imbedded in us by our parents and others in childhood! You won't have that force of positive parental pressure to push you in the right direction through life. You'll have to look to your Heavenly Father and to the spiritual mothers and fathers that God gives you within your spiritual family, the church, for that kind of positive influence. But even you are evidence of the truth of that proverb. The influence of parental pressure when young impacts the whole life - positive or negative! However, to balance this out, let me also just give:

b. a reminder about the ability of all children to choose as they mature Parental pressure is not the only force that plays into our lives. Some very godly parents do everything right and have a child that grows up and goes away from the faith. I know some and so do you. And sometimes they blame themselves and desperately try to figure out where they went wrong, why this principle of training up a child didn't work. Just remember this. There are a whole lot of other forces besides our parents that affect us dramatically, people we meet, experiences we have, the culture we live in. And try as hard as we might we can't shelter children from all of those things. So, as we grow older each of us has the necessary opportunity to choose to cling to that parental influence and own it for ourselves or to reject it. If it was bad, we are responsible to choose as adults to reject it and to live a different way. If it was good, we must still make that personal choice to own it for ourselves. That's why Solomon challenges us directly with:

2. the responsibility to embrace positive parental influence - 1:8-9 Here's great advice from Solomon for young people: listen to your parents and what they taught you; if they are good godly loving people who are training you to love and follow the Lord, don't just listen; HEAR it! And don't ever let it go! It's a privilege and a thing of beauty that will enhance your life like a beautiful wreath in your hair or a lovely necklace. To ignore it, to throw it away, is foolishness! The wise thing to do is to cling to it, to embrace it and hold fast, even when it doesn't look too inviting or seems difficult! Now notice that:

a. some of that influence came as discipline or correction That word *instruction* in the Herew is *discipline* or *chastening*, correction when we're wrong. Boy, we don't like that, do we? Especially from Dad. We don't like to be wrong, to have Mom or Dad stop us from what we want to do or punish us for stepping out of line. We hate that! We get mad at our parents, even though inside we may know they're right. Oh, but we can choose to learn from it, we can choose to take it to heart, we can choose to see it as from the Lord and for our good and as a way of getting wisdom! But they not only influenced us through discipline:

b. some of that influence came as rules or instruction, teaching, especially from Mom. Our parents are always teaching us things that are healthy and good for us. Brush your teeth. Wear your coat when it's cold. Go to bed; you need the rest. And, of course, things much more serious than these. And we don't like them either. We're too tired to brush our teeth and we hate wearing that old heavy coat and that TV show is much too important to turn off just to go to sleep. We like things our own way. And besides, we know better; after all we've lived all of 6 or 10 or 13 or 16 years, haven't we? But we can choose to HEAR it, to embrace it, to take it to heart and learn from it, can't we? We can see it as the Lord taking care of us through our parents even if our feelings don't agree with us at the moment. And we can let that wisdom become built into us. What will happen if we do?

3. the effects of embracing positive parental influence - 6:20-23 If you'll just embrace that parental teaching and hang onto it, it will have three wonderful effects. First of all:

a. it will guide you in choices you walk through in life Life is like a road with a whole series of intersections where you can turn this way or that, where you can do this thing or that thing, and you must choose. But making those choices will be a whole lot easier if you've been listening to and absorbing the wisdom your parents have been trying to impart to you through the years. It's like walking through the forest. If you have a good sense of direction and know the path you're on is going the right way and you come to a path that veers off to the left or right, you instinctively know not to turn but to take the path that goes in the right direction. That parental wisdom will serve as your compass, your sense of right direction in life. Second:

b. it will protect you from dangers you're unaware of in life When you sleep, when you're unaware of what's really going on, what your parents have taught you will protect you. There are lots of things out there you've never experienced firsthand, things that are like Sleeping Beauty's apple, all shiny and appealing on the surface but poison on the inside if you bite into it. And when the opportunity confronts you in life to, let's say, try drugs or get involved in sexual immorality or to make a bunch of money dishonestly, you'll recognize those things for what they are. You won't have to touch the flame to see if it burns; you'll know that it does from your parents' wisdom and steer clear of it and in so doing spare yourself a whole lot of pain and hurt! Thirdly:

c. it will assist you in discoveries you wake up to in life It will be a platform that God can use to help you discover new levels of wisdom and understanding as you meditate on it and let it teach you. There are things that Mom and Dad said and did that never hit home until you're a Mom or Dad yourself and, all of a sudden, they become clear and you understand. God uses that treasury of knowledge throughout your life. So, verse 23 summarizes:

4. what positive parental influence is to us (23)

a. it is light It is necessary *information* about life that gives us the *understanding* we need to live wisely. But it is more than that:

b. it is life It is *preservation plus fulfillment*. The fifth commandment says what? *Eph. 6:2, Honor your father and mother*, and Paul comments, *which is the first commandment with a promise -- that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth*. If you embrace that positive parental instruction, it will in many ways preserve your life from harm and destruction and fill it with meaning and abundance.

Now let's return briefly to Chapter 4 and look at some things that David taught Solomon. There are:

II. Three Areas Parents Can Vitaly Impact - Chapter 4 First of all:

1. we can impact our children's priority by teaching them the life-giving importance of pursuing wisdom (5-7) -

When Solomon was just a young man, a new king, God made him an offer one night. He said, "Ask Me for whatever you want." He could have asked for riches and fame but he didn't. He could have asked to live a long time but he didn't. He could have asked for revenge on his enemies or any one of a thousand other things that people chase after in life but he didn't. He asked God for wisdom instead and God granted it. Now why do you think that was? Verses 3-5 tell us. David pounded it into his head from little on up. David taught him a priority that of all the things you can chase and pursue and acquire in life, none of them matters. Chase wisdom. What's wisdom? Here's a simple definition for you: **wisdom is thinking like God thinks**. Get God's view on the matter, His way of looking at the situation, His opinion and instruction about it. Verse 7 says, whatever else you may get, get that, even though it costs all you have. That's what matters. Why? Because **1 Pet. 5:8** says, *...Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*. You've got an enemy prowling about who is constantly trying to ruin and destroy your life and in **2 Cor. 2:11** Paul warns us to be careful *in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes*. We need wisdom, God's thinking; that's the only thing that will save us. Verse **13** says it is LIFE! And the more we model that and teach that and show that to our kids, the more we will impact their priorities in life to pursue God's wisdom over the things the rest of the world is chasing. Secondly:

2. we can impact our children's purity by teaching them the life-giving importance of practicing righteousness (14-19) Sin always has a hidden payoff. *Rom. 6:23 ...the wages of sin is death.* No matter how wonderful it looks or feels, sin blinds and ruins and destroys and ultimately kills. It's a slippery downhill slide. But the person who chooses righteousness or purity is on a path that just grows brighter and brighter until they step across the river into heaven's full light of day, where everything is pure and righteous. The more we teach and model for our children the principle that choosing right is important, that it's a matter of life and death, that it will determine the very quality and length of our life, the more we will impact their desire to stay pure throughout life! And finally:

3. we can impact our children's spirituality by teaching them the life-giving practice of guarding the heart (20-23) Oh, if we could teach them this, that spirituality is not about performance and rule-keeping; it's about the heart. What's inside determines who you are and how you act. Jesus said in *Mark 7:21, For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, ... All these evils come from inside...* It's not a matter of teaching them how to behave. It's a matter of teaching them to do what David said in **Ps. 139:23-24**, *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Oh, if we could teach them to guard their hearts and not let the love of anything or anyone supersede the love of God, if we could teach them when they are wrong to rend their hearts and not simply their garments, what a life-long impact it would have on their spirituality and produce in them a humble walk with God.

Oh children, listen to your parents for this is right! It's a wonderful force God's put in your life to help you stand against all the negative waves that crash against you. Oh parents, take your role seriously. You are impacting your children for life, every day, good or bad, but impacting nevertheless. What more can I say to help you realize the seriousness of the choices you make and the example you set? I'll leave you with this poem:

In His Dad's Steps

I watched him playing around my door,
My neighbor's little boy of four,
I wondered why a child would choose
To wear his dad's old worn-out shoes.
I saw him try with all his might
To make the laces snug and tight.
I smiled to see him walk and then
He'd only step right out again.
I heard him say, his voice so glad:
"I want to be just like my dad."
I hope his dad his steps would choose
Safe for his son to wear his shoes.
And then a shout and a cry of joy,
A "Hello Dad!" and a "Hi-ya Boy!"
They walked along in measured stride,
Each face aglow with love and pride.
"What have you done today, my lad?"
"I tried to wear your old shoes, Dad.
They're big, but when I am a man
I'll wear your shoes, I know I can."
They stopped and stood there hand in hand.
He saw his son's tracks in the sand.
His words -a prayer- come back to me,
"Lord, let my steps lead him to Thee!"
- Vision

Prov. 1-9: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life The Pressure Of Sexual Temptation

If you were to ask me what is the biggest wave crashing against God's people today, what is the greatest pressure we face in America that is trying to sweep us off the path God has planned for us to walk, I would say it is the pressure of sexual temptation. God created man and woman as sexual beings and placed inside them a drive to be involved in this wonderful relationship with one another. However, at its very creation God built a high wall around it called marriage and said, "Those are the absolute boundaries; the sexual relationship is good and holy and pure ONLY in that box, ONLY inside the lifetime commitment of marriage. A man shall be joined to HIS WIFE and the two shall be one flesh." God's plan is: One Man + One Woman for One Lifetime and sex belongs ONLY in there! Now notice He didn't say, "a man shall be joined to his girlfriend, to his fiancé, to somebody else's wife, to any woman he has deep feelings about or to any willing female he can find." Yet those are all messages that we are being sent loud and clear by almost every part of the culture

around us. It's all over the newsstands, the television and the internet. We hand out condoms in our public schools and tell teens to practice "safe sex" with one another, something that doesn't exist! We are people who know the boundaries God has set but who live in a culture that is sex-crazed and the temptation to think about, to test, to try, to step out of the boundaries God has set confronts us almost daily, even if only in our minds. How can we fight this tremendous wave of pressure all around us and remain pure and holy as God has called us? Well, this is a subject that Proverbs has an awful lot to say about, and there God through Solomon gave us a number of very important principles that can help us face this tremendous pressure. First off, in Chapter 5 he gave us:

I. Some Principles Particularly For Married People - Ch. 5 Everybody can learn from them but they are aimed particularly at those who have committed themselves to one another in marriage.

1. remember that appearances are deceiving (1-6) Now you married folks realize by now that after a few years of living together, you pretty well get to see and know the real person you married. You know how hard the other one is to live with. You see each other before the make-up is applied when the hair is all frazzled and the teeth get popped in and the breath reeks. But you go to work and that guy at the next desk always looks so handsome and smells good. He opens doors and holds chairs and is a real gentleman. And he listens to you when you talk! That lady is always so fresh-looking and beautiful and speaks so soft and sweetly to you. She never gets angry or nags. There's no doubt that a stolen kiss would really taste sweet and a few hours together could flood you with wonderful feelings. But that wonderful tempting appearance is in reality the sugar coating on a cyanide pill! First of all, that's not the real person because you'd soon find out that they're just a normal flawed human being like everybody else. But beyond that, in that tempting moment, no matter how wonderful they are, they are simply the sweet bait on the trigger of a steel trap set for your life! You don't bait a trap with something ugly and repulsive but with something that appears wonderful! And Satan isn't stupid; he knows that. But you have to remember to look beyond appearances, to remember that the sweet appearance is only covering up the bitterness and danger of making that wrong choice! Look beyond the surface to the end result!

2. take steps to avoid tempting circumstances (7-8) If there's a particular person or situation that is really tempting to you, the safest thing to do is to avoid it, to make sure that you never let yourself wind up alone with that person and if you can't avoid them, to have someone with you, to stay away from that place, to make deliberate choices that keep a distance between yourself and that which could be used to cause you to fall! Recovered alcoholics don't go in bars or keep beer in the frig. Paul told the Corinthians that God always makes a way of escape from temptation and in the next verse he said, "Flee from idolatry!" When you see it, run from it; put distance between yourself and the danger. Don't call; don't linger near.

3. think about the consequences of the wrong choice There is no better deterrent than this. Every time you are tempted by the appearances, just think about what it will cost you! I absolutely guarantee that:

a. you will experience a tremendous loss (9-10) It will steal away from you your best strength (your honor and reputation and all that you've devoted yourself to, the example you've been); it will steal away your time (you will waste months and years that could have been devoted to the service of God); and it will steal away your material things. How many men have thought someone else looked better and gone through a costly divorce, lost their home and perhaps ended up thousands in debt and are now trying to support two families out of the one income and struggle for years. Some other chapters mention some additional consequences like:

(1) the devastation of violated relationships - 2:16-17a What damage does this selfish act do to that person who's been married to you and faithful all those years? It can destroy them. One of the things that has always helped me to resist even any wrong thoughts in this area is this: I think about LuAnn and how it would devastate her and ruin her life. I think about my kids and how they love me and how they would learn to hate me for it and for ruining their lives and their home and how I could be separated from them. I think about all of you and how in one moment I could ruin and undo all the respect and trust of many years and how turned off our young people would be. The pleasure could never be worth the price. It's too high! Plus, there's:

(2) the guilt of a broken covenant - 2:17b We made a promise before God, a sacred covenant *...to keep myself only unto thee until death do us part*. How could I violate and hurt the Lord who gave Himself for me on the cross, who died that I might live, by violating His will, by breaking the covenant I made with and before Him. Oh, the load of guilt would be tremendous. Then sometimes there's:

(3) the shame of using and being used - 6:25-26 Sex outside of the marital commitment is cheapened; it becomes a thing, a mere act. You or the other person become an object to be used, something to satisfy a lust, perhaps even an object for sale, a means of earning a living. A human being intended for precious and holy relationship becomes a commodity no different in essence from a loaf of bread. And there is a tremendous shame involved in that. And often there is:

(4) the anger and hatred of injured parties - 6:32-35 You've never known anger until a betrayed spouse, theirs or yours, kicks into the mode of jealousy and revenge because of sexual unfaithfulness. It can often become downright violent and dangerous; just ask the Philadelphia police!

The consequences are tremendous. When you compare what you'd get against what you'd lose, it is staggering and so Solomon says:

b. you will experience a deep regret (11-14) You'll live to wish you hadn't made that choice, to wish you had listened to sermons like this one and the advice of Sunday School teachers and the Word of God. The regret and the remorse will be deep. So, think about the consequences.

4. work hard at developing your own marriage (15-19) The best defense against sexual temptation is a wonderfully satisfying marriage but that doesn't happen unless you work on it and Solomon gives us some hints:

a. focus your desires on your spouse (15) Realize the blessing that God has given you in your own wife or your own husband right at home. Focus your desires there. Don't be looking around for a soda machine elsewhere for a quick drink when there is a whole well of water in your life. Focus and concentrate your spouse. Let your desire be for him or her, not for "it"!

b. revel in the uniqueness of your relationship (16-17) Think about this blessing: you are the only one in the whole world who enjoys intimacy with your spouse and you are the only one to whom he or she gives themselves. You have set boundaries so that the two of you alone share this precious oneness. And no one else ever intrudes on that. There is something wonderful and marvelous about that uniqueness. Revel in it, remind each other of it, pledge it to each other repeatedly.

c. see the beauty in your spouse (19a) I know; some of you are thinking: "Have you seen my husband? He's more like a wallowing hippo than an elegant stag!" Our culture has done us such a disservice by promoting the idea that you're not handsome unless you look like Brad Pitt; you're not beautiful unless you have the dimensions of a fashion model. And that's so fake. So much of that is makeup and designer clothes and camera angle. 99% of us simply have average appearance but there is a natural beauty in every one of us and if you will look for it in your spouse, you can see it. It's probably more than skin deep. Compare 31:30. Learn to love and appreciate that beauty.

d. work at satisfying and being satisfied with your spouse (19b) Communicate. Find out what the other likes. Work at providing satisfaction for each other. Learn to enjoy and savor the satisfaction you receive from each other. And finally:

e. be thrilled with your spouse's love for you (19c) Think about it. He loves me! She loves me! Isn't it wonderful that someone in all this world loves me the way he or she does? Who am I to deserve that? Let it thrill you and captivate you. All of these things will help you to build a healthy relationship and automatically lower the pull of temptation. It's the hungry fish that chases the lure, not the one who's full and satisfied!

5. remember God's complete knowledge of you (20-21) You may be tempted to think you can pull it off in secret, that nobody will ever know. But God will. The whole time you're even entertaining the thought, He is standing by knowing it. Every flirtatious moment, every longing stare, every wrong act. God is right there IN you knowing it fully, going through it right with you. And you can rest assured that God will take whatever steps of discipline He needs to in your life to open your eyes.

Now you married folks have already got the majority of our time so let's move to Chapter 7 where Solomon shares:

II. Some Principles Particularly For Young People - Ch. 7 Beginning at verse 6 he tells a parable, a story about a young man who is like most youth. He's simple, naive and unaware of the power and the danger involved in sexual temptation. He lacks experience in life to help him in this area. And his story is filled with principles for young people but they'll help older ones too.

1. be aware of the effect of the atmosphere of night (6-9) Now this sounds simple but most temptation to sexual sin occurs at night, particularly late at night. Somehow darkness always seems to hide things, to cover them up and make them feel secret. At night our minds are tired and our emotions are often heightened. We tend to think with our feelings. What feels like a total disaster at night often seems much clearer and more easily dealt with in the fresh light of morning. But what feels so wonderful and so right at night may turn awfully bitter in the morning when the mind wakes up and thinks about the consequences and realizes the guilt. Young people, be careful of staying out late and being alone in the dark late at night. Temptation is increased a hundred-fold. And parents you can help put some healthy limits on that for them!

2. be mindful of the appeal of revealing dress (10) He meets this woman and her dress advertises right away what she's interested in. And verses 11-12 make plain that this is not some particular woman but it's meant to be a caricature.

ture of a person you might meet anywhere. It's for all of us. Young people often don't realize how powerful revealing dress can be, particularly for young men. You young ladies need to realize that wearing really tight or low-cut tops or revealing bathing suits is a real turn-on for guys, but in the wrong way. You want them to like you as a person not simply as an object to be desired. And you guys need to realize how much this affects you and learn when not to look, not to allow yourself to be excited in the wrong way towards that girl so that you entertain lustful and wrong thoughts.

3. be careful to limit physical contact (13) Nothing arouses your inner desires more than physical contact. Touching and kissing arouses deep feelings and emotions inside you and it's progressive. A little feels good and leads to the desire for more. The more you touch, the more you want to and so on. And the further you go, the harder it becomes to control, to stop and say no. In marriage that's a beautiful and wonderful thing but the trouble is that it works the same way outside of it! So, you must realize the power this has and make a conscious choice to limit yourself. Otherwise, you will wind up in full blown sexual activity and violate God's will for you and your own body.

4. be wise enough to see through seductive words She talked to him with inviting seductive words. Words are SO important, particularly to women. Hearing certain things can arouse deep feelings in you and you need to learn to see through them. First of all:

a. beware of quasi-religious talk (14) "Oh yes, I went to church just yesterday; I go pretty often. I believe in God, you know. Now let's talk about how beautiful you are...." Believe me, if people know you're a Christian or go to church and that's important to you, boys or girls are not above saying they're religious too and using that as a hook to lure you. A person who genuinely loves the Lord shows it in behavior and consistently in their lives. Here's a lady dressed like a hooker, kissing a complete stranger and saying, "I love Jesus!" It doesn't add up. Beware of insincere religious talk.

b. beware of appealing flattery (15-18) "I love you; I love you; you're beautiful. You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. You're so handsome! You're the one I've been looking and waiting for. I'll never want anybody else. I can't live without you!" Now those are the kinds of things you might say after you've known someone for months or years and are ready to marry them. But when she just met him? When your boyfriend or girlfriend of a limited time is saying things like that, learn to see through it. It's appealing flattery, the "lines" that our culture has taught us to use. And often all we mean is that our hormone level is up! And those words can move you deeply if you don't see through them. Beware of them.

c. beware of false assurances (19-20) "We'll never get caught; no one will ever know; we'll just try it once; nothing will happen; you won't get pregnant; I'm going to marry you some day..." And on the list goes. False assurances, none of which are true, none of which can anybody really promise! They too are lines that are as old as the Proverbs. Beware of false promises and learn to see through them!

Young people, this is serious. The temptation to get sexually involved and active is tremendous and you must learn to be wise and stand against it. Wait for that one you marry. Save yourself to give to them on your wedding night. You'll be glad you did for the rest of your life. Solomon has:

III. Some parting Warnings For All Of Us married or unmarried:

1. it is like touching fire: you WILL get burned - 6:27-29 God says that sex outside of marriage is not only wrong; it has very harmful consequences and you will NOT be able to avoid them. If you dump hot coals into your lap, your clothes will get burned. If you walk barefoot on hot coals, your feet will get burned. If you get involved sexually outside of marriage, you WILL pay the price. And understand this:

2. it is a serious matter: it is a DEADLY path - 7:24-27 This is not some light easy thing we're talking about. Thousands of people suffer and die every year from sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS. Babies are aborted; lives are ruined and changed forever. It's not just some fun, an emotional fling. Surely what's done between two consenting adults can't be bad! Yes, it can; it can be deadly! One wrong choice can ruin a lifetime, not only for you, but for the other person and for your family.

Commit yourself before God to purity. Ask God for the grace to practice these wise principles. And if you've already fallen or you're being seriously tempted, start right now, where you are. Turn to Jesus and give Him everything you have and seek help from a wise godly counselor or pastor. *Roberta Croteau writes in Aspire, "In the mid 1980's, singer Amy Grant's life was not as charmed as it appeared. Troubles in her marriage--her husband Gary's cocaine habit and their subsequent talk of divorce--left Amy in one of her darkest moments. She remembers: 'For a few days, I just stayed in bed and mourned my life. The only hope I could seem to see was just junking it all, moving to Europe, and starting everything all over again. It was then my sister, in a last-ditch visit, marched up right beside my bed and said, 'Fine, go to Europe, leave it all behind, start your life again. But before you go, tell (my little girl) how you can sing that Jesus can help her through anything in her life, but that he couldn't help you.' The words hit home. Amy and Gary began marriage and personal counseling, slowly rebuilding their relationships with each other and with God."* No matter where you are, whether you're merely tempted, in the process of falling, or already fallen, Jesus can and will help you; you're His child. Turn to Him.

Prov. 1-9: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

The Invitation To Receive Wisdom - Chs. 8-9

Remember our Biblical definition of wisdom. Wisdom is being like God! It is thinking like He thinks, acting like He acts, choosing like He chooses, learning what He knows and reasoning like He reasons. And it is only found through a relationship with God which is deepening and growing. Today we'll take that theme a step further as Solomon does in chapters 8-9. I heard James Dobson talking about his father the other day on the radio and his father told him that for him having the gift of eternal life was like owning a precious jewel encrusted with flakes of sediment. The gift of eternal life was something, as a younger man, he knew he had, but didn't think much about and didn't really appreciate the beauty of. Yet he said that it seemed as though each experience of suffering or loss of a loved one or difficulty in life that drew him nearer to his own death peeled off more and more of those flakes until, as an older man, it had become the most precious and beautiful thing he possessed. Wisdom is something like that, a precious invaluable treasure which is often hidden and needs the flakes of earthly sediment peeled away so we can realize its true value and beauty. That's what Solomon is trying to do in Chapter 8 and the first facet of the precious gem that begins to show is:

I. The Two-fold Nature Of Wisdom - 8:22-31 Read as Wisdom speaks. Notice first of all that:

1. wisdom is the foundational *principle* of the universe It is not just a principle, but *the* principle, the foundational principle of the whole universe. It is out of wisdom that God created and formed everything that is. And since wisdom is actually a part of God's character:

a. it is as eternal as the mind of God (22-23) He is all-wise and always has been. His wisdom predates you and I; it predates Solomon and even Moses and Abraham. It predates the human race and even the physical universe. It has no beginning because God has no beginning; it is as eternal as His wise mind! And so:

b. it is the principle He involved in all of creation (27, 30) The entire universe was created through God's wisdom. It has design and purpose and the evidence of that wisdom is absolutely everywhere, from the earth being wrapped in a breathable atmosphere which replenishes itself through a balance of respiration and photosynthesis to the whole cycle of evaporation and precipitation which allows vegetation to grow. From the obvious design of the wing of a butterfly to the neck of the giraffe which allows it to feed on the treetops to the intricacies of the human body. The hymn says: *All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.* All come from the infinite eternal wisdom of God and that wisdom:

c. it is the source of God's joy and it is focused on the human race (30b-31) The NASB and KJV say, "*I was daily His delight*". Genesis says God saw all that He had made and it was very good. He was delighted with His creation, delighted with the wisdom and intricacy with which He had made it but it all had a focus and a point. It was created as a habitation for the human race. God didn't love the rocks and the trees and the mountains. He decided to create and love people and made all of this in His wisdom to be an environment for us to live in! All that wisdom expressed in the vastness of creation for whom? For us!

But now think about those verses again. If I read them without telling you who was speaking, who would you say was talking? You see, wisdom is more than the foundational principle of the universe:

2. wisdom is concentrated in the foundational *Person* of the universe Listen to what the New Testament says:

a. Jesus is the *logos*, the eternal expression or word of God - Jn. 1:1-2 He was with the Father from all eternity and was one with the Father. He was the One through Whom the Father expressed His mind, will and desires. He is the One born at Bethlehem but whose goings forth, Micah said, have been from of old, from everlasting. And then we read that:

b. He was the one involved in all of creation - Jn. 1:3, And turn to Col. 1:15-17. He is the Divine Craftsman who created it all from the angels to the aardvarks. From the mountains to the prairies to the oceans white with foam, He was the Master Craftsman at the Father's side setting the heavens and marking out the horizon and the foundations of the earth. It was all made by Him and for Him. He was the Father's delight for whom it all was made and He holds it all together right now so that it doesn't fall apart. His personal power is what holds all of creation together. So, you begin to realize that when Wisdom is talking in Chapter 8 it is more than a principle; it is Jesus talking and if you're hesitant, then look at the next chapter:

c. He is the possessor and the storehouse of all wisdom - Col. 2:2-3 He is Wisdom; He is Knowledge; He is Understanding; He is God's mystery, God's secret and hidden counsel revealed and made flesh! All wisdom there is resides in Him. Wisdom is not simply a principle which Solomon speaks of as though it were a person; wisdom really IS a Person, our Lord Jesus! Now then, we can go back to Proverbs 8 and listen to Solomon as he pulls away the flakes of sediment to reveal the beauty of:

II. The Virtues Of Wisdom...And Therefore Of Jesus! - Ch. 8

WISDOM is: _____ JESUS is: _____

1. available to all (1-5, 17) He is a *SEEKING* Savior

It's not just for the select few. It's not just for the fine minds, for those of great education and learning. Because it comes from knowing God, it is available to all because a relationship with Him, the Source of all wisdom, is available to all. But it says more than that. People often talk about seeking wisdom and indeed Chapter 2 told us to do just that, but Solomon says wisdom calls out to us; wisdom is constantly seeking us, on the heights, the paths, the gates, the entrances, everywhere we go. How can that be? Because Jesus is a Seeking Savior! He doesn't wait for us to stumble onto Him; He seeks us out; He offers Himself to us. That's what Bethlehem is all about, Him seeking us! That's why He sent His church into all the world; it is Him seeking us! I didn't find Him; He found me! Ron Hamilton wrote a little chorus: *Before I loved Him, He loved me. Before I found Him, He found me. Before I sought Him, He sought me. Yes, Jesus cares for me.* He's not only available; He wants me to come to Him, to know Him, to have His wisdom! Secondly, we read that the wisdom of God is:

2. true and just (6-9) He is a *TRUSTWORTHY* Savior

The wisdom, the words, the thoughts of God are always good and true and just, never evil, never deceitful, never unrighteous. You can trust His righteous character always. And so, John declared in *John 1:14, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* When someone on earth tells us something or we read or learn it, there is always the nagging doubt, "What if they're wrong? What if they don't know the truth?" Or worse, "What if they're deliberately not telling me the truth and I'm being deceived?" But Jesus declared, *...I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.* - *John 18:37* and Pilate scornfully said, "What is truth?" and walked away. But the fact is that what Jesus says and does is right and true, no matter how the rest of the world looks at it or how much they scorn it. You can place yourself in His hands without fear; He is a Trustworthy Savior. *Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him; How I've proved Him o'er and o'er. Jesus, Jesus, Precious Jesus; O for grace to trust Him more!* Isn't it beautiful to have Someone in whom you can place your trust absolutely, totally without fear! And then Solomon says that Wisdom is:

3. infinitely valuable (10-11, 18-21) He is a *PRECIOUS* Savior

Knowing God's wisdom, what He thinks and knows is more important, more valuable than silver or gold or any precious gem you could acquire. None of those things will take you to heaven. None of those things will buy you true happiness and fulfillment and give meaning to your life. Oh, maybe for a little while, but it will all fade. On the other hand, to know Him IS life eternal and brings joy unspeakable and full of glory that does not depend on your circumstances, not only in this life, but for all eternity to come! *He is precious, more precious than gold!* Nothing the world can offer compares to Him. Even if you could own the whole thing, what would it profit you to gain the whole world and lose your own soul? To know Him is life itself! Then wisdom is:

4. absolutely pure (12-13) He is a *RIGHTEOUS* Savior

James wrote: *...the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.* The Greek root is from the word *holy*, absolutely pure and perfect without any taint of sin or evil. God's way of living life is pure and without spot or blemish. Nothing God ever directs you to do will have the faintest hint of sin. And John added, *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he [Jesus] is pure. ...But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.* - *1 John 3:3-5.* He is absolutely righteous and pure and that righteousness has been imputed to us. WE are made the righteousness of God in Him. Our heart, our nature, our spirit, is made righteous exactly like His. Hallelujah! In a world where unrighteousness exists on every hand, where nothing we can touch, no relationship we can have, is completely right and pure but all is tainted by sin, we have a Righteous Savior. And He is:

5. in control of all (14-16) He is a *REIGNING* Savior

Boy it sure doesn't look that way, does it? This world looks out of control. It's the Saddam Husseins and the Yassar Arafats seem to be vast mistakes in the scheme of things, but the powers that be are still ordained by God's wisdom and serving His purpose. Every Christmas we sing: *He rules the world in truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love.* He is a Reigning Savior. The nations this moment are displaying the glories of His righteousness and the wonders of His love, whether we can see it or not. His wisdom is not impotent, able to know but not able to do! He is upholding all things by His powerful Word and making all things work together for good to those who love Him! Just think, He's constantly at work in my life in His infinite wisdom arranging all things for my good and His glory! And finally, wisdom is:

6. life itself (32-36) He is a *LIFE-GIVING* Savior

To get wisdom is to get a relationship with God which is to get life. To reject it is to choose death. Our Jesus is a life-giving Savior. He said: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* - *John 14:6.* Colossians says Christ IS our life. It is His very Spirit living inside us and joined to ours that gives us life. He who has the Son HAS life and God wants us to KNOW it!

But oh, how little we value Him sometimes! *A gem dealer was strolling the aisles at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show when he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as possible, asked*

the vendor, "You want \$15 for this?" The seller, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, lowered the price to \$10. The stone has since been certified as a 1,905-carat natural star sapphire, about 800 carats larger than the largest stone of its kind. It was appraised at \$2.28 million. It took a lover of stones to recognize the sapphire's worth. The Wisdom of God and Jesus are one and the same. You can't have the one without the other; you can't have IT without Him. But it's like His true beauty and worth is all covered up with the sediment of earth and we value Him so little when He is everything! I hope this morning we have done just a little to remove some of the flakes of sediment so that He shines to you as what He truly is!

Now as we come to chapter 9, we find:

III. Two Invitations - Ch. 9 The first is:

1. the sincere invitation of Wisdom (1-6, 10-12) Wisdom says her:

a. its banquet has been fully prepared and you're invited to feast (1-5) How many times did Jesus Himself use the same analogy in His parables? God has a banquet fully prepared for you to feast on and you're invited. It's a banquet of wisdom and how do you get it?

b. the way is through a personal relationship with Jesus (10) You have to know Him; you have to be ready to confess your sin and turn to Jesus and invite Him into your life. And on that banquet table:

c. it offers life, abundant and eternal (6, 11-12) A life that goes on forever in fellowship with God but which is full and abundant right here and now. Come to Him and it's yours. But there's another invitation out there:

2. the fraudulent invitation of Folly (13-18) And:

a. it is a continual enticement to the righteous (13-16) The fool is the one who rejects living God's way, who rejects God Himself. But folly is always out there, every day wherever you go, inviting you to sin, to choose wrong, to ignore God's wisdom. But:

b. its appeal is based on false promises (17) No it isn't! Stolen water is bitter and food eaten in secret brings guilt. Sin will always promise what it can never deliver but:

c. its path can only lead to death (18) The wages of sin always has been and always will be death, by degrees, little by little, but always death. And if you want, you can choose it, simply by ignoring God's invitation which has always been to life.

In fact, Isaiah issued God's invitation long ago: **Is.55:1-3, 6-7**, "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David., Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 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.*"

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About You (I): Understanding Your Heart

If wisdom is the way to face the pressures of life, as we've studied already in Proverbs, and if wisdom is learning to think, act, choose, know and reason like God, then perhaps the best place to start is by looking in the mirror. There is a famous inscription on the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi, Greece which dates from the 6th century B.C. that says, *Know thyself*. It's good advice. In order to face life the right way, each of us must understand and know ourselves the way God does. We must know the complete truth about ourselves. The Scripture has a term which it uses repeatedly to talk about a person's true self; it speaks about the heart.

I. Your Heart: is a generic term used to mean **Who You Are Inside**. It's not talking about the physical organ that pumps blood but indicates the real you, the true you, the personality that lives inside the physical body. **(27:19)** As a smooth pool of water or a mirror reflects what you are on the outside, your heart reflects what you are on the inside, what you really and truly are.

1. the generic term heart includes: all of what we would call in more specific terms our soul and spirit together. It includes:

a. your spirit which is your true nature, good or evil (11:20) The spirit is that part of you at the very core where Christ either does or doesn't live. It is that core of your being that determines your nature. It is either good, if you've been born again and have a new one, or it's evil, if you haven't and still have the old dead one! But the term *heart* also includes all the elements of personality. It includes:

b. your mind which is your thoughts and motives - Heb. 4:12 tells us that the word of God is so sharp and penetrating that it can cut right to the thoughts and intents of the heart. Your heart includes all the things you're thinking. It includes your intentions, your motives, your reasonings. It's about why you do what you do and what's behind that blank look that you're wearing right now. And, of course, it includes:

c. your emotions which are your inner feelings, anger, fear, joy, sadness and all the rest. Your heart is the place inside where you react to your surroundings and circumstances, where you get terrified or exhilarated or enraged or overwhelmed. And it includes:

d. your will which is your choices and plans (16:1, 9) Plans are a heart thing. The heart is where you decide, where you choose, where you plan and reason out your course of action.

Your heart is all these things, the real and true you, who you are on the inside. And here's what makes this such an important subject:

2. no one can know it but you unless you reveal it to them (14:10) The heart is intensely and uniquely personal. No one can see it; it's inside. No one can feel all you are feeling, know all you're thinking. It's invisible, protected. Nobody can get at it. Nobody can tell what your heart is like unless you open it up and reveal it to them, tell and show it to them. They can't know with certainty what you're thinking and feeling and planning. All they have to go by is what they see and hear on the outside and the truth is that often:

a. your outward appearance may not reflect your heart (14:13) You can be laughing on the outside and crying on the inside. And you know it. You know all those times you did things but your heart didn't want to, when you smiled and said, "That's OK," but it wasn't and your heart was breaking inside. Many, many times in life we manage to conceal our hearts and put on an outside appearance which is an act, which shows the public what we want them to see. And sometimes we even fool ourselves into thinking that the outward shell of our behavior and actions IS who we really are, but it's not:

b. your heart is the real you, not your outward appearance (23:7) The NIV marginal reading says, *for as he thinks within himself, so he is*. This man may be saying to you, "Eat and drink," but his heart is stingy and begrudging. It is saying one thing but feeling something different. He is not what his mouth says; he is what his heart says. What your spirit is and your thoughts are and your feelings and intents are, these are the real you! Your heart is who you are; it doesn't matter what the outside says or does. That may be a complete facade. Now here's something else we'd all better remember:

3. your heart is impacted by the presence and power of sin (20:9) You come into the world with a spiritual power or force called sin in all of you. It's in your spirit, your mind, your emotions, your will, and your body. Of course, Solomon didn't know about the new birth, but when you get saved, your spirit is made brand new, holy and pure. But sin still lives in all the rest. For sure, its effects are visible in your body, but it still pokes its ugly head into your thoughts and feelings and choices. So, you can and do think wrong thoughts, feel wrong feelings, and choose wrong ways of reaction and behavior. Yes, you can say that Jesus came into your heart and washed it white as snow, but that is really referring specifically to your spirit where you are a "new man". The rest of what falls under the term *heart* is only under His control as you submit it to Him on a daily basis. That's why the Psalmist could say, *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* - Psalm 66:18. You can cherish sin in your heart, allow it to rule in your thoughts and feelings and choices and define what you are really like, even if you're a believer. *The story is told of an old preacher named Thomas K. Beecher, who could not bear deceit in any form. Finding that a clock in his church was always either too fast or too slow, he hung a placard on the wall above it which read: "Don't blame my hands, the trouble lies deeper."* When our hands are out of whack, the trouble lies deeper. The state of the heart is what determines how we live. Now that brings us to talk about:

II. The States Of Your Heart Though your spirit never changes once the Holy Spirit has regenerated it, the rest of what's inside you can and does change states of being, sometimes in a positive way, sometimes in a negative one. For instance:

1. your heart may be anxious (12:25) Here's a person who has become worried down deep. Fear has gripped his thoughts. He becomes convinced that something bad is going to happen to him and is unable to think that God is in control of his situation. It's really unbelief but he feels afraid and unsure of what's going to happen to him. The more he dwells on it, the heavier the burden gets and it leads to depression. Does your heart get out of whack like that? Listen to Paul's prescription for an anxious heart: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* - Phil 4:6-7. Pray! Pray with thanksgiving; thank Him for it. Make your request and place the situation in His hands. And keep it up until your heart knows that He is in control and feels His love for you and that becomes bigger and more real than the threat of your circumstances! Peace, the confidence that God has, can rule your heart and keep out that dreaded anxiety and worry and fear! Then:

2. your heart may be longing (13:12) Here's a heart that has hung itself on one desire, one hope that becomes a deep longing. The mind comes to think that one thing is key and important and the emotions fall right in line. "If only I could be married..." "If only I could have a child..." A heart that becomes fixed with longing on one thing until it becomes a driving, dominating factor is set up for a fall. When that hope is deferred, when it doesn't happen, the heart becomes sick. We think wrong thoughts, conclude God doesn't love us, and choose foolish courses of action. Our heart should have longings. We should long for His appearing, for His presence, for His glory to be declared among all nations. He is the object of our longing heart and when our heart starts to long for other things, it becomes unhealthy. On the other hand:

3. your heart may be contented (14:30) Compare the contrasting halves of the verse. Peace here means contentment. A healthy heart is a contented heart, one that as far as circumstances go has learned Paul's secret, *...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength - Phil 4:11-13.* I am contented with my situation because in Him I have enough and am enough. A heart that has learned that secret is a healthy one. And let's leave room for the fact that:

4. your heart may be happy (15:13, 15; 17:22) A heart full of joy and cheer makes life bearable. In fact, joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit, so if the Spirit is indeed in control of your heart, He will be producing the joy of the Lord in you. You will be learning to rejoice in the Lord always. On the other hand:

5. your heart may be crushed and sad (18:14, 25:20) Your heart can be broken, crushed. It can become heavy with grief. An accident happens, a loved one dies, you are hurt by abuse and your world falls apart. Your feelings can become numb and dull, your thoughts all-consuming. You can lose the will to choose at all, to function or even to live. There may come a time in your life when your heart is like that, so it's important that you understand that Jesus can heal the broken-hearted. It's one of the things He came to do, to take wounded hearts and heal them and make them whole again. *Psalms 34:18* says, *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* The Lord wants to bind up broken hearts and make them whole and He often uses other people with special gifts in the process like pastors and counselors and others. If your heart's broken, don't give up; let's talk and get you help. And finally:

6. your heart may be proud and hard (16:5, 28:14) It may become lifted up against God and resentful and self-centered, wanting to shut God out. It may become unwilling to listen to the pleading of the Holy Spirit to change. Like Pharaoh who hardened his heart to the obvious working of God in front of his face. Like Israel who time and again hardened their hearts and complained against God. It can happen to you and to me, that we stuff up our spiritual ears and refuse to listen to Him. What a dangerous thing to happen and that's why we need to understand some key:

III. Principles In Caring For Your Heart First and foremost remember that:

1. God knows your heart (15:11) What did Samuel say? Man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks where? On the heart. God can see who you really are inside. He can see those thoughts and motives. He can feel those hidden emotions. You can't hide anything from Him; there's no use trying. And what does He do with it? **(17:3, 21:2, 24:12)** He weighs it, tests it, evaluates it. He's not interested in what you look like on the outside, how you appear on the surface; He's concerned with who you are on the inside. That's the part of you He wants to grow and change and mold into His own image. It is on the basis of your heart that God deals with you. And therefore, it is absolutely imperative that:

2. you must know your own heart (20:5) What's really going on in the heart is water so far down the well that you can't see it; it's a deep thing, a mysterious thing, a thing that's hard to know, even for you yourself. It is not very often that we make the effort to look at why we do what we do, that we search and examine our own motives or look at our true feelings. Many times, we're about as dense as *the businessman whose wife was experiencing depression. She moped around, sad and lifeless, with no light in her eyes or spring in her step - no joy. It got so bad that he took her to see a psychiatrist. On the appointed day, they went to the psychiatrist's office, sat down with him and began to talk. Soon the wise doctor realized what the problem was. Without saying a word, he stood and walked over to the woman, signaled her to stand, took her hands, gazed into her eyes, then gathered her into his arms and gave her a big, warm hug. Instantly the woman changed. Her face softened, her eyes lit up, she immediately relaxed and her whole face glowed. The doctor said to the husband, "See, that's all she needs." "Okay", he said, "I'll bring her in two days a week, but I have to play golf on the other afternoons".* We don't look deeply into the hearts of others, much less ourselves. But a wise man makes the effort to throw the bucket down all the way down that well and haul up the deep water. He does it for others; he does his best to look at their hearts and inquire as to what's really going on instead of just judging by outward appearance. But he also does it for himself. He hauls up that bucket and looks at his own heart. He examines his motives, acknowledges his feelings and tests their validity and checks the submission of his will to the Lord. He recognizes his own blindness and cries out with the Psalmist, *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and*

know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. - Psalm 139:23-24. He invites the Lord to reveal to him his own heart and to make those changes He wants; he cooperates with God in his own process of sanctification, instead of hiding and pretending to be something he's not. Then one final warning:

3. you must guard your heart carefully (23:19, 4:23) Your heart is the real you. It's the source of your life; it's what really matters and it is so easy to allow wrong things to creep into it. It's so easy to allow jealousy and bitterness and anger to get into your thought life and lodge there. It's so easy to have a wrong thought about someone else and let it grow and fester there till it becomes a grudge. It's so easy to let a desire for something wrong begin and grow and come from the heart into action. We must guard our hearts, diligently, carefully.

A young boy asked his mother if he could help her wash the windows. She welcomed his offer and told him to begin with the one in the kitchen because it was the dirtiest. He went outside and worked diligently until he thought it was clean. Then with a dry cloth he rubbed until his arms were tired, but the pane of glass still had many smudges. Frustrated, he called his mother and asked her what was wrong. Looking at what he had done, she said with a smile, "Why, you have been spending all your time washing the glass out here. What's wrong is that the dirt is on the inside!" The boy went into the house, and soon his efforts made the window clean and sparkling. You can spend your life polishing the outside, creating an appearance that's acceptable to others. But your Father has already told you that the problem is on the inside. Joel said, "Render your heart, not your garments..." Psalm 139:23-24, Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom About You (II): Understanding Your God

Last week we saw in facing life that it is vitally important that you know yourself, that you know your own heart the way God does. Today I'd like to suggest that it is also vitally important that you understand who God is and who you are in relationship to Him. There is a key word that summarizes a concept found all over the Book of Proverbs and the rest of the Bible which sums up what God is to all of His creation and to us and that word is **Sovereign**. A sovereign is *one who has supreme, permanent authority, rule or power*. It is often equivalent to the term king.

I. God Is Your Sovereign The word *sovereign* or *sovereignty* does not appear one single time in English in the King James version. Yet in the New International Version God is addressed 289 times as "Sovereign LORD" (all caps), 284 of them in the Old Testament. Have you noticed that? How can that be? The KJV in all those places says, "Lord GOD" (small Lord, CAP GOD). The Hebrew says "*Adonai Jehovah*." Jehovah is the sacred Divine personal Name of God which is why it is capitalized. The Hebrew *Adonai* is translated *Lord* and is always and only used of or to God and it is a strengthened form of *adon* which means a master over servants, a household, etc. The 5 New Testament occurrences use the Greek *despotes* [English *despot*, an absolute ruler] which means the master of a slave. God is the absolute Master, so the NIV translated it the Sovereign of all. He is your Sovereign. He has supreme permanent authority, rule and power and Proverbs makes that very clear. First of all, it tells us that as Sovereign:

1. He has a perfect knowledge of all things (15:3) He will not be fooled nor will anything in all His realm escape His notice. His eyes observe, they keep watch everywhere, over everything and everyone. Let's think about that for a moment:

a. He knows everywhere Solomon must have been listening to his father David who knew this well: **Ps. 139: 7-10**. No matter where we are, He is there, China, Africa, Alaska or Glenside. Literally, in every place are the eyes of Jehovah. No place escapes His presence and His knowledge. Not the dark jungles of Colombia where rebel guerillas have held 3 American missionaries captive for 5 long years. Not the 4 mountain villages in Algeria where 412 innocent men, women and children were slaughtered wholesale by Muslim extremists last week. Wherever you can name, His eyes are there and:

b. He knows everything, both the evil and the good. **(5:21)** David again put it so eloquently in **Ps. 139:1-6**. God knows it all, every habit, every secret, every thought, every deed. *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. - Heb. 4:13.* The secrets of men's thoughts, the plans behind closed doors, the dark deeds of the night, the cup of cold water given in secret, His eyes see it all. And:

c. He knows everyone (20:27) God has a lamp so bright that He can see into your very soul, your heart. And not just yours, but everyone's **(21:12)**. Even the wicked. His eyes watch the wicked and the good. No one escapes His penetrating, piercing gaze. What a Sovereign! Nothing in all His Kingdom escapes His knowledge and consequently:

2. He has a perfect control over all things (16:4) Everything, good and bad, triumphs and tragedies, weather and wars, sports and satellites, everything that exists and occurs is part of God's ultimate purpose and plan that He is working out. He is such a powerful sovereign that:

a. nothing is left to chance (16:33) When you flip a coin, which way it falls is not an accident, not sheer chance. *Did you hear about the cowboy who applied for an insurance policy? The agent asked, "Have you ever had any accidents?" After a moment's reflection, the applicant responded, "Nope, but a bronc did kick in two of my ribs last summer, and a couple of years ago a rattlesnake bit me on the ankle." "Wouldn't you call those accidents?" asked the puzzled agent. "Naw," said the cowboy. "They both did it on purpose!"* Even what looks like chance, like sheer accident has purpose in God's overall scheme of things. There literally are no accidents in the lives of God's children from the Divine viewpoint, only things that happen that are not done intentionally by us. His control is so great that:

b. He controls even rulers and nations (21:1, 31) When a world leader makes a decision, passes a decree, good or evil, even that is under His control. When the Russian parliament recently passed that law severely restricting Christian activity by outsiders, it was no accident but will in the end accomplish God's purpose. Saddam Hussein and his continuing defiance is not simply a man defying God and the international community, but a man doing what God has chosen beforehand and fulfilling His purpose in spite of himself. Who wins the battle doesn't depend on how many horses or tanks or planes you have; God picks the winner. You see:

c. there is no opposing His control (21:30) He is Sovereign. You can't oppose Him. Even Satan, his declared arch-enemy, is really ultimately accomplishing His purpose. He thought he was winning against God in the case of Job but really, he was serving God by refining Job, just as God had planned all along. Nobody can oppose His absolute knowledge and power. *Prior to her coronation, Queen Elizabeth sent out to her friends and various Commonwealth dignitaries engraved invitations which read like this: "We greet you well. Whereas we have appointed the second day of June 1953 for the solemnity of our coronation, these are therefore to will and to command, all excuses set apart, that you make your personal attendance upon us, at the time above mentioned, there to do and to perform such services as shall be required of you."* A sovereign does not request attendance; she commands it, "All excuses set apart." When a sovereign expresses his will and issues his command, his subjects respond without hesitation or excuses. And our God is the Sovereign Lord, the One to whose command all the universe answers without fail! Now where does that leave you?

II. Your Position As His Subject If He is your Sovereign, you are His subject, the one over whom this watching is going on and this control is being exercised. What does it mean for your life? First it means:

1. He is carrying out His purpose in your life (19:21) No matter what your plans, your dreams, your choices, it is His purpose that ultimately prevails and gets carried out. **Rom. 8:28** assures us *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God who have been called according to his purpose.* Your life is not meaningless; the things that happen to you are not simply chance events nor are they evidence that the Enemy is winning in your life and having his way over you. Rather it means that:

a. He is arranging your circumstances (16:9) You may plan your way but what actually happens is determined and directed by God according to His master purpose for your life that fits in with His grand overall plan for His world. As you face the pressures of life you can rest assured in this that whatever your circumstances, no matter how high or low, easy or difficult, painful or happy, where you are is a wise choice made by Almighty God who is unfailingly controlling it to bring about good. There was a tract I had years ago called, "This Thing Is From Me" and it spoke in the first person to the reader, "My child, have lost a loved one, is your heart broken? Remember: this thing is from Me..." And it went on to address circumstance after circumstance with the truth: this thing is from Me! Understanding that can bring peace to the heart. Understanding that can bring meaning out of senseless chaos and tragedy. However, here's the catch:

b. you may not understand what He is doing (20:24) In fact, you WILL not understand it. To fathom it, you'd have to have His infinite mind! You're not capable. You'd have to see how all the events of your life fit with all the events of all the people in your family, your church, your community, and the world! You'd have to see how your prayers impact people over all the world and theirs impact the events of your life. Even if God wanted you to understand it completely, He couldn't show it to you. But that's exactly the point. You don't have to know what He's doing; you don't have to figure it out. You know His character, His heart. Right smack in the middle of history He pounded in a cross that screams once and for all, "I love you!" You will never figure out all He's doing, but you know He loves you and so:

2. you must trust His wise control in your life (3:5-6) You want to face the pressures of life; you want to make it through victorious? Don't lean on your own understanding. Don't think you've got it figured out and know all that is going on. God is a God of surprises and miracles. Trust in Him with all your heart. Completely! What does that mean? It means that:

a. your trust in Him must exceed all other influences (29:25) It must be stronger than your fear of appearances, your fear of failure, your fear of what other people might do to you. It must be the basis that moves you to live regardless of what else may be looming on your horizon. Old Peter stepped out of the boat to go to the Lord Jesus and he walked on water. He didn't understand it. He just trusted and walked but then he started to look around at the height and the fury of the waves and the ferocious wind and those things began to tell him he was going to drown. He became more moved by the fear of them than by the sight of Jesus before him and began to sink! He began to doubt Jesus' control over these horrible forces of nature. Yet when he trusted he could walk on the top with Him! My friend you can get bogged down by fear and flounder and struggle in the circumstances of your life, believing that they control you. And you can become full of worry and anxiety and spend your life trying to fix your problems and rescue yourself or you can walk on the top with Him! You can walk through the storm with your eyes fixed on Jesus, with absolute confidence in His control and then, no matter what happens to you or which wave hits you, nothing will be able to shake your peace! You must trust in the Lord with all your heart! And then:

b. you must place all you do in His hands (16:3) Succeed in what? Verse 4, in accomplishing His purpose. You can never tell how what you do will turn out. You show love to someone and it may or may not have the desired effect. You preach and people may or may not listen or change. You pray and circumstances may get better or worse. But control of outcomes belongs to Him. Your place is to be obedient to your Sovereign and just commit all you do to Him, put it in His hands, trust Him to do what He wants with it. **Ps. 138:8** says, *The LORD will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever...* both in me and through me! It's all in His hands, He's sovereign and I know He loves me forever!

Decision Magazine printed a story about a man named Ian Coffey who was traveling in Asia with his 10 year old son Chris, when mechanical problems grounded their flight for eight hours. After spending a long, hot, frustrating day in a third world airport, they finally boarded the plane and took off. Mr. Coffey was not only exhausted, he was worried. Because of the delay, they would not arrive in Calcutta until well after midnight. That meant that their contact phone number would be useless because the office would be closed. They would have no place to stay. On top of it all, Chris had been sick for several days and they needed to get him some medicine. As his mind was racing with all the problems and anxieties, Chris said, "Here, Dad, read this." He had been rummaging through his bag and pulled out a battered Gideon New Testament. As he handed it to his father, he pointed to the section that said, "Where to Find Help -- When Anxious or Worried." Mr. Coffey reread the familiar words of Jesus in Mat. 6:31-33, So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Chris leaned over and said, "It's great, Dad. Jesus said He's taken care of everything." Then he pulled the blanket around his shoulders and went to sleep. Mr. Coffey realized that he hadn't been merely assessing options; he had been giving in to fear and anger, feeling that because he was serving God, he had a right to avoid inconveniences like this. But Chris, in childlike faith, had simply assumed that his heavenly Father had things under control, even when his earthly dad was consumed with worry. [Decision. May 1994. Page 32.] My friend, Jesus says He's taken care of everything; He's in control. Trust Him!

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About You (III): Understanding Your Security

One of the most basic core needs that any human being has is the need for security. Security is the confidence of knowing that you are safe. And it makes all the difference in the world. *Chuck Swindoll mentions a Peanuts cartoon strip in which Lucy and Linus are staring out the window, watching it rain. The conversation goes like this: Lucy: "Boy! Look at it pour. What if it floods the whole world?" Linus: "It won't. In Genesis 9 God promised Noah that would never happen again. The sign of that promise is the rainbow." Lucy, turning back to the window with a big smile: "You've taken a great load off my mind." Linus: "Sound theology has a way of doing that."* As you stare out the window of your life at the pressures and circumstances that crash against the glass, it can be almost overwhelming sometimes. If there is one message that life sends you loud and clear it is that there is no security. People die when you least expect it or accidents happen. The job you expected to be there until you retire vanishes like smoke as technology changes. People you were counting on let you down. Ugly forces like cancer or divorce or crime or war enter your life. Sometimes it rains on your life pretty hard and long. Unless you have the security that comes from sound theology, understanding the promises of God for you, when these forces and pressures invade your world, your mind will be loaded down with one centralized thought: survival. You will live in fear. Now let's examine more closely:

I. Our Need For Security - To be secure we need: Four things and they can be expressed graphically in concepts that are found all through the Psalms and Proverbs and many other places in the Bible. First of all, to be secure we need:

1. a refuge - a safe place to retreat from danger When you are in trouble, what's the first thing you look for, a place to run to all, be safe, to get away from danger. If you sense danger outside, you run inside the house and lock the door. It's a refuge, a safe haven. One of the most horrible feelings you can have is to be trapped, to look around and have no place to go, no way to escape. When I was a kid there was talk about bomb shelters, fall-out shelters. Any-

body remember that? There was fear of war and a building with enough concrete would be a place to run and find safety. You were to know where you would go. Or they had this thing called Block Parent Homes, remember those? So, if you were a little kid and a bully tried to hurt you or a strange man tried to pick you up you could see the sign in the window of a house and run there to be safe. The Hebrew word for *refuge* means a shelter but is also often translated as confidence or trust. The lexicon says, *It expresses that sense of well-being and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence.* A safe place, something or someone in which you have confidence and trust for your own well-being. But a refuge must be more than merely a sign in a window. It is only safe if it is also:

2. a fortress - a strong place to defend against danger (21:22) The ancients often built walled cities as strongholds. A certain section would be enclosed with a high, thick wall. Jericho was like that. Not everybody lived inside the wall, but when the enemy approached, everybody would run inside the wall and the gates would be shut so that the strength of the walls would keep out the danger. We would also call this a fortress. That comes from the concept of being strong (*to fortify*). In American times the settlers moving west would establish a fort (short for fortress), an area with strong walls which could defend against the enemy and all the settlers could run there for safety. We all need to know that we have a force strong enough to defend us against the things we fear, strong enough to stop the onslaught of whatever is coming against us. But even a refuge that is a fortress is not secure unless it also has:

3. a fountain - so that it becomes a provisioned place to abide during danger A fountain in ancient times was not the sort of water spray we see at the mall or drink out of in the hall. It meant a natural spring or a dug well that had tapped into a subterranean stream of water so that there was an inexhaustible source of supply. The favorite way to conquer a fort is to surround it and wait until they run out of water! There must be a fount, a source of continual provision, enough to see you through the danger. There is no security unless we feel that our needs are provided for in such a way that we can get through whatever we're facing. And finally, it would be nice if that refuge, fortress and fountain included:

4. a tower - a high place to lift beyond the reach of danger Into the city wall, and perhaps sometimes even in a city which had no wall, the ancients would build a tower, an elevated stone or earthen structure into which they could enter and be high above the enemy to see what was going on and to rain down arrows on the enemy, while staying totally out of his reach. Old Abimelech learned his lesson the hard way in the book of Judges. He attacked the city of Thebez and they had a strong tower which everybody got into, but he got too close to it and a woman dropped a millstone down on his head and cracked his skull. He couldn't fight the people in the tower; they were beyond his reach. We need a place that will lift us beyond the reach of danger so that we can live without fear, knowing that we're above it, beyond it. That's the kind of security that we need. And the fact is that we have it!

II. The Fact Of Our Security - God Himself is our security - Ps. 46:1, God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Here comes that sound theology Linus was talking about. Our security is not in a something but a Someone! It is not to be found in a rock wall or a stone tower; neither is it to be found in having a great deal of money or in carrying a weapon on our hip at all times like the .45 Colt carried in the old west or like the dagger they carry in many Muslim cultures today. Rather our security is in God Almighty. The book of Proverbs tells us that:

1. God is our refuge (30:5) He is *the guarantee of our eternal safety*. Even the best refuge, the best shelter on earth can be broken into sooner or later. But our relationship with God through Jesus Christ guarantees that we will be safe forever and ever. And it can never be broken. Is this a guarantee that nothing bad will ever happen to us? No! Just look in the book! God's people do suffer, are hurt and even killed. But our refuge is even better than that. Our guarantee is that no matter what happens to us, because we are in Him, we are still safe. Look at 14:32:

He is a refuge even in death (14:32) Jesus said, "Don't be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do!" That's all; that's it! But Jesus has guaranteed us that if we live, we live with Him and if we die, we die with Him so whether we live or die, we belong to Him. We are safe in Him; our real life can't be touched by anything or anybody. Paul said, *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 our Lord.* - **Rom 8:38-39.** That's safety; that's a refuge! In the days of the Communist Revolution in China a pastor was caught by the officials. They tortured and beat him, trying to make him denounce his faith. But he would not do it so finally they became so angry that they brought a coffin and made him lie in it. They told him, "All right, now you must make a final decision! Either deny Jesus Christ or we will bury you!" His only reply was, "I will never deny my Lord!" They nailed the coffin shut and left it sitting for a time, listening for a voice from inside. There was none. So they screamed and shouted at him and pounded on the coffin. But there was only the sound of quiet peaceful breathing. They buried him alive. [The Coming Influence of China, p. 29] How could he do that? How could he lie so peacefully and face death so calmly? He had a refuge! A place of safety that went beyond beatings and imprisonment and even death itself. He was connected to Jesus Christ who is the guarantee of our eternal safety and he knew it! Then think about this:

2. God is our fortress (14:26) He is our walled city, our fortification that stands between us and the pressures of life. He is **the confidence in which we place our trust**. People have all kinds of fortresses in life. They are confident that certain things they have will protect them. It may be that they've got a good job and have accumulated a lot of money in the bank. And they feel confident they can survive anything that comes. Or they may be hanging their hope on a person who is always there for them to rescue them, to defend them in whatever situation they face. It may be that they are simply trusting in their own ability, their own health and strength and intelligence and ambition to succeed and feel that they are enough to face anything in life. But Solomon's warning is very clear: **Only a fool trusts in himself (28:26)**. No matter what you trust in outside of God, the Bible says you're a fool. David exclaimed, *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* - **Ps. 20:7**. He is stronger than any force in the universe. What is an army to Him? What is a disease to Him? What is an enemy to Him? God fears nothing; He is Almighty. And we're in Him, so Paul says, *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* - **Rom. 8:31**. He's our fortress, the One in whom we have confidence that He stands between us and anything that comes against us! Then think about this:

3. God is our fountain (14:27) He is **the source that meets all our needs** and never ever runs dry. That is true in every area. Solomon tells us that:

a. He more than cares for our physical needs (10:3) At first glance this would seem to be not true. There are righteous people who do go hungry in the world. Even Jesus was hungry at one point. Paul said he knew hunger. Yes, He meets our physical needs. He's met mine for years. **Phil. 4:19** is in the Book. He told us to pray for our daily bread. But there's a word missing here in English. The Hebrew says (YLT) *Jehovah causeth not the soul of the righteous to hunger, And the desire of the wicked He thrusteth away*. He supplies so much more than just our physical needs. He satisfies our soul, our desires, our needs, yea all I need in Him I find, the hymnwriter said. He is a well of grace that never runs dry to which we can keep coming back and from which we can draw and draw for courage and strength and comfort and love. In fact, look with me at **2 Pet. 1:3**, *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness*. All we need! An inexhaustible spring! He satisfies all the needs of our soul, not just our physical needs but our whole person and the way He does is that:

b. He answers when we call to Him (15:29) His ear is always open and bent down in our direction. He hears when we call and has the answer before we ask. He is our fountain! And:

4. God is our tower (18:10) He is not only able to make you feel safe and strong enough to protect you and sufficient to supply you, but He is **the One in whom you can live above trouble**. In other words, even as you pass through the struggles and the turmoils of this life, **You can rest content and untouched (19:23)**. You can live on a higher plane than the one where all those dangerous things are. You can live with certainty and calmness, knowing that all those things really can't reach, can't touch you. Look with me at **Col. 3:1-4**. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. You are in the heavenlies with Him. The things that are real and true and eternal for you are above, not below and if you will just do what the text says, if you will stop standing in the tower and looking down at the enemy and worrying about whether they can reach you and simply realize that you're in the tower. Your life is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Nothing can touch you without His permission and only to serve His purpose. And you can live on that high plane, safe and secure above, resting content and at peace no matter how high the billows are swirling around you! And then do remember this fact from last week:

5. God is our sovereign (16:4) God is in control. He's in charge. And that means that He's **the one in control of the trouble**. He is in absolute charge of those forces that are opposing you. That is true of **even our enemies (16:7)**. He can make them be at peace with you if He wants. He's in charge. So not only is there security on our side of the wall but there's His sovereignty on the other side of the wall. We can't lose! His will WILL be done!

That's the kind of security we have in Him. It is absolute and complete. But it is one thing to have it; all believers do. It is quite another to know you have it, so let's close by talking about:

III. The Realization Of Our Security (3:23-26) Isn't that what you want, to sleep sweetly and peacefully in the midst of the storm like Jesus did on the boat, to walk unafraid of the giants around like David walking out to face Goliath, to rest in the confidence that the Lord is your security? How do I experience what I have? **To experience it we must:**

1. run to the Lord (18:10) When trouble comes everybody runs somewhere. They immediately go to whatever it is they count on, their money, their parents, their religion or whatever. You need to run to the right place, to Him. Learn the habit of instantly going to Him in prayer, of coming to Him and laying out the whole situation. If we're honest, that's often the last thing we think of, but it needs to be the first. Run to Him. Flee to the Lord. *"O safe to the Rock that is higher than I, my soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly...Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in Thee."* Go to the Lord; otherwise, you'll never know what you have. And then:

2. trust in the Lord (29:25) Make a conscious choice. Affirm what you say that you believe. I will trust God; God is the one who is controlling this and who in whom I am safe. The promises of God are true. I trust Him. I remember some

people I knew used to have a little sign that said, "God is bigger than any problem I have." He is! Trust Him! Cast yourself upon Him. Do like Hezekiah did when the huge enemy army came upon Jerusalem. "Lord, we know not what to do, but our eyes are upon You!" *My hope is in you, Lord, my strength is in you, Lord, my life is in You, Lord, in You, it's in You!* Cast it upon Him. Take a stand that says, "I will trust You" and then stay there:

3. abide in the Lord (19:23) When you are fearing the Lord, that is, trusting the Lord, continuing to stay there moment by moment in that trust, then you live in confidence and peace. Jesus said, "Abide in Me"... Stay there. And every time you feel your confidence slipping away, run back into His presence and make that choice to trust Him all over again and keep doing it and doing it until you learn to abide, to stay, to rest in the Lord, no matter what.

Chuck Swindoll tells this illustration: *At the time it was completed in 1937, the Golden Gate Bridge was the longest suspension bridge in the world. During the first phase of the \$77 million project, 23 men fell to their deaths in the waters of the bay. Very few safety devices were used. Before they began the second section, it was decided that something had to be done. Stout manila cords were fashioned into the largest net ever made (the cost was \$100,000), and it was stretched out below where the crews were working. Was it worth it? Ask the 10 men who fell into it without being injured! Not only did it save those 10 lives, the work was completed in three-fourths the time because the workmen were relieved of the fear of falling. "God's great net of security," observes Chuck Swindoll, "spans this globe. No matter where His children live, He has stretched out beneath them His everlasting arms. As a result, every one of us can live and work freely and fearlessly, knowing that we are protected, safe, secure, sealed, and kept by Him."* [Eternal Security: The Assurance of Our Salvation by Charles Swindoll. Zondervan, 1995.] That's the way God intends His children to live. We need to understand, to know it. But most of all we need to live it in our daily experience.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom About You (IV): Understanding Your Pride

What I'd like to share with you today is kind of the culmination of this one portion of our series of studies. To live successfully and godly, we learned from Solomon that you must look inward and understand yourself, your own heart, the real you. Then we looked upward for two weeks to examine the fact that you must understand God's control over everything and the security you have in Him. Now I'd like to turn our gaze inward once again and talk about mankind's deepest heart problem, his own fixation with himself which we call:

I. The Sin Of Pride (21:4) This is a very difficult verse to translate. The root word which the NIV translates *lamp* could be one of two words, one of which means a *lamp* and the other of which means a *plowed furrow* in the ground (as the KJV translates). Let me try to take it apart for you, but first let me ask, who are the wicked? People without the Lord, nice or not. The lamp by which the unsaved person sees everything is self. The way by which everything in life is measured or chosen is by whether it is good or bad for me, for my interests, desires and well-being. I am at the center of my universe. And so, the furrow that I plow outside of the Lord, the direction that I choose, is a self-centered direction. And that process of putting self at the center of things and choosing by it is sin and the word for sin here means to miss the mark, to move away from what God has intended. In an English word, it is pride. What is pride? The composite dictionary definition is that pride is *acting out of an excessively high opinion of one's own abilities/worth*. When you put self at the center of your world, your thinking, your choosing, the way you live, that's exactly what you are doing, acting out of an excessively high opinion of your worth and abilities. And you are acting exactly the way a person without God has no choice but to act! There are several Hebrew words used in Proverbs that are translated pride and when you take the sense of them together, you find that pride seems to have three elements:

1. an element of elevation: presuming for yourself a position or right God has reserved to Himself or others It means to be lifted up in your own eyes above others. Let's just take **Rom. 14:3-4** as an example. Here's one believer that does something another believer doesn't think is good and so he "looks down on" the other guy, that is, he elevates himself to the position of judge to determine what's right for that other person. And please note that we're not talking about moral issues that God's Word clearly speaks of. We're talking about opinions and interpretations of what is the best way to handle a circumstance. So, we elevate ourselves in our own eyes and criticize our brother who disagrees. But verse 4 gets to the crux, "Who are you!..." When we become critical and judgmental of others, we are taking a position God has reserved for Himself! They are His servants and so are we. It is not our place to evaluate others' actions and motives. And so, to assume His place is pride! To see yourself as better or more deserving or above others is essentially to play God, which is the essence of pride. Then it has:

2. an element of rebellion: refusing to put yourself in the place God has assigned to you Let's take Saul for example. On one occasion God sent him out with a specific set of instructions to completely annihilate the Amalekites but he chose not to do it 100%, so Samuel confronted him. **1 Sam. 15:17, 19, 22-23**. Now note the contrast between verse 17, "being little in your own eyes" and verse 23. When you get elevated in your own eyes it becomes the sin of rebellion, that is, of choosing to direct your own life instead of obeying God and yielding to His control. When I choose my own way against His, when I do what I want instead of what He wants, whether it is simply eating the fruit of a forbid-

den tree or as serious killing your brother, it is all the same thing; it is rising up against God, refusing to stay in your place and trying to take His, asserting that your will is better than his. And thirdly pride always has:

3. an element of intention: choosing deliberately It is not a mistake, something done without knowing. Look at: **Ps. 19:12-13** Notice the distinction here. There are hidden faults, things I don't recognize the wrongness of or things I don't realize I'm doing. Those need forgiven. They are offenses I've given without realizing it. But it is the willful (presumptuous, prideful) sins, the ones I deliberately choose to do, that I need to be kept or prevented from. Those are the ones where I know that I'm choosing my own way, that I'm rebelling against God's authority and acting higher than Him and others, but I do it anyway.

Now this pride thing, this self-trip is part of our flesh and even as believers, we all yield to it from time to time. But let's look at what happens when we do:

II. The Effects Of Pride First of all, Solomon warns us that:

1. it brings disgrace (11:2) Disgrace, dishonor, shame. When you're a notch too big, God will see to it that someone cuts you down to size sooner or later and you'll look like the fool you've actually been. *Pastor Clark Cothorn writes: "For many years playing my trombone was not just a hobby--I was a serious musician, and perfectionism drove me to excel. One December, while practicing with my college wind ensemble, I became distracted by an incorrect rhythm that was repeated not once, but several times, in the woodwind section. It was the band director's job to point out mistakes so that they could be corrected, but he didn't stop the ensemble right away to correct the problem. I thought that he ought to intervene immediately. He had other plans. My distraction turned into irritability as I wondered when he would call attention to the wrong rhythms being played by others in the band. Irritation escalated to obsession. My pulse increased in tempo, and my foot started tapping out the downbeats in an effort to get the erring woodwinds back on track. I became so concerned with the performance of the other band members that I began playing my own part by memory instead of paying attention to my music. My eyes drifted off the director, and away from my own music stand, to the music of other band members. I concentrated so hard on other people's mistakes that I missed an entrance, and promptly blared several mistakes of my own. That memorable 'music lesson' became a lesson in my life. When I become more concerned about someone else's mistakes or sins, I take my eyes off the Director, Jesus Christ, and it becomes easy for me to fall into sin, too." [Decision, Jan 1996. Page 17.]* The higher I get in my own eyes, the more obvious it becomes to everybody else and the harder the fall will be when it comes and the more humiliation, shame and disgrace I'm going to face.

2. it brings disputes (13:10) Pride is the breeding ground for quarrels. Elevating yourself, seeking your own way and being convinced that you're right always leads to conflicts. Jesus' own disciples got to talking among themselves about which one of them was the greatest and what happened? They argued among themselves and Jesus had to rebuke them! When pride enters the church body, what happens? Everybody wants their own way, demands that their own point of view be followed and there are quarrels, disputes, divisions. When pride enters a family what happens? There are fights and name-calling and fits and walking off and ultimately divisions. Pride breaks any relationship it enters because no two people can ever get along while seeing themselves above each other.

3. it brings destruction (16:18) Pride is a destroyer. It can tear apart your life, your home, your marriage, your family, your job or your church. It brought incredible destruction in the lives of men in Scripture: Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, even men of God: Adam like Samson, Saul, David, and Solomon himself. Even Job had a measure of it and Moses had a moment of it which kept him from the promised land. Pride in the heart leads to actions of sin and God can only break it through a fall, through suffering which brings us to the end of ourselves and makes us look up and put Him in His proper place again. Today is "Sanctity of Human Life Sunday". Twenty five years ago this month the Supreme Court of the United States lifted themselves to the place of God in the infamous Roe vs. Wade decision and said that a person is not a human being until after they are born and that the woman and a doctor have the right to take away that life. The result of that has been an incredible destruction. 35 million tiny lives have been legally snuffed out (3 times the population of the State of PA); it happens every 22 seconds. Our teen pregnancy rate has doubled. But to me perhaps the most devastating effect is the horrible emotional and physical damage that is being perpetrated on the women and young girls of this country who have been fed a lie by proud people. 100,000 women every year miscarry a child they do want because of physical damage from a previous abortion! Norma McCorvey was pregnant in 1969 with her third child and she didn't want it in the worst way. She sought an illegal abortion but couldn't get one. Two young law students befriended her. They wanted to challenge the existing law and needed a case. They got drunk together. They filled her head with "it's your right". They promised to help. She signed an affidavit and became "Jane Roe". But they didn't help. She did have her baby after all. And here's her own testimony: *"I didn't have a clue. I was ignorant. I was dumb! Things weren't all right. They got progressively worse and worse and worse. It was smoke pot, drop acid -- do anything you could get your hands on. It was pretty much how I wanted to stay all the time. Just stoned. Don't think... It was shame for me. I could see little babies being pulled out of their mamas, but they were alive. That's what I lived with for the better part of 14 years. I suddenly realized that it was a child. It wasn't tissue--it wasn't a lump. Plus, I had worked in an abortion clinic and had seen the freezer full of dead babies." It was a little child who invited Norma to church and pro-life group who witnessed to her. And today, Norma, "Jane Roe", says "I just started praying*

to God to ask Him to forgive me... I'm a Jesus freak now. It's the best thing in the world that could ever happen to a young woman--to love God and to love His Word and to be His servant." How many Normas are out there? How many women have been emotionally destroyed and live guilt-ridden because of the pride of those who want the right of ultimate control over life? Pray for them; pray for this holocaust to stop and for law to be changed. It is no wonder that pride:

4. it makes one detestable (16:5) God will not share His glory with another; He can't. It violates His own uniqueness. It is the one thing that God cannot allow to continue. And that says something about the future of our country. Just look at Sodom and Gomorrah, Hitler's Germany, Russia, China and many other places where man played God and human life was devalued. That's the path we're on as a nation and it only leads to judgment.

OK, let's get personal now and talk about:

III. Principles For Dealing With Pride In Your Life We all deal with it on a daily basis at some level. Self always tries to push its way into our lives. How can we prevent it?

1. realize your own limited knowledge and ability (3:7) It begins in your thought life. Refuse to be wise in your own eyes, to see yourself unrealistically. **Rom. 12:3**, *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.* Know yourself well. Look honestly. See your faults and shortcomings. Realize your limited knowledge and ability. Learn to know when you're only pretending and what's real about you. Ask God to show you yourself, to search you and reveal yourself to you. Then:

2. refuse to seek your own glory (25:27) The word *glory* is a little better. It is not a true virtue, a true sign of goodness to seek your own glory. Paul said in **Phil. 2:3**, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* Refuse to do anything for the purpose of lifting yourself up above others to be better than them. For instance:

a. refuse to speak your own praise (27:2) Don't brag. Don't tell others how good you are. Don't seek after and solicit their praise of you. It will puff you up and it is a sign that you are puffed up. Here's another example:

b. refuse to assume your own worthiness over other people **(25:6-7)** Never claim a place of greatness, assume that you're more worthy, more knowledgeable, more anything, than the people who happen to be around you. Jesus said the same thing in **Lk. 14:7-11**, *When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* Choose to exalt and honor others; never seek it for yourself. And always:

3. remember the sovereignty of God in your life (27:1) Don't spout all those plans and dreams and forget God's sovereign control over every aspect of your life. James said the same thing in **James 4:13-16**, *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.* Keep humble before God and let Him be Lord of your accomplishments.

4. recognize praise as an occasion of testing (27:21) Every time someone praises you it is an occasion to become proud and take credit that belongs to the Lord. Every "Good sermon, Pastor", every "nice job, it looks great, Fred...", every "you're a great cook, Sally" or "You are absolutely beautiful," is a moment of reckoning. Not that you have to use some pious reply always. You can merely humbly say "Thanks" but in your mind you need to be saying "Thank you Lord, that you did the job well through me, that that person sees You flowing through me." Praise is an occasion of testing because it can plant the seed of pride. And finally, this advice:

5. repent immediately when you see pride in yourself (30:32-33) When you see pride in yourself, clap your hand over your mouth; stop it immediately. Repent. Turn to God and ask His forgiveness. Make whatever corrections you need to with other people. Deal with it immediately because if you don't, you can count on the fact that trouble will come.

Jay Carty tells a story about a man who was a fighter pilot in World War II: "During his training, he flew planes that didn't have radios. That's the way it was in those days. Signal men on the ground communicated with the young flyers by waving flags. Bill was the best in his class and had a chance to prove it during the graduation exercises. With the grandstands full of top brass, he set out to make a mark for himself. He won the touch-and-go competition easily, captured first place in

the dog fight event, and thereby won the right to land first. Bill was feeling fine, and he was leading the parade. As he was enjoying his victory, he thought of making the perfect landing just to cap off a perfect day of flying. He thought about the applause awaiting him as he climbed out of the cockpit. He lowered his flaps and started his approach. A buzzer went off. Bill knew what it meant but was so caught up in the moment that it didn't register. He could see the men in the tower waving with both hands. "Hi, guys," he yelled, knowing they couldn't hear him. How nice of them to welcome the conquering hero. Then a red flare sailed across his field of vision. Fireworks for the winner! They had thought of everything. "Concentrate, concentrate. Focus on making both wheels touch at the same time. As the plane settled to the ground, Bill noticed the propeller stop. This phenomenon was followed by the screech of metal. The propeller had stopped because it had hit the runway. The ear-piercing sound was caused by the body of the plane doing the same thing. As a cloud of dust enveloped the plane, Bill remembered, "I forgot to put down the landing gear; I didn't lower the wheels!" Bill thought he was a winner. He thought everything was just fine...until it was too late. Oh, he'd been warned. The buzzer was installed as a reminder to the pilot to put his gear down when the flaps were lowered. The guys in the tower tried to wave him off. The red flare was an attempt to keep him from landing, but Bill crashed anyway." [What Makes a Man by Bill McCartney., 1992. Pages 220-221.] God has placed warning signals in His word and in your life to warn you when pride is creeping in. Don't ignore them! Don't let self blind you to reality. If you do, no matter how hard you try and how sure you are of yourself in life, you'll crash anyway.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom About Relationships (I): The Importance Of Communication

By now I'm sure you've realized that the majority of the book of Proverbs (chapters 10-29) is a series of collected sayings that are not placed in any particular order. Together they express God's wisdom about facing life. But we are grouping them according to themes that deal with various areas of life. The first major area which we completed dealt with wisdom about yourself and your position as it relates to God. The second major area, which we'll spend some weeks on, deals with wisdom about human relationships. And we're going to begin by considering what Proverbs has to say about the importance of communication in our lives and in building every relationship we have. Let me make a bold statement:

I. Effective Communication Is The Basis Of Human Relationship Before we investigate Proverbs, I'd like to take you back to the very beginning of man and to the nature of God to help us understand:

1. our basic human need to communicate You see our:

a. God is a communicating God Look at the very beginning of all things. Prior to this, in the whole process of creation God had only spoken commands that brought the material world into being. He said, "Let there be light..." and things occurred. But when He got to the final stage of creation, He didn't say, "Let there be man". In **Gen. 1:26** God held a discussion with Himself. He communicated with Himself. The members of the Trinity spoke to one another. That's significant. In all the creation, there was no being with whom God could communicate, except Himself, not the plants, not the birds, fish or animals. So, He decided to make a creature that was like Himself. In what way? If He had wanted one that looked like Him, He could have made a statue or an animal that mirrored His appearance. But that wasn't it. He wanted a creature that could communicate with Him, with whom He could have a relationship. It is the very nature of God to express Himself, to communicate. We read in **Jn. 1:1** that Jesus is the Word, the expression, the communication of the Father. **Heb. 1:1-2** says, *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.* God always speaks; it is His nature to communicate and guess what?

b. we are created in His image - Gen. 2:18-20 God said it right out; man can't be alone. His nature is to commune, to have relationship, to communicate. And all the animals couldn't cut it. Adam could have had a hundred pets with names for all. He could have played with a lion and romped with a bear. But there was not one with whom he could have a two-way relationship of communication. That's the same situation God was in! So, He made us for Him and for Adam He made another human being who was in his image, who was like him, with whom he could have a significant relationship of communication and what brought Adam joy was not, "Oh, here's someone who looks like me!" or "Oh, here's someone who can do what I can do, who I can work with or have fun with" but "Here's someone who IS like me, whose nature is like mine, with whom I can have a relationship that is two-way. I am no longer alone." You see:

c. communication is the essence of human relationship We are made to have relationships with other human beings and the essence of all relationships is communication. So now let's go to Proverbs and notice:

2. the benefit we receive from effective communication (16:24) When you eat a piece of honeycomb, two things happen. First, you taste it and the sweetness of it has an impact on your mind and emotions. You enjoy it. But it also impacts your physical being. Remember in the Old Testament how in the wilderness Jonathan tasted the honey and his eyes brightened. He had a sugar rush, a burst of energy that helped his physical well-being. Effective communication is like that:

a. it is vital to our mental/emotional well-being To feel healthy and whole, to view ourselves properly, we need to be communicating. Having relationships where significant communications happens is necessary for our mental health; we **MUST** express ourselves. So, let's look at the reverse; look at what happens when communication in some vital relationship is broken. There is a tremendous reaction, perhaps anger, perhaps great sadness, perhaps confusion, inability to concentrate, the desire to get away or escape life somehow and vegetate without thinking; maybe we do something crazy or reckless. The reaction just shows how important the process is to us. And so, it doesn't take much to figure out that:

b. it is also vital to our physical well-being When in any vital relationship communication is stifled or broken, it often results in physical symptoms like tension, headaches, upset stomach, nervousness, inability to sleep, ulcers, and what have you.

So, we are actually benefitted greatly both mentally/emotionally and physically when we have meaningful relationships where there is effective communication going on. Solomon mentions:

3. the joy we experience in effective communication (15:23) Communication brings us joy, gladness of heart and notice that it is bi-directional. There is:

a. the joy of giving communication Oh, doesn't it feel good when we can tell somebody something that's in our heart and actually get it across to them and have them respond appropriately or when somebody comes to us with a need or a problem and we're able to help them with it and they are comforted somehow by our communication. It brings joy because it fulfills **our need to be heard**, to express ourselves and have it be meaningful and impact others. For instance, when I hurt, I have a profound need to tell somebody and to have it matter to them and when I do and they do, I get relief; I experience a measure of joy again. But in the other direction there is also:

b. the joy of receiving communication How often has somebody said just the right thing, just the thing you needed to hear and it changed your whole outlook, brought you comfort, lifted your spirits, etc. When somebody communicates with us in a heartfelt way, we feel good because it meets **our need to hear**, to not be alone, but to experience life in a communicating relationship.

So, I can't stress it enough: any meaningful relationship we have in life (parent-child, husband-wife, brother-sister, friend-friend, fellow believer) absolutely requires meaningful, effective communication. Now where Proverbs really helps us is that it gives to us:

II. Some Key Principles That Promote Effective Communication First of all:

1. effective communication is tender (15:1) One of the biggest obstacles to communication is anger. Once you or the other get angry, that emotion tends to take over your thinking and your attitude. You stop listening, say things you don't mean, or even seek to get away from the other. If the way you talk to the other is harsh, you'll stir up or create that anger. The Hebrew word for *harsh* means painful, hurtful. If you speak with the intent to hurt or cause pain to the other, it will likely create or increase anger in them and block the process of communication. But if you speak gently, it will have the opposite effect. Now, gently doesn't simply mean softly or quietly (though a lowered volume often helps!) I can whisper, "You're ugly as sin." and the effect won't be much different than if I'd shouted it. It's the intent of the heart behind the words that must show. The Hebrew says it must be tender, loving, caring, sincerely concerned about the well-being of the other. When you speak that way, it has a way of melting the other's heart and binding it to yours. Communication that is cold, insensitive, matter-of-fact, or surface level won't build a relationship, but words that express the true desire of your heart toward the other will. Be tender when you communicate.

2. effective communication is considered (15:28) It is thought out; it is weighed carefully. It is not spewed out like a gusher under pressure, but the words are chosen well and carefully with consideration for the other person's understanding and how it will be received. When Jesus started to tell Peter how he would be delivered to the Jews and crucified, Peter immediately blurted out a rebuke, "*Never, Lord!*" he said. "*This shall never happen to you!*" And Jesus had to rebuke him! "*Get behind me, who?*" Who had hold of his thoughts? Satan did! When you shoot from the hip, when you talk without considering what you're saying, when you blurt out the sinful and wrong thoughts that come to your mind, it is a tremendous opportunity for Satan to do damage through your mouth! But if you pause and think about what you're going to say and why you're going to say it, what you end up saying will be righteous and true instead of wrong. It will build and further relationship instead of breaking it. James says, *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*. - 1:19. That doesn't mean to talk slow, but to stop and think before you speak. Now that verse brought up another principle which Solomon mentions:

3. effective communication requires sincere listening (18:13) Boy, how many times have I been that fool! How often have I had my mind made up and just quit listening to the other person and formulated a reply while they were talking and then just waited for a pause to deliver it in! You'll never truly communicate without a sincere desire to hear what the other person wants to share with you. Relationship and communication are both two-sided. You must stay open to receive and genuinely want to hear what the other has to say. It doesn't work any other way. Then:

4. effective communication is honest Communication that is deceptive is not communication at all and destroys the bond of relationship. So, for effective communication:

a. there must first be truth in information (24:26) Now what's a kiss on the lips like? Well, compare it to the custom of the old peck on the cheek that's used in greeting in many places. Big difference, huh! It's mutually stimulating and desirable. It says, "I want you; I want to know you; I want a relationship with you." That's why you're careful about who you give one out to! But honesty is like that, telling the truth to one another, being open and transparent about how you really think and feel. That builds relationship; it draws the other to you; it builds trust. It says, "I really do want you; I want a genuine authentic relationship". And along with true information:

b. there must be transparency in admission (28:13) Honesty is about becoming vulnerable, admitting my faults, confessing my sins, my wrong thoughts and attitudes and actions. The other way doesn't work. If you cover and hide things and pretend, there is no relationship and sooner or later the other person figures it out and when they do it destroys and tears down the relationship. But if you are transparent and admit things openly, you'll find mercy. You'll find that just as God is willing to take you like you are, sins and all, that the other person knows their own flaws and is willing to extend mercy toward yours! Then one last thought:

5. effective communication is well-timed (27:14) If you show up on my doorstep at 5:00 in the morning and start yelling, "Pastor, I really appreciate you; you preach great sermons; I'm so glad you're my Pastor!", how will that blessing be perceived? As a curse! You don't even have to yell on my doorstep; simply calling on the phone at that hour would do it! Timing is everything. Solomon also wrote in *Ecc. 3:1, There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven*. There is a right time to say what your heart wants to say. There is a time when a person is ready and prepared to hear. When their heart is full of grief and agony is no time to explain the logical purposes of God in using their suffering. It's the time to express love and caring. When they are upset and angry is no time to communicate with them that they're wrong or have made a mistake. Before you say something, consider, "Is this the right time and place and occasion that will allow them to really hear me?"

You see, effective communication is really communion, the expression of two people savoring fellowship with one another. You were created for it; your heart craves it; but it does not happen automatically. You must learn to practice it.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About Relationships (II): The Power Of Speech

Last week we learned that we were created to have relationships both with God and other people and that the heart of all relationship is effective communication. There is no way that I can emphasize enough the importance of the role that this process of speaking plays in our lives. Solomon knew it. If you count the individual proverbs from chapters 10-29, you'll get 595, roughly 600, and of those fully 100 or 1 in 6 have to do with our speaking and communicating with one another, more than any other single subject! Yet it is something we do so much that we don't recognize:

I. The Awesome Power Of The Words We Speak We are affected by the words of others to an incredible degree and our words have an unbelievable impact on others.

1. they have tremendous power to bless For instance:

a. they can nourish and cheer (10:21, 12:25) We are a needy people. Bread can nourish our bodies but only words can provide us the emotional and mental nourishment that we require. Take a baby and over the years speak to him words of love and acceptance and worth. Tell him he's important and capable, that he matters to you, that he's necessary and special, and you'll raise a secure, healthy, balanced adult. But feed him the wrong words, constantly tell him he's ugly and stupid and that you don't care about him and neither does anybody else and you'll raise an insecure, fear-driven adult who will likely struggle all his life to get his needs met and can't function in relationships unless Jesus gets hold of him and feeds him words of truth about who he really is! Words can build a whole life. They nourish our mind and our soul and even as adults we need them. When we are sad or distressed, a kind word has the extraordinary power to bring us comfort, to bring cheer and joy into our darkness and lift us up, to minister a measure of healing to our hurt. *John Trent writes: "I remember playing my heart out for a high school football coach who rarely used [words] to encourage or praise. It was late in a game we were supposed to win, but we were losing. And while I thought I had played a good game, in the fourth quarter I was pulled out after making a tackle. "Here it comes!" I thought to myself as I jogged up to the coach. As the captain of the defense, I was going to get blasted for losing the game and benched. But that's not what happened. "John," he told me, "I just wanted you to know that I wish I had ten more of you out on that field. I'm proud of how you played. Now get back into the game" It has been more than 20 years since I nearly fell down after hearing his words. I remember floating back on to the field and playing even harder than before. We lost the game, but I won something that never showed up on the scoreboard-- a crystal clear picture in my mind. I had the lasting memory of a man who encouraged me just one time...and made four years of effort seem worthwhile."* [The Hidden Value of a Man by Gary Smalley and John Trent. Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994. Page 93.] Words can be a blessing to us far greater than money or anything material. In fact:

b. they can literally save a life (14:25) If you go into a courtroom, true words can literally save the life of someone on trial for a serious crime. Words can summon the ambulance when someone is ill and get them to the hospital on time. When I asked for an illustration of how words had deeply impacted your life last Sunday night, someone said, "Someone told me about Jesus and it changed my whole life." It is through words, through speech that we understand the Good News about Jesus and experience salvation! Peter said to Him, "You have the Words of life!" The words that give eternal life have changed the eternal destiny and the daily lives of millions upon millions, and the lack of them have kept billions in darkness. The words of others have shaped and impacted so much of your own life and your eternity! And:

c. they can be a thing of great beauty (25:11) The NASB says a word "spoken in the right circumstances" is like an apple made of gold set in a pure silver ring or necklace. It's a thing of beauty and preciousness. To hear the words, "I love you" in the right circumstance can send your heart into ecstasy and be remembered and treasured forever. Certain things people have said have been treasured and remembered for generations for their beauty and wisdom. And the Words of God, we're told, will endure forever for they are more precious than gold, than much fine gold! Oh, words have a tremendous potential for blessing but we must never forget:

2. they have tremendous power to harm as well! Yes, they can nourish and heal but:

a. they can also wound another person deeply (12:18) A word can pierce you just as deeply as a sword! It can cut you like a knife! Has that happened to you? Something somebody said to you or about you just wounded your soul, did unspeakable damage. Maybe you've spent years trying to get over hurtful things others have said! They can hurt as bad as any injury. In fact:

b. they can destroy another person (11:9) With what you say you can destroy a person's reputation, their character. You can destroy a friendship, a marriage, turn a child against his parents. Words can drive a person to suicide or sentence them to death. And words can keep a person from knowing Jesus and sentence them to a Christless eternity. And, as we've all found out:

c. they can bring you great trouble (21:23) How many times has something you said created a great problem! My mouth has gotten me into more trouble than my behavior ever did!

If you think about it, we're careful about handling sharp knives, we put signs up around dangerous machinery, and we write laws to prevent people from carrying deadly weapons around, yet every one of us has a loaded machine gun ready to go off attached to our face that can do incredible damage! James reminded us of that. Compare **James 3:3-6**. He says that your tongue, the words you speak have a tremendous impact. They can be the spark that sets a whole forest on fire! They can impact the entire course of your life or someone else's. And the sad fact is that there is more propensity for evil to get control of our lives through our speech than any other way. Satan's greatest attempt to gain control of us is through the words of our mouths. The Bible speaks plainly of:

II. The Incredible Difficulty Of Controlling Our Speech In fact, we are told that it is not only difficult, but:

1. it is impossible in and of ourselves - James 3:2, 7-8 If you could control your speech, you'd be perfect and none of us are! We've tamed everything else. Just look at TV. We've got tame grizzly bears that act in movies. We've got tame lions that walk on a leash! You name; we can tame it! Everything on earth except our own mouth! Look at the Scriptures! Abraham lied! Moses spoke angry words! David muttered a selfish wish that endangered lives. Elijah prayed against his own people. Peter let Satan talk through his mouth and even Paul had to apologize for his speech to his enemies. Nobody has ever been in perfect control of their own words, except Jesus! So how can we use our words for blessing and prevent using them for destruction? There is only one way!

2. it is only possible by grace through the Spirit - Gal. 5:22-23 Self-control, literally internal power or strength, is a fruit or a result of the Spirit of God being in control of your life! Only God has the power to control something as powerful as your tongue and by His grace He is willing to do it. In a minute I'm going to give you a whole list of ways in which our speech needs to be controlled. And I don't want you to fool yourself into thinking you can do it because you can't! You can't walk out of here and decide, "I'm never going to criticize anybody again!" or "I'm never going to go back on my word!" In and of yourself you will; you won't be able to stop it. No man can do it! Your only prayer of controlling your speech is to learn to discern when you're about to use your tongue wrongly and then to stop and cry out to God for His power in that moment to change it and to speak through you! In fact, because I'm in so many situations where I communicate with people about important things, I learned long ago the necessity of praying before the phone call, of praying at the start of the conversation, "Lord, speak through me, control my words!" Without that you're dead in the water! You see, when we talk about building proper habits of speech, we're really talking about:

III. The Unnatural Habits The Spirit Must Build Into Your Speaking It won't come naturally to talk in a godly fashion. It will go against everything your flesh tries to get you to say. These habits are unnatural and you must ask the Spirit of God to build them into your life. First of all:

1. ask Him for grace to limit your lips (10:19) The more you multiply your words, the more, as the NASB says, *...transgression is unavoidable*. I think we've all met people who just can't stop talking! You know, the kind where you hold the phone away from your ear and occasionally say, "uh-huh", "yep", etc., while simultaneously being able to calculate your income taxes? You can drive people away from you by simply talking too much. But you can also fail to restrain your lips by talking at the wrong time and being insensitive to a person's needs or by saying too much about a difficult subject that the person is not ready to talk about, forcing a conversation they don't really want to have. Failing to restrain your lips breaks down relationships. Does this mean you should be a quiet, shy person and never say anything? No, it means that wisdom is to be able to set proper limits for your speech, to strike a balance between speaking and listening that is called true communication. I heard a lady say the other day that one time she said to her husband, "Let's talk!" And he said, "Sally, we never talk; you talk and I listen!" Wisdom is to recognize when it's time to quit talking and when to say more. And that means asking for grace to be sensitive, to talk the way you'd want to eat, not just all you can at every opportunity, but in a way that is healthy and balanced and in keeping with your need to communicate and the other's as well. Second:

2. ask Him for grace to prevent critical speech (11:12) Notice the word *neighbor*. It implies relationship, someone you know and have a relationship with. An unwise man, a man who doesn't speak like God speaks, criticizes and condemns and points out the faults and the mistakes and puts down that other person when the opportunity arises. We've all been there, haven't we? It comes so easily. Sometimes we criticize behind their back, to some third party. Somebody offends us or hurts us somehow and we run to tell the story to someone else and get some pity to salve our wounds. You know what that does? Compare (17:9). It separates friends; it tears down relationships. But if you ask for grace to hold your tongue and deal with it biblically between you and that person, you can grow love in that relationship. Then sometimes, we're critical straight to their face. We tell them how stupid they were, how irresponsible, how much better we'd have handled it. And sometimes it's people we really love, maybe our spouse or our children. But a wise man holds his tongue and refuses to speak in that critical, derisive mode at all, because it breaks, it tears down, relationships. Paul said in Eph. 4:29, *Do not let any unwholesome [corrupt, rotten] talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*. That's a tall order. How can I do it? I ask Him for grace to do it through me! And then:

3. ask Him for grace to keep a confidence (11:13) There are times in life when you become possessed of private information, things that are rightfully confidential, information that really belongs to the person and is not the business of others. Maybe a friend shares with you a personal trial they are enduring because they can't bear it alone anymore. Maybe someone lets you in on a painful secret from their past or pleads for help with a hidden problem. And what's our reaction? Especially if it's negative, the flesh always wants to share it with somebody else. Why? Well, there are times when the information is simply overwhelming to us; it impacts us deeply and personally and we just honestly crave the relief of someone to share it with us. But more often than not, it's because we get something out of sharing it! It lifts us up somehow in our own eyes or in the eyes of others; it gives us some inner feeling of superiority or satisfaction. The KJV has a great word here. When we do that, it calls us a *talebearer*, one who walks around with news. The lexicon defines it as a scandal-monger, one who walks around spreading bad news about other people, as opposed to being one who is trustworthy, one who can be safely confided in and trusted to be a support and a help. Revealing confidences is one of the surest ways I know to break a relationship. When a person can trust what we will say, how we will control our mouth, that is an honor they bestow! And since we know our flesh and how prone we are to say what we shouldn't, we need to plead for grace to prove trustworthy. And while, we're at it we should:

4. ask Him for grace to tell the truth (12:19) Truthful lips. This sounds simple but it really isn't. Is what I say always true? Or maybe it would be more appropriate to identify the ways in which I lie, because we all do in our relationships! Somebody asks, "What's wrong?" We say: "Nothing, I'm fine" when it's not true. We lie to one another about what we really think and really feel inside. We put on masks and pretend and keep our relationships at a surface level because we're scared to tell the truth about what's inside, so we lie to keep them at a distance. Compare (16:23). A wise man speaks from his heart; literally his heart teaches his lips. He tells the truth about what's inside. His heart causes him to speak with insight, to convey information and understanding to the other so that the relationship grows. Other times we lie when we say something we don't really mean, good or bad, or when we mouth a promise but don't fulfill it. Compare (20:25). To talk rashly, without thinking, without really meaning it, is a trap, a snare we step into so easily and the result is that once again we've lied. We've failed to tell the truth. And listen, God is a God of truth. Lies are only temporary. They are ALWAYS found out. But truth is eternal; it endures forever! So how can we ever have truthful lips when lying comes so easily and so quickly to us in so many subtle ways! Again, the only answer I know is by crying out for grace, by begging the Spirit of God to control our lips, not just once but daily, hourly, maybe even moment by moment during intense communication. And finally, while you're asking:

5. ask Him for grace to face resistance tenderly and patiently What about when your words aren't having the desired effect? What about when the other person isn't hearing you, isn't understanding you? What about when they won't be persuaded to your point of view or they tell you you're wrong. What words come out then? Angry words, nasty words, name-calling, yelling, all the good things our flesh serves us up so quickly. And poof!, there goes the relation-

ship. But look at **(25:15)**. It is tenderness and patience that can change the mind of even a king, not all that other stuff. A bone here is a symbol for strength or hardness but it is the delicate tongue, the soft word that can shatter that strong obstacle, not the loud roar of anger. Now it will likely take time. It will likely take saying it over and over, patiently discussing it again and again, quietly sharing your heart repeatedly, softly telling the truth until it finally gets a hearing. It means suffering by putting up with the resistance in the meantime. But you'll keep the relationship in the process instead of driving the other person away. How can you do that? Where does that patience and long-suffering and restraint of anger come from when the other is not hearing? How is it possible? Only by grace, by crying out for God's mercy to make it so of you.

Oh, every time our mouth opens the potential is there for good or evil, to heal or to wound, to give life and build relationship or to kill and destroy it. And the thing that makes the difference between the two is whose finger is on the trigger, who's in control of it at the moment, you or the Holy Spirit. Paul concludes it nicely: *Gal. 5:16, So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* Talk by the Spirit, invite Him to breathe His life through the words of your lips. What comes out will surprise you and it will build those relationships which are so vital to your life.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About Relationships (III): The Attitude Of Kindness

The first essential ingredient in any relationship is an effective process of communication which we've studied over the past two weeks. The second vital ingredient is an attitude which we must bring into all relationships in order to make them a positive experience: the attitude of kindness. Now unfortunately our concept of kindness has been pretty much watered down in this culture. We take it to mean simply "being nice to other people". Some years ago, there was a pop song which said, "You've got to try a little kindness, show a little kindness, shine your light for everyone to see....try a little kindness and you'll overlook the blindness...". Or the bumper sticker I saw which read, "Practice random acts of kindness." The idea is to try being nice once in a while! Other, more ancient cultures have a more deep-seated ethic of kindness. Old Testament stories indicate practices among the Jews like: if there is a stranger passing through without a place to stay, you MUST take them into your home. If there is danger, you must defend your guest with your life. The Kyrgyz people whom we've adopted have a tremendous ethic of kindness; they will exhaust their meager resources to treat you in a lavish manner and will borrow money if they have to, just to feed you as a guest should be fed. And that's wonderful, but the Biblical concept of kindness goes much deeper than even that. So, let's first examine:

I. The Meaning Of True Kindness It contains three elements:

1. love (*hesed*): commitment to the other's well-being (11:17) The word *kind* here translates the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament word *agape*. It means covenant love, the love that God has for His covenant people, a love that's based on a promise, a covenant, a vow to the other person to care for them. We would say a love that is committed to sacrifice for the other, to do whatever it takes to preserve the other's well-being, regardless of our own needs or feelings. Now when we come to the New Testament, we read this definition: *Love is patient; love is kind...* So kindness is one element of the love that Jesus places in us toward other people. We don't help others and do nice things for others because it's a great way to treat people and it makes the world a better place, but because there is a force called the love of God in us which MAKES us be absolutely committed to the well-being of others around us without regard to ourselves. We are driven to it by the Spirit who lives in us and produces the fruit of kindness. But it is not just commitment, in true kindness there is also an element of:

2. tenderness (*raham*): feeling for the other's plight (12:10) The kindest acts, *raham*, the tenderest acts of compassion, the most intimate feelings which the wicked are incapable of. That's part of kindness, to feel true genuine sympathy for the other. *A little girl was so late coming home from school that her mother began to worry. Finally, when she got home, her mother asked her what happened. "I stopped to help a little girl. She was crying because her doll had broken," said the child. "That was kind of you," the mother said. "Did you help her fix the doll?" "No," replied the girl. "I stopped to help her cry."* [Love in a Lunchbox by Elaine M. Ward. Abingdon, 1996. Page 96.] That's tenderness, to be touched by the pain of the other, or by the joy of the other and to feel it and to act out of it. That's kindness. Paul described it like this in *Rom. 12:15, Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* The writer of Hebrews talked about Jesus, our High Priest being *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*. We're not kind because it earns us brownie points with God but because our hearts feel the pain and joy of others and we are driven to enter into it with them, to sympathize (literally to suffer with or alongside) them. But true kindness is not just commitment and feeling, it has a third element:

3. mercy (*hanan*): generosity toward the other's need (14:21) This verse contains the Hebrew word most commonly translated "kind", *hanan*, but it is much more often translated as *mercy*. And the biblical concept of mercy is to recognize the great need which another person has, the trouble they are in, their helpless plight, and to generously and freely use your own resources to meet that need. A most obvious example is the one in this verse, to see the struggle and suffering of a poor person and to give them food or clothing or money to help alleviate their suffering. That is mercy. But it's not only material; listen to this, *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us,*

not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy... - Titus 3:4-5. Why? Because He saw us helpless and condemned to eternal death and freely and generously gave His Son to go to the cross to save us! Mercy is to see the other's plight and to give of your time and ability and resources to meet it freely, expecting nothing in return. That's true kindness!

So let me sum it up. To have an attitude of kindness is to be committed to the well-being of others, touched in our hearts by what they're going through and to be moved to freely give in whatever way we can to do something about it! No wonder it's a fruit of the Spirit. You'll never do that in your own strength! You might try a little kindness but afterwhile it will get wearing and you'll get tired of being nice and kind and always meeting everybody else's needs. The real thing only comes by saying, "Holy Spirit, produce your kindness in me!!!" Now you'll see how true that is when we explore:

II. The Lengths To Which Our Kindness Should Extend To begin with it should extend:

1. generally toward all we contact, even animals (12:10) Now before I get in trouble here, let me freely admit what you already know: that I'm a hunter and also a meat-eater. In my defense let me say, so were Solomon and David and all the other Old Testament folks. They killed their sheep and cows to eat them and hunted deer in the wilderness for food and even sport. Another proverb says, *Prov. 12:27 (KJV), The slothful [man] roasteth not that which he took in hunting...* Kindness does not mean never harming any living thing, never fighting in a war, never taking a life, etc. To paraphrase this verse loosely: *A righteous man feeds and pets his dog and waters his horse and lets him out; he knows even the animals that are under his care and is kind to them but the wicked man is just generally cruel, he kicks his dog and beats his horse and if he does that, you should see what he does to people!* I've known people who were just plain cruel, that enjoyed hurting things, one who enjoyed putting a cat in a bag and dropping it from the barn loft, people who enjoyed hurting the people around them, digging at them, making them feel bad. But a person who knows the Lord exercises kindness in that same general fashion, to all around them universally. Look at **Gal. 6:10**. That's the idea. You can't pick and choose, deciding "I'll be kind to this one and ignore that one." It's a general attitude that pervades all of your life if the Spirit is in control. You're kind to everybody and everything. You just can't enjoy being cruel to anybody or anything. But as we just read in the second half of that verse, kindness should extend:

2. especially toward one another (14:21, 21:10) - Gal. 6:10b A person who loves the Lord especially can't help but show kindness toward his neighbor, someone he has a relationship with, a fellow-believer (those of the household of faith), a family member, or a friend. Kindness is a vital part of any relationship we have and Paul spells out for us what it looks like when we live like the new people that we are inside. Look at **Eph. 4:32**. When the Spirit is in control, when we're living out of His resources, we are kind and compassionate to each other, even forgiving one another when there is an offense or a hurt, just the way God treats us. Now in one way, it's more natural to be kind to those you know, but in another way, if there's any unkindness in us, any cruelty (and there is in all of us in the flesh), it is toward those who are closest that we feel the most free to express it! In other words, to strangers and people you know at a surface level, you're at least going to put on a front of apparent kindness, even if inside you are feeling unkind toward them; you are most likely to be unkind toward those you love and are close to! Think about it; isn't that true? Take, for example, the idea of talking kindly. You'd never talk to a stranger in some of the ways you talk to your spouse or your kids. You kids would never raise your voice to your teacher the way you talk to your parents sometimes! Familiarity does indeed breed contempt, as the old saying goes, and that's why we're commanded to take special care to make sure we're acting constantly in true kindness to those we have relationships with. If we are not exercising an attitude of true kindness, it will break down the relationship! It's vital! Then kindness is something we must extend:

3. specifically toward the poor (14:21) God has a special love for the poor and needy of the world, which is a good thing because there are an incredible amount of poor people in the world. Over half of the world's population or more than 3 billion people live in countries which are rated on the human suffering index as either high or extreme. That means their income is low, in many cases \$250 US per year or less, their life expectancy is short due to malnutrition and disease; they may eat one meal a day, probably rice, many of their infants die and so on. It includes almost the whole continent of Africa, all of the 10/40 window with India and China and some of South America! Even though there is some poverty in the US, it is minor compared to the rest of the world and there are at least social systems in place to make resources available. That's not so elsewhere. Jesus said He came to preach good news to the poor. Our hearts should be moved in a special way toward the poor. Why? Well, Solomon says:

a. it stems from our regard for the Lord (14:31) Our kind attitude toward poor and needy people stems from our regard, our honor for, the high place in which we put the Lord in our lives. Look with me at **2 Cor. 8:7-9**. Paul is talking about an offering that's being collected for the poor fellow believers who live in Jerusalem and are suffering at this moment in history. Read what he says. What moves us to love the poor? Well, we were ALL poor. We were spiritually destitute, hopeless and helpless. And Jesus became poor for our sakes, became a human being and went to a cross and gave up everything, that we through His poverty might become spiritually rich, heirs of all the riches of glory! We know what it's like to experience kindness to the poor because we were there and the Lord reached into our poverty and so we hold Him in such high regard that we honor His act and His example and are kind to those who are poor, both spiritually and physically! But it's even more than that. When I am kind to the poor:

b. it is an act directed toward the Lord (19:17) Remember Jesus' words in **Mt. 25:40**? *The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'* When you were kind to the poor, you were kind to ME! When we are kind to the poor, when we are committed to helping them and cry over their suffering and give of our abundance, it is a sacrificial offering given to Almighty God. God Himself takes up their case, even takes their place, their cause to such a degree that He takes acts of kindness toward them personally! Imagine that! Oh, the needy of this world ought to have a special place in our hearts, not that we flip them a bone every once in a while out of our abundance, but that they are always on our hearts! And it is no coincidence that those who are the most physically needy in the world are also the most spiritually needy. More than 80% of them live in the 10/40 Window under Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Communism. The people of that vast region not only suffer all their lives, but die without Christ and suffer forever because most have NO opportunity to hear the Gospel. They are on God's heart and they ought to be on ours. Every one of us ought to be praying for these people in a particular way and using our resources to minister to them! Then finally, and you won't believe this one, the mark that distinguishes Christianity from everything else that's out there is that we are to extend kindness:

4. radically toward our enemies Let's start with what Jesus said in **Lk. 6:27-30, 35**. That's how God is; He's kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked, to His enemies. He saves the likes of Saul of Tarsus who kill His followers! He sends His rain, the blessings of life, on both the just and the unjust. Kindness is not just for people we know and like or just for neutral people we run into; it is for people that hate us and yell at us and fire us and steal from us and in some places jail us and kill us! Maybe it's for an ex-husband or ex-wife that has hurt us beyond belief and bitterly continues to do so! Maybe it's for the teacher or the bully who has hurt my child. Maybe it's for a person who stole from me or abused me. And it's not just an outward thing; Solomon says:

a. we must have kindness in our hearts (24:17-18) We're to have that loving caring attitude in our hearts toward our enemy, to pity him when he suffers, to be moved by his suffering and his hard times and his lostness and his spiritual poverty! Genuinely! We're to never let it rise up in your heart, "Great! Good for you! You got what you deserve!" Now you KNOW that's not something you can do on your own! You have to cry out to God for grace for that one! It's not in us, only in the Holy Spirit in us! And out of that genuine kindness in the heart:

b. we must display kindness in our actions (25:21-22) Paul repeats this again in **Rom. 12:17-21**. Suffice it to say that the coals are not punishment; they are the coals he needs to start his cooking fire. Whatever your enemy needs, you show him kindness. *There was a Confederate hero at the Battle of Fredericksburg. His name was Richard Kirkland: "When General Burnside ordered his troops up the hill toward Marye's Heights [where the Confederates were entrenched behind a stone wall], the ground turned red with blood. Due to the Confederate army's superior position, the waves of Union soldiers were easily repelled by the Confederate troops. In the end, 100,000 men in blue lay dying or dead in front of the stone wall. Kirkland, behind the wall, could take many things--the stench of his own body, the sleepless nights in the mud, the lack of food, even killing other men--but he could not take listening to the cries of the dying. They called out for water as if it were an August day with unrelenting sun. He grabbed up all the canteens he could find and scrambled over the stone wall to attend to the dying Union soldiers. Miraculously, he was not instantly shot by a sniper. Out there in the field of blue and red, he gave them all that was left to give. Water. He heard their confessions. He was handed notes to wives and girlfriends. He listened to the unutterable silence of their wounds. He watched them die in his arms. Richard Kirkland is buried in Camden, South Carolina. Two flags fly over his grave--a U.S. flag and a Confederate flag. It seems appropriate that both flags are there since, in his person and by his action, Kirkland united the two, or more aptly, rose above loyalty to either. In an act of true heroism, he showed faithfulness to a higher authority."* [The Other Side, Mar/Apr 1995. Pages 66-67.] Put in Christian terms, he showed true kindness to his enemies. That's what we're called to. But why? Let me just briefly mention:

III. The Consequences Of Kindness First:

1. kindness ultimately benefits you as well as the other (11:17) Kindness begets kindness and cruelty begets cruelty. Just start living selfishly and treating people unkindly and see how quickly you end up in deep trouble. It is actually a profitable way to live compared to the other. Secondly:

2. kindness builds a reputation of respect which reflects on the Lord (11:16) Being kind gets you a wonderful reputation; it brings you honor and because you give the glory to the Lord, it reflects on Him. Jesus said in **Mat. 5:16**, *In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* Your kindness reflects on God's reputation; it shows the world around you what He's like and draws people to Him. Thirdly:

3. kindness opens doors of opportunity (18:16) An act of kindness, a gift in whatever form, opens doors of opportunity you wouldn't dream of, doors not just to get things for yourself, but of opportunity to share the Gospel, to talk to people who would never listen, even to great people, important people, doors that would never open if you were unkind and uncaring. But lastly and most importantly:

4. kindness is pleasing to God And that's the goal of our lives, isn't it? To please Him! You see:

a. unkindness is disobedience (3:27) That's a command we're to obey. Don't withhold kindness; don't say, "I'll just ignore this need and hope it will go away". James said in **James 4:17**, *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*. To withhold kindness is to be unkind, is to sin against God and guess what:

b. unkindness cannot be hidden (24:11-12) You can't fool Him. He knows your heart. He sees every act of unkindness, every time your heart is unkind toward others and refuses to care. If you want His blessing on your life, if you want Him to work through you and live His life out through you, then there's no room for unkindness.

Let me close with this story I read: *"Once there was a feeble old woman whose husband died and left her all alone, so she went to live with her son and his wife and their own little daughter. Every day the old woman's sight dimmed and her hearing grew worse, and sometimes at dinner her hands trembled so badly the peas rolled off her spoon or the soup ran from her cup. The son and his wife could not help but be annoyed at the way she spilled her meal all over the table, and one day, after she knocked over a glass of milk, they told each other enough was enough. They set up a small table for her in the corner next to the broom closet and made the old woman eat her meals there. She sat all alone, looking with tear-filled eyes across the room at the others. Sometimes they spoke to her while they ate, but usually it was to scold her for dropping a bowl or fork. One evening just before dinner, the little girl was busy playing on the floor with her building blocks, and her father asked her what she was making. 'I'm building a little table for you and mother,' she smiled, 'so you can eat by yourselves in the corner when I get big.' Her parents sat staring at her for some time and then suddenly both began to cry. That night they led the old woman back to her place at the big table. From then on, she ate with the rest of the family, and her son and his wife never seemed to mind a bit when she spilled something every now and then."* [The Book of Virtues by William Bennett, ed. Simon and Schuster, 1993. Pages 143-144.] They understood how unkind they'd been when they thought about themselves being the recipients of their own treatment. Jesus said something like that; we read it earlier: *Luke 6:3, Do to others as you would have them do to you*. We call it the golden rule but it's really just a yardstick to help us visualize what kindness looks like in any situation. How would I want to be treated if I were them? Look at your life. Who are you being unkind to? What example of unkindness are you laying before your children? God help us to practice true kindness, to be like Him of whom it was said, "He went about doing good".

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom About Relationships (IV): The Building Of Friendships

Outside of blood family and marriage, the most basic relationship among human beings is that of friendship. It's something that happens in your life almost automatically through your contacts with other people. You probably don't give it much thought. And the term friend is a pretty broad term; it covers a great deal of territory and even as I say it, you're probably busy sorting out in your mind:

I. The Elements And Degrees Of Friendship There are people who are your friends in that you know them and talk to them, but they're not close and then there are people who are really close friends and so on. There are actually several elements in the true meaning of friendship and whichever elements the other person shares with you will determine the depth and degree of your friendship. The Hebrew has three different words which are translated *friend*. The first one means:

1. a companion (rea) (18:24a) It is the word often translated *neighbor* and it refers simply to **one who shares your situation** It may be the person you sit next to on the bus, the person who lives next door or the person you chat with at PTA. It is the broadest level of friendship. In fact, it is the word used in **Lev. 19:18**, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* Then you'll remember that somebody had a discussion with Jesus about this and asked, "Who is my neighbor?" and Jesus told him the story of the Good Samaritan, which basically answers that question by saying, "Anybody you find lying in a ditch!" In one sense, anyone we contact, anybody we find ourselves with or around is a friend, a companion and deserves our care and concern. With most of the people we know, this is the degree of friendship we have. They go to the same church, work in the same department, live in the same neighborhood, have kids in the same school and that's as about as far as it goes. We care about them; we would help them if they're in trouble, would maybe even sacrifice greatly for them in an emergency, but there is truthfully not much depth to the relationship. That's because full friendship requires two other elements. There is a second Hebrew word also translated *friend* in the second half of the same verse. It means:

2. a beloved one (ahav) (18:24b) Its root is the common word for love and affection and it might better be translated as "a beloved", that is, **one for whom you care**. God Himself says in **Is. 41:8**, *...you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, literally, my beloved*. Abraham was God's beloved. All the way through his Gospel, John calls himself, "the disciple whom Jesus loved", the beloved disciple. When Lazarus was sick, his sisters sent word, "Lord, he whom you love is sick!" There are those who are "beloved friends", people for whom you care on a more personal and deeper level because of affection that has developed between you. These are the people you spend time with and invite over for meals or go on vacation with. These are the ones whose birthdays you remember and whose company you enjoy. And, of course, we have a lot fewer of them than we do companions;

it's not possible to have time to include a huge number of people at this degree of relationship. But there is still another element of friendship that brings the concept to its fullest meaning. The Hebrew word we might translate as:

3. an intimate (*alluph*) a close friend, a familiar friend, a friend who sticks closer than a brother (**16:28, 17:9**). Note that both these suggest separating a tie. An intimate is **one to whom you are bound**. Look at **Ps. 55:13-14**. There is a deep intimate tie there and a spiritual one. David has been betrayed by his closest confidant, as it were (I think this Psalm is about Ahithophel who deserted David for Absalom). Or on a positive note, look at his relationship with Jonathan, **1 Sam. 18:1, 3**. Literally, it says his soul was bound, tied together with David so that there was an unbreakable oneness there that defied all circumstances. Here is the person with whom your heart is united, whom you trust completely with your life and all your secrets, with whom you can share anything without fear, who will never harm or betray you and will always be there for you, with whom you can sit down and pour your heart out in prayer. This is friendship at its fullest degree and most of us are able to develop this kind of friendship with only a very few special people over a lifetime and, sad to say, some of us have nobody like this! And make no mistake, we need it! All of us need satisfying relationships with this level of intimacy.

Now let me clarify something. Life is not so simple as to be able to just classify all your acquaintances into three groups. The friendships you have are probably all at varying degrees on the scale in terms of depth of affection and intimacy. Categorizing people, putting them in a box, will only get you into trouble. The point is that we need to build and develop the friendships in our life. If all we have is companions, acquaintances who know us at a surface level, our soul will not be satisfied and we need to build affection into some of those. We need to really love and be loved by others, cared about in a more tender, personal way. But if that is all we have, it still won't be satisfied; we need to build intimacy into some of those so that we have soul-mates, true confidants who are one with us. But before we talk about how, let's look at:

II. Some Cautions Solomon gives **About Building Close Friendships (12:26)** A wise man is cautious in friendship. Literally, He "searches his companion". He's careful to really know the person he's building the relationship with before allowing it to proceed to a deeper level. Not everyone can develop the kind of intimacy you crave nor even be trusted with it. Not everyone will enter in at the level of caring and affection, though you might want to. You must love all men without distinction but you must choose your closer friends carefully. Why? Well, for one reason:

1. friendship will influence you greatly (13:20) You will be influenced by the company you keep, by the people you walk with, live your life together with. In fact, you will become like them, make no mistake about it. If they're wise, their wisdom will rub off on you and yours on them. If they're fools, their foolishness will impact you and hurt you, even if it doesn't exactly rub off, though it often does. Friendship:

a. it can lead you into sin (22:24-25) If you hang around a hot-tempered man, eventually you'll learn his behavior; you'll learn to release your anger freely like he does. Write it down and circle it, **1 Cor. 15:33**, *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."* If your friends are into drugs or into immorality or into the occult and you develop affection and intimacy with them, you'll become like them; you'll follow them right down that foolish path. But on the other hand, friendship:

b. it can grow and mature you (27:17) Literally, a man sharpens the face of his friend. Just like two pieces of iron, a file and a piece of steel, can interact as they rub together and produce a sharpened edge that is not possible alone. Friendship with the right person can make you wiser; it can make you more holy; it can make you more like Jesus Christ!

But that'll never happen by intimately knowing a person who is foolish or immoral or living a defeated Christian life. And I guess that raises a question. Should I only build friendships with people that are like me or "better" than me? Not exactly. Thinking like that is what created the Pharisees with their "better than thou" attitude and no sinners would ever be saved. What I really think it means is this: I should be careful to know the other person and to discern what kind of influence their friendship has on me and how deep I can allow the relationship to develop. If I sense that I'm being pulled down, drawn away from the likeness of Christ, I've got to seriously consider backing away. On the other hand, if my being in the relationship is pulling them up, drawing them toward Christ, that is exactly why Jesus was called the "friend of publicans and sinners". God has intended us for that. Still, the most intimate of relationships can only develop between friends with like beliefs and values who share a spiritual relationship. The second caution is this:

2. friendship must not be built on need-meeting We all know adages like these: (**14:20; 19:4, 6**). In the world we live in, people build friendships to get things. Sometimes it's money or gifts of some sort; sometimes it's power or privilege. Don't they say, "It's all in who you know?" Now, of course, we'd never be that blatant or shallow but we can do the same thing in much more subtle ways. We can build friendships with others because they provide us with intangible things. For instance, maybe they give me the attention that I desperately crave and can't seem to get anywhere else in life, so they become what gives significance to my life or maybe I'm afraid and knowing them gives me the safety of having someone I know will take care of me if I can't make it, and so they become my security. It may even be two-directional; I get my security from them and they get their significance by helping me. Today they have a name for it; they call it co-dependence, I think. Now let me be very clear. We are not to be independent. God does meet our needs through each other all the time; in fact, He has given us to one another in the body so that each part can supply what the other needs. What I'm saying is that when you build a friendship (or a marriage or any other relationship for

that matter) with somebody for the primary purpose of getting something *from* them instead of the sharing of mutual affection and intimacy, that relationship is doomed and it's unhealthy. You end up sucking the life out of each other in a way God never intended; HE is to be the source from which all our needs, tangible and intangible, are supplied. He gives us significance; He is our security. When we depend on each other in an unhealthy way instead of Him, relationship is destroyed. We must never see the other person as a *means* but as a gift from God; someone to enter into our experience of life with us. And a third caution:

3. friendship must focus on quality, not quantity (18:24) This is a tough verse to interpret in Hebrew but the sense seems to be this: you can have a ton of low-level relationships and end up ruined because none of them are really providing the intimate bond which your soul craves with other human beings or you can choose to build the kind of intimate friendships that are closer than blood ties. The focus has to be quality, not quantity. It's not how many "friends" you have; it's the depth and quality that is growing in those relationships that matters and makes the difference in your life. It's not how many people you "know" but how well you know the people you do know that counts!

OK, so how do you go about carefully building intimacy in your friendships with the right people? Solomon mentions four:

III. Characteristics That Develop An Intimate Friendship These are things that if you work on growing them in yourself and extending them to the other and the other proceeds to do likewise, your friendship will grow ever deeper.

1. there must be dependability unaffected by circumstances (17:17) You've heard the expression "a fair-weather friend"? What's that? Somebody who is your friend as long as it's easy, but when you go through trouble and adversity and that person has to share it, they're not around. That's not who you need to be. You need to care about the other person 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, not just when it's convenient or easy or safe. You must be there for them, no matter what and no matter when, constant, unchanging, just like God is for you. And it is sharing those tough experiences, the losses, the griefs, the fears, that will bind you together, that will fill you with affection for each other and bring a level of intimacy deeper than anything else.

2. there must be honesty that can be trusted (27:6, 29:5) A true friend is not somebody who always tells you how wonderful you are and ignores all your mistakes and sins. It is somebody who will always tell you the truth but always for your own good, never for the purpose of hurting you, even if the truth hurts. In other words, you can trust their motive of love even if they may have to disagree with you or refuse to help you with something they feel is wrong for you or try to stop you from making a mistake. You need to trust the character of the other person and they need to trust yours; you have to know that you would not intentionally hurt each other, not even by withholding the truth. If you can't do that, there will never be depth of relationship. Now granted, you're human and you'll fail at this! There will be times when you WILL hurt the other; you'll lose your temper and say things you don't mean, or fail to react right to something they say or do. You can't help it; it will happen. But you'll also be swiftly back to apologize or and ask forgiveness because the love in your heart for them IS trustworthy and stable. You want to deepen a friendship? Start trusting the other; commit to tell the truth instead of hiding it. A few experiences like this will bind your hearts deeper than you would ever imagine.

3. there must be communication that is intimate (27:9) Literally it says counsel or advice of the soul. You will never develop intimacy talking about the weather or the job or the hobby or politics or music or sports. Real intimacy comes from sharing the thoughts and feelings of your heart and having another person enter into them with you. That's the true sweetness of friendship; that's why you need it. That's what your soul longs for. And you can't get it by wearing a mask, by pretending. You have to reveal yourself, to expose yourself, to voice your fears, to admit your failures, your evil thoughts, to express your desires and your hopes and your dreams, to tell what's going on inside. Not all at once and not in every conversation but gradually and regularly. This is what will satisfy your heart and it has to begin with you. If you pursue this course, your communication will gradually deepen as trust grows, but it won't go anywhere if it's only one-sided. Both have to adopt this vulnerability and it requires constant effort to stay there. Finally:

4. there must be commitment to never abandon the other (27:10) This is another difficult verse to interpret, but its point is not that you can't have intimate relationships with family; in fact, you must! I think the point is probably the opposite: your friendships should have the same commitment of permanence that family relationships have. My kids know I'll always be their dad. No matter where they are, what they do or how far they stray, I'll always love them. I'll never get fed up and say, "I've had enough" and disown them and break that relationship, even if I do have to kick them out of the house! That's the kind of commitment that breeds intimacy in friendship. Nobody is going to invest this level of depth, this level of intimacy, in someone whom they feel is going to run away, abandon and leave them. But when your friend knows that nothing they may do or say, no failure or wrong reaction of theirs, is going to make you abandon them, that your relationship is not based on their performance, and you know the same thing about them, then your hearts will open toward one another without fear.

I could look right out among you and name some examples of those who are real true deep intimate friends to me and to others but that would be embarrassing and besides, you're now prepared to understand the depth of the precious privilege that we all have and that goes beyond any human example I could name. Look with me at **John 15:15**, *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for every-*

thing that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. Jesus is our truest and best friend. Think about Him; He displayed all those four important characteristics:

IV. The Example Of Our Best Friend: The Lord Jesus - Jn. 15:12-15

- 1. He was not deterred from loving us even by death - vs. 13**
- 2. He was totally honest with us even with hard things - vs. 18-20**
- 3. He communicated to us all the Father's heart - vs. 15**
- 4. He is committed to never abandon us - 14:18, Heb. 13:5**

You can look up and study the references in the outline on your own. Oh, He is our friend, our very best, most affectionate, most intimate friend! At least from His side! And you can develop that intimacy from yours if you want! But as you do, ask Him to develop those things that are true of Him in you. Ask Him to build in you the kind of dependability and honesty and communication and commitment that He has so that your friendships will be a mirror of your friendship with Him.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About Relationships (V): The Blessing Of Correction

Last time we looked at the importance of intimate friendships in our lives and in the process we read Prov. 27:17 (KJV), *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend*. Today I'd like to look at how that sharpening process works. That word *sharpen* is very literal when used of physical swords and metal objects but when used of living things, it means to make keen or alert. Habakkuk 1:8 uses it to describe the alertness and awareness of the wolves that come out to hunt at night. God uses other people, friends or family, to sharpen us, to cause us to be alert and aware of ourselves, to see ourselves for how we really are and to make the positive changes that are necessary. Somebody once said: "Every man has three characters: the one he exhibits, the one he thinks he has, and the one he has." We all have a certain blindness about ourselves, an inability to see the truth about us in certain areas of our lives. Yet it may be blatantly obvious to others and God constantly uses them to open our eyes and make us aware. There are a number of terms the Scripture uses to describe the various aspects of this process, but for want of a better word I'm going to lump them all together under one concept: correction. God uses the people we are in relationship with to correct things in us, whether positively by encouragement or negatively by rebuke, whether before the fact by instruction or after the fact by confrontation, but always correcting our course by making us aware of ourselves and the ways in which we need to change to be more in the image of Jesus. Now first I want to impress upon you:

I. The Value Of The Process Of Correction (25:12) For somebody who is wise, who is thinking like God thinks, to tell me something about myself which I am not aware of is more precious than a gold earring, than a 24 karat gold necklace, when it falls on an ear that's open and willing to listen. Even though it hurts! Just think where you'd be if nobody had ever corrected you, if nobody had ever warned you about the danger of things you wanted to do, if nobody had told you about mistakes you'd made, if your parents and teachers had just let you do whatever you chose! God used them to shape and mold you and to make you a productive person. Yet we're so resistant to it! There is something in us that fights it to the death, isn't there? We absolutely hate to be told we're wrong or to be shown that there is a better way, don't we? Do you know what that thing inside us is? PRIDE. Pride is what makes us count this thousand dollar gift that someone is bestowing on us because they love and care about us, as though they were smearing us with dirt. In order to get sharpened, we need to change our thinking about ourselves. We need to admit our desperate need for the advice and insight of others and to value it for the blessing it is.

1. it is more valuable than hidden love (27:5) Concealed love doesn't do anybody any good. You never know about it. The caring doesn't touch you because it is never expressed. It doesn't help you. It doesn't change you or benefit you. Just take a completely silly example: suppose I'm walking around in public with a huge rip in the back of my pants which I can't see. But you do. I'm embarrassing myself yet you're too embarrassed to tell me or you don't think I'll believe you or you think I'll be upset with you for telling me. So you don't. You can care about me and worry about the fact that I can't see it but everybody else can and be saddened that I'm being humiliated and follow me around all day with those thoughts, but unless you tell me, it doesn't help me one bit, does it? I'd be better off to have some wise-guy teen pass me on the street and mock me and say, "Hey mister, nice air-conditioned pants!" That's funny but just think if instead of ripped pants I had a deep character flaw or a persistent sin or a problem with one of my kids I was clueless about. Concealed love won't help much. Loving correction would be the best thing you could do to help but even open rebuke by a stranger would be better than concealing the problem. We're so worried sometimes about appearances and reactions that we don't truly love by correcting. But Solomon reassures us that correction:

2. it is ultimately more appreciated than flattery (28:23) Insincere compliments, saying nothing, false assurance that everything's OK, doesn't help anybody. You see, God is going to mature us one way or the other. He's not going to be content to leave that glaring thing in our lives alone. Sooner or later, He's going to find us a mirror that will let us see ourselves, even if it isn't you. But when He does, you know what the first question to others will be? "Why didn't you tell me the truth?" In the end when the truth comes out (and it always does either here or at the judgment seat of Christ), correction will be more appreciated than all the insincere flattery we gave or received. Sometimes it doesn't

seem so at first, not right away. It may stir up a hornet's nest and cause pain, but always in the end it's better and will ultimately be appreciated. In my first little church I used to do a brief children's message each week and one Sunday a good friend came to visit. Afterwards he laughed at me about the way I talked to the children, "You're talking to them like they're in college, using all those big words! Be simple!" And at the moment it hurt! It didn't feel good! It wounded my ego. But he was right! And I learned how to talk to little kids (and being simple has helped with adults too)! In the end I have learned to appreciate that more than all the compliments everyone else was giving out, because it changed me for the better.

So, let's think further about this process of correction. It is bi-directional. We need to talk about both directions, giving it and receiving it. First:

II. The Process Of Giving Correction To Others (13:14) Why bother at all? Why not just let people make their mistakes and mind your own business? Because it can be a life and death matter. Because your input, your instruction, your correction can be small at the moment but have giant consequences. It can affect that person's whole life, keep them from disaster, help them to make wise life-choices and even save their life or their soul for eternity. If you love the other person, withholding the truth is hurting them deliberately. But once you decide to share with them, Solomon points out two key facts:

1. it is important to know the person who needs correction Correction is best given and received in the context of a relationship. It can be a very dangerous thing. Just try to go and correct some dictator and you'll see what I mean! You see:

a. correcting inflames the wrong character (9:7-8a) The character of the person you're trying to help by sharing correction determines their response. If they are deliberately evil, if they are a mocking, crass, insulting kind of person who has no real desire to pursue what is good and right and pure or to improve themselves, all correcting will do is to inflame their anger against you and cause them to dump their behavior on you. You become the next target! Correcting that kind of person has exactly the opposite of the effect intended. And Solomon warns against doing it! But:

b. correcting blesses the right character (9:8b-9) A person who is righteous and loves God and wants to please Him and wants to grow will be blessed by correction. He'll add to his learning, grow in his understanding and he'll love you for it!

So, know the person before you try to offer well-meant correction. Think about their character and their heart. Are they the kind of person who will receive this as it is intended? And if not, am I ready to suffer the consequences that may come if they don't? Secondly:

2. it is important to choose the right manner of correcting (12:18) Remember that verse? There is a right way and a wrong way, a right time and a wrong time to talk to people. Bringing loving correction to someone is not something that should be blurted out recklessly; it should be considered and careful and prayerful, directed by the Spirit with the goal of bringing healing in their lives, not just of feeling one up on them and pointing out their faults. *In Decision Magazine* Marlo Schalesky tells about the day she heard someone knocking on her front door. She opened it to find an eight-year-old neighbor boy grinning up at her: "I can pull weeds for you for a dollar fifty," he asserted. How could I refuse? I led him to the planter, where just the week before I had spent hours planting beautiful flowers. It was true that weeds had already infringed on my new plants. "You can pull those. All right?" He nodded and went quickly to work. I chuckled to myself and returned to the house. Soon the boy's three-year-old brother was helping pull weeds. I stopped to watch the two of them for a moment, smiling at their innocent industry. The next time I looked out the window, the younger brother was still there, abandoned by his older sibling. He had diligently pulled up everything in sight--weeds and flowers alike! The place where my lovely flowers had stood were not empty holes. I gasped and ran outside. When I reached the child, I took a deep breath and mustered a smile. "Tell me," I asked calmly, "what are you doing with the weeds after you pull them?" The youngster grinned broadly and pointed to a neat stack of uprooted flowers piled against the side of the house. I went to gather them. "These are flowers," I explained gently when I returned. "I think we should probably replant them, don't you?" The boy's eyes grew wide with astonishment, and his lower lip began to quiver. "Oh," he cried, "we thought they were weeds!" He bit his lip to quell the tears that threatened to spill down his rosy cheeks. "That's OK," I hastened to assure him. "We can just put them right back in the dirt." His face lit up as he nodded. For the next hour we replanted all the flowers I had planted the week before. As I dug holes to replace the plants, God reminded me of how many times He has had to replant spiritual flowers that I, His child, have uprooted in my zeal to serve Him. Sometimes I can't tell the difference between a weed and a flower. [Decision, Jun 1995. Page 15.] Oh, how would you have handled that one? I can see myself yelling and screaming my correction, wanting to make them feel bad for all the wasted work I had put in, especially if it was my own kid! With yours I'd be kinder, of course! And even if that's how I'd do it with a little kid, yet how would I do it with an adult whose mistake is reaping some deeper consequences! Paul was talking about the maturing of the body of believers together when he wrote in Eph. 4:15, *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.* Truth-telling in love is what grows and matures us to be like Him. But if you leave out the loving manner, and just have cold truth-telling, the other will not hear and will not mature. So, consider carefully how you will share what you know in your heart you must share for the other's well-being; consider how you can convey it so that your love is apparent.

Now let's put the shoe on the other foot and talk about:

III. The Process Of Receiving Correction From Others This is the hard part! That pride inside us doesn't want to receive it. It wants to say, "That's not true; I'm all right; I'm perfect. Let me alone! Don't hurt me!" It wants to ignore it and throw that person out of our lives, but Solomon warns us of:

1. the foolishness of refusing it (12:1) Now I didn't call you stupid, Solomon did. If you refuse to listen when somebody who loves you and who knows what they're talking about is trying to help make you aware of things you can't see in your own life, that's just pure foolish behavior. And:

a. it is always detrimental to you (15:32) It's like hating and hurting yourself. It's like shooting yourself in the foot, like crippling yourself intentionally. Nobody would ever want to do that but when this correction thing comes that's exactly what we're tempted to do. Not only will we suffer the consequences of our wrong choices that we refuse to change, but you see, correction from a friend is a very small hammer that God uses to mold us and if it doesn't work, He loves us so much that He won't quit. He just has to use a bigger hammer! If you ignore correction, it will take you into suffering and pain and on from there! And:

b. it is ultimately dangerous to you (29:1) When you've been warned and warned and warned and you're stubborn enough to pursue evil or a wrong course anyway, you're headed for destruction. The consequences will catch up with you. You'll ultimately experience ruin and destruction in your life in some fashion. And there won't be any going back and changing it. Choices come to you only once. You can't go back and reverse the effects of them. That's why we have to listen now, to let God use each other to shape and mold us into His image. The more we resist, the more danger we place ourselves in. Oh, great is:

2. the wisdom of receiving it (16:20) Literally, he *finds good*. It is greatly to my benefit to openly receive instruction and correction and even rebuke as it comes. It does me good and the more that I am willing to accept that, the more good it will do me. I am wise to receive it. In fact, I should:

a. actively seek correction and instruction (15:12) A fool refuses to consult those who are wiser than he; in his arrogance he feels he knows more. But a wise person knows how much he doesn't know and actively seeks input from others. *Pastor Bill Hybels tells about being the chaplain for the Chicago Bears several years ago. He led a Bible study for the players at Halas Hall in Lake Forest, where they practiced. One day he got there early. Some of the players and coaches were watching a film of the previous day's game. Hybels joined them and was surprised by what he saw. Time after time a different player would request that the projector be stopped. Then he would ask his teammates and the coaches, "Now what did I do wrong on that play?" Here were these world-class athletes, highly-paid champions, laying aside all pride and asking others to tell them the truth. They realized that they needed objective observers to point out how they could improve. As Christians, however, we are hesitant to allow someone to share that kind of feedback about our spiritual growth--much less ask for it. We don't want accountability. We resist rebuke and admonishment. [Honest to God by Bill Hybels. Zondervan, 1990. Pages 181-182.]* You know in any other area of life, we'd seek it out. If our car doesn't run, we find a mechanic. If we need something built on our house, we find somebody who knows how. But when it comes to matters of real life, to matters of family and of spiritual things, places where we're struggling and suffering in pain, we so often refuse to ask! There is no shame in saying, "I don't know how to do this; I need help." I need to learn to put pride aside and ask, but look again, I must:

b. carefully seek it from a wise person (15:12) I'd better consult a wise person, somebody who has the wisdom from God to help with what I need to know in my life. It always kills me how people who are struggling in their marriages will run to ask advice or at least listen to advice from people at work who maybe are not Christians or whose marriages are also falling apart, who have no clue how to help them. When you need help with your car, you find a mechanic (and one whose own car runs!). When you need spiritual help, correction, instruction, counsel, you need to seek it from somebody who is wise, who has learned to think like God thinks in that area. That's how you can tell true correction in love from plain criticism and jealousy. Look at the character of the one it comes from! Seek out wise people to hold you accountable and then:

c. readily receive correction when it is offered (17:10) A fool you can beat with a hundred lashes when he makes a mistake and he'll go right back and do it again. You've seen that over and over again. People make life mistakes and get badly hurt and go right back and do the same thing. But for a person who is discerning and understanding all it takes is a simple word from an honest heart because they recognize the value of the input of others, both positive and negative, in their lives and stand open and willing to readily receive it.

Let that be you. Let that humility pervade all your relationships, that willingness to learn, that willingness to acknowledge the blessing of the insight of other people. God's advice is *Ps. 32:9, Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.* Don't make God perfect you the hard way. Listen to His Word; listen to the people He has placed in your life for your good and edification.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom About Relationships (VI): The Controlling Of Anger

One of the factors that we have to deal with the most in the relationships we have is anger. Wouldn't you agree? Now we need to begin by understanding something about the nature of anger. Anger is an emotion. It is a feeling we have about things we experience just like happiness or sadness or fear or surprise. Emotions in themselves are neither good nor bad. They are God-given pieces in the natural make-up of our human personality. And they are a reflection of the image of God. God has emotions. Just check your concordance and see how many times God was angry! So, if God doesn't sin, yet God feels anger, then anger itself is not sinful! There are plenty of things we ought to rightfully feel anger about. When somebody abuses a child, I feel anger. When evil or injustice triumphs and goes unpunished, I feel anger. When I am mistreated and hurt by somebody and I don't deserve it, I feel anger. And there is nothing wrong with that! The problem is that our emotions are extremely unreliable indicators of how we ought to act. Our mind should be the controlling factor in determining our behavior, not our feelings. In other words, I should do what I KNOW is right according to God, not simply what I FEEL like doing. When I feel anger and anger takes over control of my behavior from my mind, then what I have is uncontrolled anger. It is not reined in and kept in its proper perspective. It controls me instead of me controlling it. And the result is that I say and do things OUT OF the anger. That's what we're going to talk about this morning. Now Solomon warns us carefully about:

I. The Effects Of Uncontrolled Anger First of all:

1. it causes foolish behavior (14:17) People controlled by anger do all sorts of things that make no sense at all, things they would never choose to do under normal circumstances. For instance, they may break things in a tantrum, pick up a \$100 radio and smash it against the wall. They may drive recklessly and dangerously. They may quit a job and walk off with no thought of how they will live. They may run away from their family. They may get in a fight. Our neighbor, Jerry, in Ohio was sort of a redneck type who worked in a paper factory with a bunch of rough characters. On one occasion he made a profession of faith in Jesus and was going through the "trying to change" process but the guys were relentless. He was known for being a hothead and they would tease him about not drinking or doing this or that and about being a Christian. He made it about two weeks and one day his supervisor followed him into the bathroom and I forget what he must have said, but Jerry told me, "John, I tried so hard but I just couldn't help it. I couldn't take it anymore. I grabbed him by the hair, yanked him into a stall, stuck his head in the urinal and flushed it!" I think he lost his job. Hey, do you know how Jack Daniels, the famous whiskey maker died? (I read this on a placemat in a restaurant.) He had an old cast-iron safe about 3 feet high and one morning in 1905 it wouldn't cooperate with him and let him in, even though he was sure he knew the combination. So, Mr. Jack lost his temper and kicked it hard enough to break his big toe. Infection set in and eventually a couple years later took his life. Put simply, Jack Newton Daniels died from his anger! The company still hasn't opened the safe. Would you ever kick a cast-iron safe? I tell you, anger, when it controls you, will make you do and say foolish and unwise things that you would never otherwise do.

2. it leads to the breaking of relationships (15:18) When anger controls me, it leads to arguments and quarrels. Or it creates fear in the other person that drives them away from me. Words and acts begin to flow that alienate and separate me from others more and more. The more I give in to feelings of anger, the further it pushes people I care about away from me, my spouse, my children, my friends. It builds walls, big difficult walls that prevent closeness and have to eventually be taken down somehow for there to be intimacy. Anger will ultimately cost you that which you yearn for the most! And if you're not careful:

3. it becomes an addictive habit (19:19) Yielding to anger once makes it easier to do a second time and a third and soon, if it is not stopped, if the consequences don't break it, it becomes a habit, a way of responding to life. If you have a person who is hot-tempered, and you try to bail him out of his trouble, you'll have to do it over and over because like any addiction, he will not be able to control his anger. We understand drug and alcohol addiction in a sense. We become dependent on the substance to produce in us a feeling or lack thereof that we need. We start out using it and soon it controls us and we can't stop. But I wonder how many anger addicts there are out there, people who have such a pattern of being controlled by anger that they can't stop, can't break it and don't even try anymore! All of us can suffer from this effect once we begin to give in and yield control. And finally:

4. it inevitably leads to sin (29:22) This is the heart of the problem. Being controlled by anger cause you to sin. Count on it. Write it down. **James 1:20** says, *for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.* You can't live a life that mirrors Jesus and operate under the control of anger. You will sin against yourself, against others and against God Himself. Check out Paul's warning in **Eph. 4:26-27**. He quotes Ps. 4:4 and says, *"In your anger do not sin"* And then adds: *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* Anger gives Satan room to work in your life. While you are angry you are vulnerable and he can use the feeling of anger to get you to sin against God. It was his strategy with Job. He told God, "If you take away what he values, he'll get angry and blame You and curse You to your face!" So, the key is to learn to feel anger but to control it and deal with it swiftly in such a way that it doesn't control you and lead you into sin.

Now before we look at how to do that, let's not forget that quite often we're on the receiving end of anger, people express their uncontrolled anger toward us and it would really help us to have:

II. Some Simple Ways To Help Others Control Their Anger First Solomon suggests that we:

1. give them a gentle answer (15:1) It's very tempting to express anger in return, to yell back when we get yelled at. But anger feeds on itself. Yours feeds mine and mine feeds yours back. The other person only gets MORE angry! Yet if you answer softly, quietly, or maybe not at all at that moment, it may be like pouring on a bucket of cold water. Look at old Naaman, the Syrian general who came to Elisha to get himself healed of his leprosy and got told to go wash in Jordan seven times. Remember his reaction? **2 Kings 5:11-14**. They didn't say, "You idiot, why don't you listen to the man, you stubborn fool!" They were quiet and gentle and respectful and the anger subsided and Naaman got healed! How many times have I seen that happen? Someone comes to me mad and I just listen, just let them talk, answer quietly and point out a few things and soon we're able to settle the matter. But if I return anger for anger, watch out! Here's another good idea:

2. express toward them an act of love (21:14) This verse does not condone the tactic of bribery as a way to get out of trouble; it simply states how well it works as an example that everybody knows! A gift, a positive step toward the person who is angry at you is very often disarming; it can be like throwing a bucket of cold water on their anger. Jesus said when someone curses you, you are not to curse back but to pronounce a blessing on him instead. When somebody hurts you, do good to them. Take a step of love in their direction; do something nice toward them; show them that you care about them even though they're angry at you. It's awfully hard to stay angry at somebody who's showing you they love and care about you. However:

3. refuse to rescue them from the consequences of their actions (19:19) One of the reasons that people let their anger control them is that they have thus far managed to avoid the consequences of their anger. They've avoided paying the price. People have swept it aside, have accepted a cheap apology later, have said, "Oh, that's all right!" or have been too afraid of risking the anger to challenge it. But sooner or later uncontrolled anger will get them into trouble bigger than they can avoid. And it doesn't help to rescue them. They need to see that their anger has consequences and take responsibility. So, if they break something in anger, let THEM pay for it! If they hurt or insult somebody, don't go and try to smooth it over, let THEM. If they do damage to their own life and well-being, let them have to pay the price and work to overcome it. If you rescue an angry person, you enable them. And then a very simple thought:

4. avoid those who consistently refuse to control anger (22:24-25) IF you can. Don't build a close friendship with someone with an anger problem. Certainly don't marry one! Do what you can to avoid a person who won't control anger. Why? Well, for one reason it's a whole lot safer, but certainly, more importantly, it will rub off on you! Your acceptance of their lack of control will embolden your own. Here's a story that's kind of crazy but it makes the point: *In his autobiography, Number 1, Billy Martin told about hunting in Texas with Mickey Mantle. Mickey had a friend who would let them hunt on his ranch. When they reached the ranch, Mickey told Billy to wait in the car while he checked in with his friend. Mantle's friend quickly gave them permission to hunt, but he asked Mickey a favor. He had a pet mule in the barn who was going blind, and he didn't have the heart to put him out of his misery. He asked Mickey to shoot the mule for him. When Mickey came back to the car, he pretended to be angry. He scowled and slammed the door. Billy asked him what was wrong, and Mickey said his friend wouldn't let them hunt. "I'm so mad at that guy," Mantle said, "I'm going out to his barn and shoot one of his mules!" Mantle drove like a maniac to the barn. Martin protested, "We can't do that!" But Mickey was adamant. "Just watch me," he shouted. When they got to the barn, Mantle jumped out of the car with his rifle, ran inside, and shot the mule. As he was leaving, though, he heard two shots, and he ran back to the car. He saw that Martin had taken out his rifle, too. "What are you doing, Martin?" he yelled. Martin yelled back, face red with anger, "We'll show that son of a gun! I just killed two of his cows!"* I can't prove this is actually a true story but I do know that anger can be dangerously contagious. Stay away from hot-tempered people as much as possible.

But now let's move on to talk about:

III. The Difficult Process Of Learning To Control Anger In Yourself (29:11) A fool just vents it all, let's out all that's lurking inside, just lets it spue out and hit whatever is in its path. And boy can that do damage, as we've seen. So, a wise person, one who thinks like God thinks, learns to control anger. Now what exactly does that mean? You have to know the target you're shooting for (and make sure it's not a cow!) Let's examine more closely:

1. the goal toward which you strive First let me tell you what it isn't. The goal is NOT to never feel anger, to never be angry! Some people have this image that a Christian is never angry, always smiling, always happy, cheerfully accepting everything that comes. That's not reality; that's learning to deny and deaden the true emotions that God has given you. Rather Solomon says that you need:

a. to be slow to become angry (14:29) The Hebrew phrase literally says, "Slow to anger" as in **James 1:19**, *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*, You don't want to be the kind of person who gets mad instantly, at the drop of a hat, who goes from 0 to 10 on the anger scale in a matter of seconds when it is not appropriate. The goal is to be angry about things that it is appropriate to be angry about and to be angry at a level that is appropriate to the situation. Now the key thing that usually causes

quick-flaring anger is prior buildup. For instance, we've all flipped out completely over nothing, for example when a kid spills their drink on the carpet. And the reason was a buildup of 10 other things that we held in that we were angry about and just stuffed in our little backpack and carried along and this became the occasion to vent it all. We all do it. Backpacking your angry feelings and carrying them along instead of dealing with them and processing them right away leads to a quick temper. Now consider this. People that are perpetually quick-tempered are usually people who are angry inside all the time. It may be a buried, deep-seated anger with roots way back in childhood. Maybe they were hurt. Maybe they were abused and couldn't do anything to stop it. Maybe they experienced a deep loss, maybe the death of a parent or spouse that made them angry but there was no one to be angry at! For whatever reason the anger didn't get expressed and dealt with but stuffed way down inside. But now, down inside they're perpetually angry and since they're already an 8 on the anger scale inside, they can go to 10 on the outside in the blink of an eye over nothing. Anger is essentially controlling their life. Listen, you can't be appropriately angry if you're continually angry inside on an ongoing basis. You can't be slow to become angry unless you deal with what's inside and stay current, so that when something happens that makes you feel angry, you can know that you're actually feeling angry about exactly what is happening and it isn't simply the straw that breaks the camel's back. We must stay current so we can be slow to anger. Then Solomon says you need:

b. to maintain control of your actions while angry (16:32) What do we mean by controlling your temper? It doesn't mean not feeling the anger. It means the ability to feel the anger yet control your actions in a godly fashion. If you can literally rule over your spirit and control how you behave so that you please the Lord, you're better than a guy who can conquer a whole city. That would be easier. It means controlling your anger and refusing to let it rule your actions, rather than letting it control you and rule the way you respond. Along that same line, the goal is:

c. to maintain control of your mouth while angry (17:27) An even-tempered man is a man who can control his mouth, hold back words that would be spoken out of anger and choose the words God would have him to say. Think about Jesus, of whom it was said, "As a sheep before his shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth." What words would you and I have screamed out of our anger as we were beaten and crucified? Yet He spoke sparingly and only those words which were true and necessary to accomplish God's purpose. How many things have you and I said, only to realize later or even at the moment that they were not true; we really didn't mean them. We spoke out of anger. Controlling anger means controlling our words when we're angry. And it means:

d. to love enough to overlook minor offenses (19:11) A wise person is literally slow to anger and the beautiful and glorious thing about him is that he passes over transgressions. His goal is not to have his anger vindicated, to have someone apologize for every little thing that makes him feel angry. He's not looking out for #1 and making everybody acknowledge his rights. His focus is not on himself but on the other. And cares enough for the other to be willing to forget and overlook and forgive the small offenses that all of us commit toward one another daily. Peter said in **1 Pet. 4:8**, *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* When you love somebody, you don't hold every little thing against them and get angry over every mistake. I'm not saying you ignore the big things, the major things, the important things. Those need dealt with. But that multitude of things like being insensitive and leaving the toothpaste open and wearing your socks without permission and forgetting to buy that thing at the store, you know what I mean, don't you? If you let anger rise up over all that stuff, you'll never get done dealing with it. Love for the other needs to cover it, to pass it over in favor of the growth of the relationship which is more important.

Now as I've pointed out so often before, all of this is a tall order. You can walk out of here and say, "I'm going to control my anger from now on!" and by supper you'll have failed. It is not possible in your own strength to control your anger very well. So let me show you:

2. the only process by which it is possible As a believer you must:

a. know your identity: being controlled by anger is contrary to who you are in Christ, a left-over habit from who you used to be - Col. 3:7-10 It's a habit that belongs to the person you were before you met Christ, that person who was controlled by sin and had a habit of self-centered anger. But that's not who you are right now. You are a new person inside; you've been born again. There is a brand new spirit living in you. For anger and rage to control the way you act and talk is out of character! It's living like someone you're not! A left-over habit you don't need. So why do you do it? Well, your new life has an enemy.

b. know your enemy: it is an act produced by your flesh, the force of sin striving to rule your life through this habit - Gal. 5:19-20 Sin still lives in your body. It is a powerful force. You used to be its slave; you did what it wanted. You learned the habit of getting angry over things and using that to get what you wanted or to feel good. That's what we call the flesh. And that power of sin in you is still trying to get control by resurrecting an old habit, trying to get you to obey it still. But you:

c. know the source of power: the Holy Spirit produces control of anger when He rules a life - Gal. 5:22-23 When the Spirit controls you, when He rules your mind, you may have the emotion of anger, but you are not in con-

trol of words and actions, He is. And if He's running the show, you'll produce His fruit. You're going to be slow to get angry, you're going to do what He wants you to do and it will be godly. You're going to say what He wants said and it will be true and holy. So, the actual answer is really simple:

d. choose to submit to His control: when angry, choose to submit control to the Holy Spirit, not to anger - Gal. 5:16 When you sense feelings of anger rising up in you, immediately stop and submit to Him. Breathe a prayer. Say, "Holy Spirit, you know this anger I'm starting to feel. I don't want to blow it. But I know I can't control it. You are Almighty God. You take control of my mind, my mouth and my actions. I choose to act out of you and not out of my feelings."

It sounds simple but just do it. Make it your new habit. And you'll be amazed at what happens, how He controls your anger. After all that's how He is. *Num. 14:18, The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion....* That's how He'll make you to be when He's in control of you. I don't know how to make it any simpler so I'll let Corrie ten Boom say it like she used to: *I have a glove here in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, the glove can do many things. Thus, it is not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. The Christian is a glove. It is the Holy Spirit in us, the hand, who does the work. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled.* You want to control your anger? You want to be like Him? Only He can do it. All you can do is ask!

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About Relationships (VII): The Resolving Of Conflict

I think it's safe to generalize that there is no relationship involving a human being that is without conflict. Disagreement, arguing, and fighting have characterized the human race ever since Cain and Abel. From the brothers of Joseph to the disciples of Jesus, the Scriptures are filled with examples of it. It can range from a simple disagreement over what color to paint the room to shouting matches, to long-term feuds and grudges. It knows no age boundaries but afflicts the very young and the very old as well as everyone in between. It occurs in the family, in the workplace, at school, in the neighborhood and, sadly, even in the church. Dealing with conflict in relationships is something you can't escape short of heaven and the world is waking up to realize it. Managers in business are now sent to expensive seminars on Conflict Management and colleges and even seminaries teach courses on Conflict Resolution. But still one of the most helpful textbooks there is on the subject is the Book of Proverbs and I think you'll find Solomon's wisdom thoroughly up to date and applicable to your life. Let's start with:

I. Some General Principles About Conflict First let's note that:

1. God considers unity and harmony very precious and rare - Ps. 133 Unity, harmony, living together without conflict is good and pleasant. It is a precious and wonderful thing. It's as special as that unique anointing oil used on Aaron's head when he became high priest. There was nothing like it anywhere! It's like the heavy dew that is so welcome in a dry land. It is the key thing that Jesus prayed for in His High Priestly prayer in Jn. 17, that His followers might be brought to perfect unity in one! Yet it's also very rare, very hard to find. So much so that when you do find it, it is evidence of the presence of God at work. The resolving of conflict and restoration of unity is a goal toward which we must look and work because it is what God desires, what God delights in. Jesus said in *Matt 5:9, Blessed are the peace-makers [the conflict-resolvers], for they will be called sons of God.* That is, they are acting in God-like fashion, displaying His character. Therefore:

2. to intentionally invite conflict is both wrong and foolish (17:19) This verse is like *the love of money is the root of all evil*. It is not money itself but the attitude, the love of it, that's evil. Conflict is unavoidable and you can be the best, most peace-loving Christian in the world and still wind up in it through no fault of your own. Somebody may just decide to create a conflict with you for no reason! It is not wrong to find yourself involved in conflict; it is wrong to love it, to seek it out, to intentionally enter into it with wrong motives. Plus, it's foolish. It's like deliberately inviting pain and trouble into your life. The guy who builds the big fancy, elevated front entrance on his house is advertising the wealth that lies inside and inviting the thief to destroy it and break in. The person who goes looking for conflict is inviting eventual pain, suffering and destruction into their life. Paul advises us in *Rom. 12:18, If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* Maybe you can't avoid conflict from the other person's side but you can take care of your own. And *Heb. 12:14* strengthens it, *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy...* Do everything to avoid intentionally creating conflict with others. Then to resolve conflict we need to know that:

3. pride or self is the major root of conflict (13:10, 28:25) *Greedy is proud or arrogant* in other translations. In other words, the root of most conflict is "I want what I want!" "I want my way... I want that thing for me... I want you to admit I'm right... I want to do what I want to do and I don't want you to tell me about it..." Look at **James 4:1-3**. What's the root cause? "The Big I", self. Pride. That is often what drives the other person into conflict with you but you have to realize that it is also what often drives you into conflict with them!! *Frank Martin writes: "A church commissioned a member to paint a mural on the wall of the teen classroom. The finished picture, based on the creation story, was praised as a beautiful work of art--until someone took a close look and noticed that Adam sported a navel. Adam couldn't*

have had a navel,' the critic exclaimed. 'He wasn't born, he was created.' Most fellow parishioners thought the objection was silly and not worth bringing up to the well-intentioned artist. 'Besides, maybe God created Adam with a navel,' someone suggested. 'We have no way of knowing.' The idea of changing the painting was vetoed, and most members assumed the issue had been resolved, but it was only the beginning. Navelgate had begun. Soon camps formed and polarized over the issue. 'Why can't we just change the painting?' was the cry from one side. 'You know we're right; you just want to keep it up because you know how much it bothers us.' 'What's the big deal?' answered the others. 'Altering the mural would be a waste of time and energy.' The conflict escalated into something bigger than anyone had expected, until the church's leaders were finally forced to step in and mediate. When the artist was asked her opinion, the solution came back laughably simple: 'I'll just paint another leaf on the bush that already covers most of Adam.' A leaf was painted to cover Adam's navel area, and the controversy soon drifted into the nether regions of the congregation's collective memory." [Youthworker, Sum 1995, Page 111.] Does that sound like anything that happens in your family? It's so simple to see it when it's about a ridiculous thing like this but in most matters it's so hard to see. That I, that self, in ME is the root cause of much of the conflict I have. It's a heart matter. And that I, that self, in the other person is often what is in conflict with me, even if I manage to get mine out of the way! So true conflict resolution is not just problem-solving, it is not simply painting another leaf, finding some simple way to get agreement. Just wait until the next time that church wants to put in new carpet and goes to decide on the color! Don't mistake problem-solving for resolution. Full resolution involves God changing the pride of hearts, both mine and the other person's! And another thing to remember:

4. it is much easier to prevent conflict than to resolve it (18:19) Once the conflict is up and running, once someone's been offended, the lines are drawn, the feelings hurt, the walls of self-defense up, and it's a difficult, painful, and sometimes impossible process to tear them down again. It's a whole lot easier to do everything you can to prevent conflict from ever getting started in the first place. So, let's talk about that for a while:

II. Some Principles To Help You Prevent Becoming Involved In Conflict (20:3) A person who does not quickly dive into conflict, who can cease and be still first and find a way to prevent it, is worthy of honor. How do you do that?

1. ask for grace to drop small matters before they become conflicts (17:14) You know how it is when you make a hole in a dam, don't you? The trickle quickly becomes a torrent and then the whole thing breaks open. You can take a small matter and escalate it into a full-scale argument in a matter of moments. But you could also choose to drop it, to let it go. You could choose to **give up your need to be right**, to win the discussion, to prove your point! We're not talking here about matters of moral principle or right and wrong. We're talking about, "You said this...No I didn't, I said this...Well, that's not what I heard...Well, you don't hear too well..." Does that happen at your house too? Many of our conflicts could be stopped before we start if we'd just stop, realize the matter isn't worth arguing about, and breathe a prayer for strength to let it go and be quiet. Along the same line:

2. ask for grace to overlook small offenses before they become conflicts (19:11) A lot of the things that people do that bother us or offend us, even wrong us in small ways could simply be overlooked in love for the other person. Chuck Norris is an actor and martial arts expert; he stars in Walker, Texas Ranger. While filming his television series, after work one day he stopped to have something to drink. He was alone. As he was relaxing in a corner booth, a big man walked up and said in an irritated tone that Norris was sitting in HIS booth. Norris says, "I didn't like his tone or his implicit threat, but I said nothing and moved to another booth. A few minutes later, though, the big fellow headed back in my direction. 'Here it comes,' I thought, 'a local tough out to make a name for himself by taking on Chuck Norris in a fight.' When he arrived at my new booth, he looked directly at me. 'You're Chuck Norris,' he said. I nodded. 'You could have whipped my butt back there a few minutes ago,' he said. 'Why didn't you?' 'What would it have proved?' I asked. He thought that over for a moment and then offered me his hand. 'No hard feelings?' he said. 'None,' I said and shook his hand. I had avoided a confrontation and made a friend. I won by losing." [Reader's Digest, Mar 1996. Page 37.] See, we have this need to be vindicated when somebody cuts in line ahead of us or takes what we wanted for ourselves. But we could choose in the smaller things to drop it, to **give up our need to be vindicated**, to have everything right and fair and get the justice due to us. Again, many of our conflicts could be stopped before we start if we'd just stop, realize the offense isn't worth the conflict that will follow, and breathe a prayer for strength to let it go and be quiet. Thirdly, to prevent conflicts we need to:

3. be careful about becoming involved in personal conflict that is not yours (26:17) There are times when you have to get involved in conflicts between other people. You get involved because you're a pastor or a counselor or an elder in the church or a family member or the Lord really lays it on your heart that you must! But sometimes we get involved by sticking our noses in where they don't belong, because we have this self-centered need to "fix things" for others. Solomon says it's like grabbing an angry dog by both ears. Hang on and don't let go! You're almost certain to get bit! It's like Moses separating the two fighting Hebrews who both turn on him and say, "Who made you judge and jury!" You'll be in less conflict if you **give up your need to "fix things" for others** and trust the Lord to deal with it in His time and His way and through the persons to whom it really belongs.

But inevitably, no matter how hard you work to prevent unnecessary conflicts, you will end up in some. Guaranteed. So, Solomon also gives:

III. Some Suggestions To Help You Through Conflict To Resolution When you find yourself in conflict with someone, what do you do? First:

1. ask for grace to control your anger (15:18) The first emotion you're likely to have is anger and we already learned that anger will get you nowhere. You can't "anger" somebody into resolving a conflict; it will only escalate it. So you pray; you ask God for grace; you pray for the Holy Spirit to take control of your emotions and calm your anger. Not only will that help you in the next steps but it will help the other person to stay calm too. Then:

2. gather as much information from all sides as possible (18:17) Isn't that true? When your kids argue, isn't it easy to side with the one who comes first and says, "Dad, Suzy hit me." Until you talk to Suzy and find out that Sammy tripped her first. But then you ask further and find out... We all make our own case look good and I have to realize that I, yes me, the grown adult, do the same. I get foggy in my thinking and become convinced I'm right when the facts may be otherwise. I'm usually blind to my own sin. I need to genuinely listen to the other person and their feelings and their point and their perceptions of how I acted. I may need to find another party who was there and get their perception and be prepared to receive the truth, whatever it is. Truth needs to matter to me more than being right! Then:

3. seek God's perspective on the matter with an open heart (18:18) In the Old Testament they had an option we don't have. The High Priest had a breastplate which contained the Urim and Thummim, the holy lots through which they could inquire of God. They could pray and ask God, then cast the dice or flip the coin or whatever they actually were and whichever way they landed was the Lord's will. And they lived with the outcome. We don't have that privilege. We can't flip a coin and know the mind of God. But we can search His Word with an open heart. We can seek His face in prayer and ask Him to create the thinking of Christ in us about the matter and ask Him to do the same in the other person. We can ask God to show us how He sees it, to reveal our true motives and the motives of the other. And while we're at it you can:

4. ask God to purge your heart of all desire for revenge (20:22) The hardest thing for any of us to admit is that when there is conflict and we've been hurt, there's a piece of us that wants to hurt back, to get even. We want to make the other feel the same pain they've inflicted on us. And that needs to go. That right doesn't belong to you; it belongs to God. Leave it with Him. Trust justice to Him. And ask Him to purge all of that out of your heart. Then:

5. honestly consider and evaluate your own position and actions (21:29) Look at what you've done, the things you've said, the actions you've taken. The person is practicing evil who says, "I'm right at all costs, no matter what" and wins simply by bold stubbornness. The upright man who really wants truth looks and evaluates what he thinks, the conclusions he's come to, the actions he's taken to make sure that they are upright and godly. And he's willing to change or to repent and ask forgiveness if he needs to. Plus, he carefully considers the steps he's about to take before taking them. *A traveler, between flights at an airport, went to a lounge and bought a small package of cookies. Then she sat down and began reading a newspaper. Gradually, she became aware of a rustling noise. From behind her paper, she was flabbergasted to see a neatly dressed man helping himself to her cookies. Not wanting to make a scene, she leaned over and took a cookie herself. A minute or two passed, and then came more rustling. He was helping himself to another cookie! By this time, they had come to the end of the package, but she was so angry she didn't dare allow herself to say anything. Then, as if to add insult to injury, the man broke the remaining cookie in two, pushed half across to her, and ate the other half and left. Still fuming sometime later when her flight was announced, the woman opened her handbag to get her ticket. To her shock and embarrassment, there she found her pack of unopened cookies! How wrong our assumptions can be. [John Ross Cranleigh in Leadership-Vol. 12, #2].* What she had perceived on his part as a gross offense was actually an act of kindness and what she had perceived on her own part as graciousness was actually gross presumption! Why? Because she looked at his ways but not her own. It's the last place we look. We quickly evaluate what's wrong with the other but never ourselves, unless we're wise like God wants us to be. Now here are two final things to guard against in the process of trying to resolve a conflict with someone.

6. be careful to guard confidential information in the process (25:9-10) You know how when you're in the middle of an argument you're tempted to pull out and use everything you know as ammunition? You get intense and out it comes, "Well, so and so told me you said... or that they saw you.... or so and so has this problem and they did this..." And the next thing you know, out comes sensitive confidential stuff and you've shared the other person's secret or got them in trouble. And now this person has it in for them or confronts them or spreads it but it's YOUR reputation and integrity that's ruined! Solomon warns us to be careful in our conflicts about betraying confidences! And then he advises this:

7. keep the circle of involvement as small as is feasible (26:20) The other tendency when there's conflict is to build sides, in your hurt or anger to tell others and get them on board to agree with you and make you feel better. And soon more people are involved and talking about it. Just like the painting with the navel! Now godliness may demand that you involve others; it may be necessary. But in general, the less people you have talking about it and gossiping about it, the easier the conflict dies a natural death. So, keep the circle appropriately small.

Now, I wonder if you've noticed something very blatant here. All these steps in resolving conflict involve your own heart, not the other person, don't they? You see, conflict resolution is not about fixing the other person, about changing them. It is about being the person I'm to be, making sure I reflect the character of God in my thoughts, actions and responses and then trusting God to settle the conflict as He wills. That's not my responsibility. God is the resolver, not me. I simply walk through it living His life and let Him care for the circumstances and change what needs changed in other people! I'm not saying the conflict will go away, but if He's living freely through me on my part then the conflict is between God and that other person, not me! God reassured Samuel in *1Sam 8:7*, *...it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me...* My goal is not to eliminate the conflict but to get myself out of the way and turn the conflict from a horizontal one to a vertical one. If my heart is right and I'm walking obediently in love and grace and the other can't be changed by that then they find themselves opposing God. And I know who wins that battle! I will freely admit that we could talk about some other, more mechanical principles like, be the first one to go to the other or speak the truth in love and so on. But I guarantee that if you'll honestly search your heart and walk humbly with God, the rest will all be plain. That's all you'll need. If we'd all practice it, there would be a lot less conflict in the world, in the church and in our lives!

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom For Families (I): On Being A Godly Wife

Today we move on in our series in Proverbs from what Solomon had to say about relationships in general to what he had to say specifically about family relationships. I thought that I would start with the wives. And I want you to know that the reason is not because I'm a man. You realize that next Sunday is Mother's Day and some of you, I'm sure, have thought that I'm preaching to wives a week early. The reason is that I was confident that it would be a special gift to you wives to have me preach to your husbands on Mother's Day and remind them of their responsibilities to you! Am I right? OK, so today I want to talk particularly with you married women (everybody else can listen in too). Solomon noticed that along the continuum of all the wives he'd seen, they fell between two extremes which you'll see in **12:4** There are wives who display noble character and those who cause shame.

I. The Qualities Of A Wife Of Noble Character (12:4a) The Hebrew word translated *noble* here has a variety of meanings: *firm, strong, able, worthy, honorable*, which is why the KJV goes with *virtuous* when it refers to a woman. The ideal woman who is firm and strong and capable and all these things, the one who should be honored and looked up to, she is a crown to her husband. And where do you find a wife like that? **Prov. 31:10**. She's a rare person! And Solomon should know, he married 700 of them! Though to be honest just between you and me, I have a whole lot harder time finding husbands of noble character than I do wives! But the serious point is that to be married to a wife like this, a wife of noble character, a wife who "wife's it" the way God intended, is the greatest blessing known to man on the face of this earth after salvation! To have a spouse who is loving God and bearing His image and pouring all of that out diligently toward you is worth more than all the gold and gems in the world. It meets the need of your soul! So, what does that ideal wife look like that I want to become? This passage lists eight important qualities.

1. she is committed to her husband (11-12) Her husband has a full and complete confidence in her that is well-placed because she is trustworthy; she is committed to him with all her heart. Back in chapter 7 we met a wife who said, *My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!* - *Prov 7:18-20*. That husband's trust was ill-placed. She was hurting him when his back was turned. But not the virtuous wife. Not only would she not think of betraying her marriage vows, but her heart is toward her husband in everything she does. She's not cutting him down, undermining him, trying to control him to do what she wants. She does him good, never harm, never hurt, never evil. She's not in the marriage to selfishly get her needs met by him; her heart is committed to him fully and completely, to being the wife he needs to become the man God created him to be. Her world is wrapped up in him. And I'm very fortunate to have a wife who is like that toward me! The heart of her husband can safely trust in her! She'll never do a thing to hurt him. She's committed, mind, emotions and will! Her intent toward him is always good and that's the heart of the concept of that excellent wife. She's committed to her husband. Then:

2. she is consistent in her responsibilities (13-14) In that culture, as in many cultures today, it was normal for the wife to be involved in weaving cloth and sewing clothing out of wool and linen. And since Acme and Genuardi's had not yet gotten any coupons printed, thrifty women normally had to go every day to the open-air market to bring home the day's food for preparation. Today we buy pre-made clothes and prepackaged groceries that last for weeks. The point is not what she did, but how she did it. She works with "eager hands", literally "with the delight of her hands". She doesn't just bring home the same old lentils and porridge every day from the market, but tries to bring home exotic and tasty things her family will enjoy! She takes joy in fulfilling her responsibilities in the marriage and family and carries them out thoroughly. She's consistent. You can count on her. Her heart is in the things she does every day. Then notice:

3. she is careful in her business (15-19, 24) For years we've had the notion that the biblical picture is that the woman stays home, has kids and takes care of them while the man goes off and earns a living. But that isn't exactly so. This ideal woman is a business woman! She has earnings of her own, buys a field and plants a vineyard. She trades in

the market and makes a profit. It is probably true that our day is not unique. Life has always been hard and in most cultures, women have almost always had to enter into the process of earning a living together with their husbands in whatever way they could, either making things at home to sell or entering into business ventures of their own. Priscilla was in the tent-making business together with her husband Aquila and Paul joined them. Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. Luke tells us a group of women followed Jesus and his disciples about and supported them out of their own means. It is quite a normal thing for wives to be involved in the process of earning family income but not to the neglect of their families for their career. The point here however is that this ideal woman is careful and prudent. She makes good use of her time. She gets up early to care for her family's needs before getting into the business of the day. She is not content just to do whatever comes to hand but plans carefully and considers well before she enters a venture and makes sure that it's profitable, that her wares sell for a price that will bring a fair profit. She plans ahead. Her lamp does not go out at night, not because she stays up late, but because she always buys the oil ahead of time and doesn't run out like the foolish virgins in the parable. She is skilled and capable, careful, prudent, wise, not simply a domestic servant for her husband but a true partner in life. Then we find that:

4. she is concerned for others (20) It is not only her own affairs she cares for. She has a heart like God's. She sees the poor and the needy in their suffering and she can't say, "I only care about our needs". She reaches out; she gives. She makes a meal; she gives clothing; she gives of her time and is willing to part with some of her hard-earned money because she is moved by the needs of others and has compassion when they suffer. However, in the midst of being carefully involved in earning a living and caring about the needs all around her:

5. she is committed to her family (21-23, 27) She makes sure they have warm clothing to wear and blankets for their beds. She sees that she herself is dressed appropriately. Her own conduct and reputation is such in the community that it honors and elevates her husband in the eyes of the people and he becomes noted because of her. What I'm saying is encapsulated in **14:1**. The ideal woman is always doing what builds her house, what honors and supports her husband's leadership, what meets the needs of her children and trains them up in a godly fashion. She never makes choices that tear down her family. She never elevates herself or her career or her needs and wants to a place where it tears down and hurts the family structure. Family is a core value for her in all she does. Most of us listened to Lois Mason preach this for years. She was a teacher, a principal, a college professor; she taught Bible classes up and down this valley and was one of the busiest women you'd ever meet. But she always preached it plainly to the younger ladies: family comes first! I see it time and again in women who are truly successful, no matter how involved they are in other things, somehow they make a choice that family is always the priority and they stick to it. Then we read that:

6. she is confident in her future (25) That doesn't mean she's cocky and self-dependent. It does mean she's not a worrier. She's not sitting around crying the blues about the days to come and the problems that will be. Instead of being a poor, pitiful, worried creature, she faces her future with confidence that is ultimately born out of what we'll read in just a moment, her trust in the Lord. But first note that:

7. she is careful in her communication (26) The ideal woman has a controlled tongue. She is not a gossip or a busybody. When she speaks, she speaks carefully, with wisdom, with God's viewpoint. And she uses that wisdom to discipline others. She's always instructing whether it's teaching her own children or giving wise counsel to other women. Paul says, *Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.* - *Titus 2:3-4*. The wise woman multiplies herself, replicates herself, by being careful to communicate right values, right thinking to the other women in her life. And then most importantly, the ideal woman:

8. she is committed to her Lord (30) On the TV they try to sell you the idea that beauty is what makes a woman, that a shapely body and romantic charm and elegance are the female ideal. But it's all a lie. Charm is deceptive; it's a cover often used to manipulate. Beauty doesn't last. Older people always tell me, "Don't get old!" But as hard as you try you can't help it. An ancient Arabic proverb says that marriage starts out with a prince kissing an angel but ends up with a bald-headed man staring across the table at a fat woman. The ideal woman is not possessed with her appearance; she knows it won't last. Her heart is focused on a relationship with the Lord. Peter says, *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.* - *1 Pet. 3:3-4*. There is nothing more beautiful than a woman whose heart is in love with Jesus and whose character and behavior mirrors His. She is a crown to her husband, the joy of his life.

That's the wife of noble character and I realize that she's a mythical person. The rest of us are real and have feet of clay and struggle hard in many of these areas to be what God wants us to be. But at least we see the goal that we're shooting for; we know what we want to be and what we need to beg God to make us. But on the other hand, 12:4 mentions the other end of the spectrum.

II. The Qualities Of A Wife Who Causes Her Husband Shame (12:4b) Now what would that kind of wife look like? Well, Solomon mentions three particular flaws wives ought to avoid. The disgraceful wife:

1. she manipulates by appearance (11:22) She has beauty and she uses it unwisely, without discretion. Even inside marriage, she doesn't see her beauty as a gift to be shared with her husband, but as a tool to get what she wants. She may use his romantic desire for her to lure him into doing what she wants, to giving in and doing things her way. "Oh, sweetheart, you know how much I love you, mmm...mmm..." And soon he's so worked up he'd jump off a tall building for her. Or she may try the opposite: "You're going to be a lonely boy if you don't...." Manipulation by appearance; it's as old as Solomon and a disgrace to the godly woman. You can read what Solomon calls the woman who does this. Secondly the disgraceful wife:

2. she manipulates by argument This must be a common flaw because Solomon mentions it repeatedly. Let's read the list: **(19:13, 21:9, exact repeat 25:24, 27:15-16)** Call it badgering, call it nagging, call it argument or contention or yelling. She moves her husband to do what she wants with her mouth. She complains until she gets action. He acts just to shut her up. Instead of true communication and listening to one another, life is a war to see who wins, whose way gets followed, who's in control. Now I know you would never be like that, but I have met a few wives (and husbands) who operate that way! It's a strong temptation to all of us but it's not God's way. And connected with that, this disgraceful wife:

3. she manipulates by anger (21:19) An angry wife is a wife who uses her anger as a tool to bludgeon her husband into submission and whose husband spends his time trying to appease her and keep her from being angry. Again, not a very good basis for relationship, is it?

Let me sum up the difference. A disgraceful wife is driven by self. A wife of noble character is driven by her relationship with the Lord to serve her husband and her family. She's a crown for his head instead of an ache in his heel. You have to decide which you want to be. *Dr. E. V. Hill, a dynamic black minister who serves as senior pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles, lost his wife, Jane, to cancer a few years ago. At her funeral, Dr. Hill described some of the ways she had made him a better man. As a struggling young preacher, E. V. had trouble earning a living. E. V. came home one night and found the house dark. When he opened the door, he saw that Jane had prepared a candlelight dinner for two. He thought that was a great idea and went into the bathroom to wash his hands. He tried unsuccessfully to turn on the light. Then he felt his way into the bedroom and flipped another switch. Darkness prevailed. The young pastor went back to the dining room and asked Jane why the electricity was off. She began to cry. "You work so hard, and we're trying," said Jane, "but it's pretty rough. I didn't have enough money to pay the light bill. I didn't want you to know about it, so I thought we would just eat by candlelight." Dr. Hill described his wife's words with intense emotion: "She could have said, 'I've never been in this situation before. I was reared in the home of Dr. Caruthers, and we never had our lights cut off.' She could have broken my spirit; she could have ruined me; she could have demoralized me. But instead, she said, 'Somehow or other we'll get these lights back on. But tonight, let's eat by candlelight.' E. V. continued, 'She was my protector. Some years ago, I received quite a few death threats, and one night I received notice that I would be killed the next day. I woke up thankful to be alive, but I noticed that she was gone. I looked out the window and my car was gone. I went outside, and finally, saw her driving up. I said, 'Where have you been?' She said, 'I...I...it just occurred to me that they could have put a bomb in that car last night, and if you had gotten in there you would have been blown away. So I got up and drove it. It's all right.'"* [Dr. James Dobson's monthly letter to Focus on the Family supporters, Feb 1995. Page 3.] That's one incredible lady. But so are many of you right here. I'm married to one. Yet I also know that we're human and we fall into those flaws many times too. Ladies, let's ask God to make us by His power and grace women that reflect the love and character of Jesus Christ to our families and to the world.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing the Pressures Of Life Wisdom For Families (II): On Being A Godly Husband

Husbands, I warned you last week that I was going to speak to you today. I know you've all been running around frantically for a day or two trying to figure out what to get or to do for your wife for Mother's Day. Well, dinners out are nice and jewelry sure does make her look beautiful and flowers are always appropriate. But if you give her what I'm going to talk about today, you'll give her a gift that will last a lifetime and will mean far more to her than any of those things. Give her the gift of being a godly husband. Paul had one basic command for husbands: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy.... husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. - Eph. 5:25-26.* Now we all say, "Of course, I love my wife!" The question is, how do we demonstrate it? Well, let's just let Solomon show us what love for a wife looks like when you flesh it out in life. First, let's consider:

I. The Attitude Of A Godly Husband Toward His Wife *Socrates reportedly warned his students to be careful to marry a good wife. Otherwise, he said, "if you get a bad wife, you'll become a philosopher."* Do you get the subtle put-down there? You know, men are notorious for making statements like that, particularly to one another. We are constantly putting down our wives in small ways, implying that they control our lives, that they don't understand anything mechanical, that they are

always paranoid and worrying about everything, just so we can feel smug and superior. I had to apologize to LuAnn last week. Our car needed a repair to the brakes and the mechanic suggested some optional work that could be done while he was in the process. I said no originally based on the bill, but LuAnn said she'd feel much safer if the whole thing was taken care of. So I called back and told him to go ahead with it and said something like, "Yeah, I didn't want to spend the money but my wife got all paranoid about it; you know how it is...!" And she heard me!!! You men are only laughing because you've done it a million times and just haven't got caught! Well, a godly husband has the exact opposite, a tremendous attitude of appreciation and respect for his wife.

1. he recognizes that she is a gift from God (18:22) A wife is a wonderful gift, a fantastic blessing from God. It is so popular today to portray it just the opposite, that to have a wife is a drag, a hindrance, a negative thing. But nothing could be further from the truth. Men, to have a loving wife to share your life with is a special gift from God that many men long to have. Now I'll admit that not every wife is such a gift. Ahab certainly wasn't blessed much by having Jezebel but the full meaning is in **(19:14)** You can get money and success all kinds of ways; most people can even manage somehow to find someone who will marry them but if you have a godly wife, a wife of noble character like we talked about last week, only the Lord can make a woman like that and you have received an incredible gift. So, a godly husband recognizes that he's received an incredible treasure in his life and:

2. he rejoices in her continually (5:18) That's not a wish; it's an imperative, a command. Rejoice, exult, celebrate because of the wife you married! Yeah, she's got some flaws but you're no prize catch either! If you've got a wife who's dedicated and devoted to you with all her heart, you ought to be thanking God for her; you ought to be happy to see her; you ought to talk about her that way. She's the joy of your life. The godly husband rejoices in the wife he's got and:

3. he rejects any thought of unfaithfulness (5:19b-20) He is so taken, so captivated by his wife's love that he won't even consider being captivated and led astray into sin with another woman. And not only doesn't the godly husband physically commit adultery, he doesn't stare at other women and revel in lustful thoughts toward them at the pool or the beach. He doesn't rent those movies with the explicit sexual material to enjoy and he changes the channel when a steamy bed scene comes on a TV show. He doesn't look at those magazines at the newsstand while he's waiting, nor does his work area have a pin-up calendar like some of the other guys'. He doesn't even engage in suggestive and lewd conversation. His thoughts are for one woman only; the one he loves, the one he married, and he doesn't cheapen that relationship by entertaining even a thought of someone else. God has a strong warning for us men in **Mal. 2:15**, *Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his.... So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.* The temptation is great. We live in a sex-crazed society; it's all around us and it creeps in. Guard yourself in your spirit! Don't break faith with her in your mind. Think about nobody but the wife God has given you. Want nobody but her. Rejoice in her. Thank God for the gift she is. Value her uniquely above all other people in your life. That should be the continual attitude that we husbands display!

But you know, even if we have hearts that are focused only on our wife and we do value her alone, we can still make her life very difficult through wrong behavior as a husband and that's why I'd like to take you back to chapter 31 and look at:

II. The Behavior Of A Godly Husband Toward His Wife - 31:10-31 You're thinking, wait a minute, this passage is for the wives! Look again! This passage extols the wonderful qualities of the ideal wife but the punchline of it is that the husband and children are to respond and do something. These verses are a Hebrew acrostic poem in which each verse starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Traditionally it was recited by the Jews on Friday nights at the Sabbath meal by the husband or children as a tribute of appreciation to the wife! The qualities of the godly wife are meant to be responded to by the godly husband! Now how does he respond? Well, for one thing:

1. he has complete confidence in her (11-12) He knows her faithful character, her singleheartedness toward him and he trusts her; he has full confidence in her. He is not jealous of her every time another man talks to her at church or when she mentions the name of a man she works with. He is not suspicious of where she's been and who she's been with and what she's been doing and isn't always demanding an accounting from her. That kind of control is intimidating and smothering and makes a marriage feel to her more like slavery than a choice of the heart, yet how many men are exactly like that, threatened by the prospect of their own inferiority or puffed up by their selfish pride to try to control their wife instead of trusting her heart and releasing her to live in the true freedom of mutual love! Then, the godly husband:

2. he doesn't deflect the burden of responsibility onto her (13-15) Yes, she's a go-getter. She delights in her work and works hard. But her husband is not content to roll over and watch her do it! He recognizes that he has an ultimate responsibility for the family's needs and is not willing to deflect that burden onto her as long as unless he is sick or in some other inescapable circumstance. Paul warns us clearly, *If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* - **1 Tim. 5:8**. Look with me at: **2 Thes. 3:7-12**. This isn't saying you should be a workaholic, that you should work night and day and neglect your family like many men do, then and now. It's saying you shouldn't be a laza-holic and sit back and let everybody else work and live off the fruits of their labors and that's particularly true of your industrious hard-working wife! Now you say, "Yes brother, preach it! I work hard and bring home a steady paycheck..." OK and then what? Do you plop into your

easy chair while she cooks supper, does the dishes, sweeps the carpets, does the wash, tends the kids and changes the baby's diaper and then ask her to bring you a glass of soda? I've heard men brag, "I never changed a diaper; I never washed a dish!" That's not manly; it's sick and selfish! A godly man never sees himself being above his wife, never sees her burden of responsibility as lasting from 7AM to 10 PM while his is 9 to 5! The old adage, "a man works from sun to sun but woman's work is never done," hasn't done us any favors. Whatever family needs remain after you get home or you both get home are shared responsibilities. You need to honor her hard-working spirit by sharing together in it. Thirdly, the godly husband:

3. he affirms her gifts and abilities and allows her to develop (16-18) She has all this going on, is displaying all these abilities and what does her husband do? Well, some husbands would stifle and discourage her and complain repeatedly if their routine was disturbed in the least. But a godly husband would affirm her and encourage her and praise her and give her opportunities to use the abilities God has gifted her with, instead of trying to hold her selfishly back. Then:

4. he affirms and shares her kindness to others (20) She's generous and what's her husband doing? Do you have any idea how many wives are filled with generosity but are stifled from giving or helping others because their husbands are stingy? How many wives want to tithe their income to the Lord but their husbands won't hear of it? How many times wives want to help and participate in some important and meaningful project that God has going, but they have to stay home so as not to upset their husbands. A godly husband is glad that his wife is kind and generous and shares those values with her. He praises her for it. In fact, he leads her along in that direction! And then we come to verse 23:

5. he models toward her the character of an elder (23) Now I've had several women ask me, "What's the deal? The wife works her fingers to the bone and the husband sits all day with the boys at the gate? What do those guys do out there at the gate, anyway?" Well, let me assure you that the gate is NOT the Old Testament equivalent of the local tavern or sports bar! Some ancient villages and small cities were enclosed with a wall for protection and had a single gate. Everybody owned fields where they grew food and crops outside the wall, but their house was inside. It was natural for a majority of inhabitants to have to pass through that gate each day. Often the town market was just inside the gate, making it easy for those bringing produce to sell. So, the gate was a natural place for a gathering. The elders, the older, respected, highly regarded men of the city could be gathered together as they passed in and out, either to witness a business transaction, a transfer of deeds or titles or to judge a dispute. Boaz, when he wanted to marry Ruth and redeem her property, went and sat down at the gate and waited until he had gathered 10 of the elders who passed by to witness the transaction. In other words, the godly husband is not a guy who passes time sitting at the gate; he's the one with a highly respected character in the community who is asked to stop and give his input in these important things. And the point is that he ought to be displaying that godly, wise, mature character to his wife at home as well. He ought to be a guide to her, someone she can trust and look to for wisdom and balance and purity, someone who makes godly and wise decisions, and always chooses what is right over what is easy, someone who can help to purify her by the washing of the water of the Word, not by quoting it to her, but by living it out before her and towards her. A godly wife deserves a godly husband as her lover and leader in life! And here's a tough one for men to swallow:

6. he listens to her and values her input (26) The ideal wife speaks with wisdom and the godly person is humble enough to listen to her! He is just bold enough to believe that God can speak to him through his wife! We go through this all the time. LuAnn says, "The car's making a funny noise." I say, "Ah, it's nothing. I drove it and didn't hear it." and I get around to looking at it a month later or it breaks down and have to say "Oops, you were right! And the real deal is that I need to humble myself and my male ego to admit that she has wisdom and can give input that I need even in areas that I regard as "mine"! Husbands, listen to your wives! They have a lot of important and legitimate things to say. We need to hear them, not just about cars, but about life! And then finally, the godly husband:

7. he praises her (28-31) First:

a. he compliments her directly (28) The Hebrew word translated *praise* here can have two meanings. It is *hallel* from which we get *hallelujah*, an expression which means, "Praise Jehovah" and we say it directly to him. Husbands, you can't expect your wives to just assume or know somehow what you think about them. You have to tell them. You can't just say, "I told you I loved you 20 years ago and if anything changes, I'll let you know!" The godly husband compliments his wife; he tells her how he feels about all these qualities we've listed. He says thanks after a good meal and tells her how beautiful she looks when she dresses up. He tells her he's proud of her when she accomplishes something and how appreciative he is of her support and encouragement. But the same word also has a second meaning, *to boast*. So:

b. he boasts of her to others He rises up and praises her to other people. He brags on her, if you will, not in a sinful kind of way but in a sincere, genuine way. When he talks about her to others; he tells the good things about her; he praises the godly life she's living and all she means to him. Further, when he praises her to her face, here's what he tells her:

c. he extols her unique value to him (29) Now obviously, if all us men tell our wives, "You are the most beautiful, most wonderful woman on earth!", all of us are lying!" Obviously not every woman can be better than all other women. The point is that every wife needs to know that she is uniquely valuable to her husband, that she matters more to him, that she is more important in his eyes, that of all the other women he's ever met he's still glad that he's chosen her and that he wouldn't have it any other way. She needs to have you verify her uniqueness and specialness in your life. And when he praises her:

d. he emphasizes her spiritual beauty (30) You can tell her she's gorgeous and describe the softness of her hair and the beauty of her smile and all that other good Song of Solomon kind of stuff, and that's great; there's a time for that, but in the long run it will mean more to her for you to compliment her for her mind, her character and her spirituality. There will always be somebody better looking around, and moreso the older you get, but to know your partner values you for who you really are, for your person and not just your appearance, is a precious thing. Am I right, ladies? And finally:

e. he praises her publicly (31) When her husband is out there doing all his important eldering stuff at the gate, he regularly and publicly mentions his godly wonderful wife and praises her. He happily gives testimony and the result is that she is known in the same way he is! She is respected and honored in that entire community of faith along with him more so because of her godly character!

Now about this time, some of us, and maybe all of us, men are scratching our heads, saying, "Man, what a tall order!" Maybe some of us are convicted of areas in our marriages where we haven't been very godly. Maybe we're all discovering that we need to learn to love our wives more. And maybe some are discouraged by their failures. Well, let me encourage and give you hope. God is very liberal with second chances. You can start right now, today, right where you are, to ask God to build into you that love and godly character toward your wife. *Bob Moeller* wrote a fitting conclusion for us. He says: *"I never met my grandmother. She died on the dusty lonely plains when my father was 17 years old. Yet my father credits her with pointing him toward God. A few summers ago, when I attended a large family reunion, I heard some unknown history about my grandmother, now gone for over 50 years. She had been a mail-order bride. My grandfather was homesteading on the prairie where there were very few women. She had answered an advertisement he had placed in the paper. My sisters filled in the last part of the story. As my grandfather was dying, he asked everyone to leave the room except my two oldest sisters. He was then 89, a widower for nearly 30 years. 'Do you know why I never remarried?' he asked in a raspy voice. The two young girls shook their heads no. 'Because when you grandmother died, I realized I could never love another woman as much as I loved her.' Then Bob adds this challenge: 'If my grandfather and grandmother began their marriage through a mail-order arrangement and yet learned to love each other that deeply, who's to say that God can't do something just as extraordinary in your marriage? If, like Jacob and Leah, you started out all wrong, who's to say God can't use your relationship to bless not only your lives but future generations as well?'" [Christian Reader, Sep/Oct 1994. Page 74.]*

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom For Families (III): On Being A Godly Parent

These last two weeks we've looked at what Solomon had to say to wives and to husbands about their roles in the family. I'm sure you realize that we could spend many weeks looking at all that the Bible has to say about each of these subjects and that these brief studies are not intended to be exhaustive in any sense. That's very true of our subject this morning. What mortal could give a lecture on "All You Need To Know About Parenting" in 30 minutes! It's an extremely complicated subject and our library is filled with good books on the subject. Even Solomon has no extensive treatise on the subject, but merely a few verses that point at key responsibilities that parents have toward their children. I found four of them so let's look at one at a time. First of all:

I. Parents Should Purposefully Direct Their Children (22:6) This is that famous verse we all know and quote but it will really help us to understand the Hebrew of this verse. The word *train up* comes from a Hebrew root which means *to start* [NIV margin], *inaugurate*, or *dedicate*. It is the root of *Hanukkah*, the feast of Dedication of the Temple. In every other place it occurs in Scripture it is used in relation to a physical structure, *to dedicate the Temple, a house, a wall of Jerusalem, etc.* This is the one place where it is used of a person. A rough translation would be: Start a person down the right path and he'll get to the proper destination. Start a child in the proper direction when he is young and when he is older it is likely that he will not turn away in some other direction. Parents, we are direction-setters! The thought patterns and values and examples we lay for our children in the early years of their lives when they are under our care create a groove of life-patterns for them to run in that will take them in the direction of a righteous life. Now notice that:

1. it is a command, not an option The tense here is imperative. It is a command, a responsibility for which parents were created. It is so fashionable among the "educationally enlightened" to espouse the idea of being non-directive, letting the child experience a wide variety of things and make all his own choices. *Bill Peel* writes: *"William Coleridge once spoke with a man who did not believe in teaching children values. His theory was that the child's mind should not be prejudiced in any direction, so that he could choose his opinions for himself. The great poet said nothing in re-*

sponse but asked if his visitor would like to see his garden. The man said he would, and Coleridge took him to the garden where only weeds were growing. The man looked at Coleridge in surprise and said, 'Why, this is not a garden! There's nothing but weeds here!' 'Well, you see,' answered Coleridge, 'I didn't want to infringe upon the liberty of the garden in any way. I was giving the garden a chance to express itself and choose its own production.' If we want the garden of our children's minds to grow more than 'weeds,' we must tend it well by teaching them values. That means more than pouring the Ten Commandments into their heads. It is penetrating their hearts with spiritual truth. It's consistently living out the values we want our children to embrace." [Kindred Spirit, Autumn 1995. Page 5.] Whatever direction we start them in, they will likely go, but it's our responsibility to see that that direction is toward a deep personal walk with the Lord Jesus. However, please understand that:

2. it is a principle, not a promise We are direction-setters, not end-product-finishers. This verse is not God's guarantee to you that if you start them right, they'll end up right. Nor is it a promise that if they do turn aside, He'll bring them back. You have to realize that there are other influences that can knock them off that path or turn their direction that are beyond our control. Circumstances can send them a crushing blow that causes them to veer aside. Peers or other people important to them can push or lure them off the track. So many of the things we think are so important as young parents (like having and keeping rules that may not be wise), we find out later are not and we have unintentionally pushed our kids slightly off target. Satan has a vast arsenal of forces out there that he plies against our children. You can start them in the right direction but you cannot guarantee the outcome; that is God's business and you have to trust it to Him. However, I don't say that to discourage you. You can take comfort in this: parental influence in the early years of life is still the single most important factor in shaping a person's life, bar none! The importance of your role in setting the direction of your kids' lives cannot be overemphasized.

Now how do we do that, how do we set that direction? The Bible has a lot to say elsewhere about parents teaching their children. Even in Proverbs children are encouraged to listen to their parents and that is certainly an important part of it. But I think that teaching is only part of an even larger concept:

II. Parents Should Model Righteousness To Their Children (20:7) Remember that this is one thought in Hebrew. A man lives a blameless life and his children are blessed by it. Why? Because what he models for them impacts their entire life. Now what he tells them is important. But what he tells them is always wrapped in the package of the way he lives before them. If he says something and models it in his life, it has profound impact. If he says something but doesn't practice it, it has profound impact in another direction. *Jerry Jenkins tells about one time when he was waiting in an airport: "Standing near us in the busy gate area was a middle-aged couple in animated conversation. As they chatted, the man pulled his hands from his pockets to gesture, and a dime slipped out and bounced on the floor, rolling to a stop near his feet. "Neither the man nor his wife noticed, but a little girl and her mother did. The girl made a move for the dime, but the mother grabbed her arm. 'I want that dime, Mommy,' the girl whispered. What an opportunity to teach this child ethics, honesty, and courtesy! 'I know,' her mother giggled. 'Wait till they walk away.' 'He doesn't see it!' the girl said, fighting against her mother's grip. 'Just wait, honey,' she said. 'As soon as he leaves, you can have it.' When the older couple began to move away, I picked up the dime. 'Excuse me, sir. You dropped this.' The man looked incredulous. 'Hey, thanks a lot!' I wasn't trying to be self-righteous or smug. A dime might seem insignificant, but I grieved for that child and the values she was learning. I could only hope her saucer-eyed look indicated she wished SHE had given the dime back to the man. There was no question about the young mother's tight-lipped scowl. She wished I'd minded my own business. I'm still kicking myself for not saying, 'Great job of parenting! I hope your daughter doesn't grow up to be an accountant. Or a civic leader. Or a mother like you. It's better I kept my mouth shut.' [What Makes a Man by Bill McCartney, 1992. Pages 102-103.]* Your children will never know how to live unless they see you do it! A godly and wisely-lived life does not happen naturally. It doesn't come from what's inside at birth. It must be planted and grown by the words and deeds of another life that is intertwined with theirs non-stop so they catch it and participate in it along with their parents. The best thing you can do for your kids is to stay deeply in love with Jesus and walk closely with Him every day so that the character of your life shines His image to them and they are drawn to imitate it and you. That's the positive side of our responsibility; the other half is that:

III. Parents Should Wisely Discipline Their Children The Hebrew root has a two-fold thought: it means to instruct and to chasten or correct, that is, to educate by correcting. Discipline is not punishment. Punishment is getting what you deserve for doing wrong. Punishment is being executed for murder. Punishment is being fined for speeding. Discipline is correcting wrong in a manner that promotes the goal of doing right. The English root of discipline is *disciple*, a learner. Discipline is instructional, educational. It is creating a consequence for their actions that teaches them, that helps keep them from swerving off the path in the future. Now every child has a great:

1. the need for discipline (22:15) Give me another name for folly or foolishness: sin. When a child comes into this world, he comes in with a powerful force inside him called sin. If you don't believe that, then answer this: Did you have to teach your child to be selfish? To lie? To scream to get his own way? To hit the other child and take their toy? I doubt it. Sin just comes naturally; we're all born with it; it's bound up in our hearts. We got it from Adam and it's now part of being human. And if the child isn't taught and trained to curb and fight it, when he grows up you've got a criminal on your hands! Left to himself he will start and continue down the wrong path. So, by righteous example and also by correction we create for the child another path, another way of living. Now why? What is:

2. the motive for discipline (13:24) It is not the punishing of evil. We don't punish our children because their sin deserves it. That's God's business. We discipline them out of our love for them, our caring for them, because we want to start them down that other path, God's path. To leave the child undisciplined is an act of hatred, a demonstration that you don't care about them! Look back to **3:11-12**. That's how your Father deals with you. He doesn't punish you for doing wrong. He corrects you out of love. *Heb. 12:11* adds, *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* Discipline is a correction in the path, made in love, so that in the end it will yield righteousness and peace in their lives. They aren't going to like it. They aren't even necessarily going to understand it at the moment. But they will benefit from it in the long run. Now what about:

3. the method of discipline (23:13-14) You've noticed the word rod in several of these verses. The NIV tries to smooth it over a bit by using the word *punish* but it literally says *if you hit him with the rod...* The rod was probably the common shepherd's staff (not with the neat little hook on the end) but a straight smooth stick that the shepherd used every day to reach into the flock and push or pull a sheep this way or that or to tap one on the butt end to get it to move. No shepherd worth his salt ever beat his sheep and hurt and bruised them and made them bleed or crippled them. And no parent worthy of the name would ever abuse their child and hurt them by beating them into submission with their hand or a stick or anything else. There is no thought of that kind of severity and cruelty here. Rather the child-discipline custom of that day was you tap the kid soundly on the tail with the staff just like you do the sheep, to get them to move the right direction. There is a great debate today over the subject of so-called "corporal punishment"; in fact, there are laws right now in a number of other countries today, where it is actually illegal to spank your own child. The Bible certainly does not shrink from the idea of reasonable physical discipline administered carefully in love but Christian parents in our culture are going to need to be more and more careful in this area and to find other effective ways to correct inappropriate behavior. The means is not itself the root issue and the rod can be a symbol for whatever form discipline may take. Obviously, we could spend weeks talking about effective discipline, however, there are two simple things I've learned, not from Proverbs but from experience:

a. discipline must ultimately be more than words to be effective A reprimand or stern word may be enough in many instances, but if there are never any consequences other than words, many times a child will figure out that words don't really hurt so bad. Parents who continually scream and yell and threaten but never take any action usually develop kids who become desensitized to the process and do what they want anyway, because they figure it's worth putting up with the verbal barrage. To be effective, discipline must include something that causes the child to regret his choice. That could be the removal of a privilege, paying for damages, a time-out chair, denial of television or a video game or a "no" to a desired outing. But whatever it is, there must consistently be something the child dislikes and wants enough to avoid to cause him to learn to change his behavior. And words alone will not cut it. Then further, I would suggest that:

b. discipline is more effective if it is purposely designed to teach a lesson in the area of the offense If you steal, you restore it with extra, the Old Testament says. If the kid is horsing around and breaks something, paying for it would be a good choice of discipline because it teaches the principle of responsibility for the property of others. If it's a nasty action toward someone, a face-to-face apology coupled with an offer to do an activity together or to help them might be in order. Do you see what I mean? One disciplinary measure doesn't cover all situations; rather, choosing something that will instruct and teach a vital lesson is a wiser choice. And I'll be the first to admit that it's a challenge. My first impulse is to react in anger, to impose the first nasty thing I can think of instead of waiting and thinking and using discipline as God's opportunity to teach. It's a huge hassle but it's worth going through. Look at:

4. the benefits of discipline First off:

a. it may save a child's life (23:14) When he's little, disciplining him for running into the street may save his life. When he's older his childhood discipline may save him from slavery to drugs or wasting his life in immorality or the deadly AIDS virus or a life in prison. Plus:

b. it will give him wisdom (29:15) It will teach him to love and fear God, to think like He thinks and act like He acts. It will change the character and course of his life, the very nature of his existence on earth and his eternal destiny. And the good news is that:

IV. Parents Will Eventually Be Rewarded In Their Children (29:17, 23:24-25) Again I'll reiterate that there are no guarantees. Some godly parents will end up brokenhearted over their prodigal son or daughter despite all they've done. It is a sad fact of the world we live in, but I know that God is able to give grace even for that. However, in a majority of cases, starting them right does actually result in an adult child who follows the path. And when you see that son or daughter grown and going on with the Lord, loving Him, reflecting His character, following His direction and serving Him, it will fill your heart with joy and delight. For all the struggles and mistakes and failures, the end result is worth it!

By now, if you've got kids, you're probably well aware of how often you fail to be that model and fail to discipline in a godly fashion. Maybe you're wishing you could go back and start over again with who you are now or what you know now. But let me encourage you simply to start where you are today. A farmer writes: *"Early in the growing season, I was too busy to provide string for my pole beans to climb. I could have made time, but I was just unaware that they were growing so fast. I hadn't been attending to them. When I did take a walk up to the bean bed, I could see that they were in trouble. At a time when the beans should have been four feet up a standard, they were all entangled and lying on the ground. The tender tops of new growth were lying within reach of fat brown slugs which were systematically stunting their growth. Without strings or standards, the young bean plants climbed their peers. Around and around each other they climbed, all the while lying in the dirt. Something had to be done right away. I got some string and set out to give those plants some guide lines. They all had desires to grow to the sun and to bear fruit, but without some standard or guidelines, they lay on the ground. If I had trained those vines when they were little, it would have taken about 15 minutes to string. But now I had to spend four hours carefully untangling each vine from its peers. I had to be extremely gentle, or the tender tops would snap off, as some did. Each plant had permanent 'bents' to it that I had to accept. I took each one and wound it around the strings I placed over them. When I first finished, they were a sorry sight. Their attitude toward the sun was confusion. Leaves were upside-down and cockeyed. They looked sick. In 24 hours, though, all the plants had changed their attitudes and were growing with the dark sides of their leaves up. Now they climbed. Through years of raising my children, I have failed at times to set the standards and string up the guidelines they have needed. The reasons have been about the same as with my beans--too busy about other things and lack of attention. I am thankful God made children able to turn quickly to the right when gently and tenderly given the proper standards to climb. Today I'm going to harvest beans. My lack of attention and failure to provide standards cost me some time and fruit. If I had never set up the standards for my beans, I wouldn't be harvesting much at all. But today I am picking green beans-- maybe not as many as it could have been--but today I am picking green beans."* [Quit You Like Men, Oct/Nov 1996. Page 12.] If you've neglected your responsibility in this area, start today; start where you are. Model Jesus Christ to them; correct them in His love. You may not see the effect you might have seen, but you will see an effect. Your heart will rejoice.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom For Families (IV): On Being A Godly Child

We've already looked together at what Solomon has to say specifically to husbands and to wives and then to those who are parents. Today we'll look at what he has to say to children and youth. So young people, this one is for you! But don't you adults tune out! Many of you are still children of living parents and some of these things you may still need to hear. Plus, all of you are children of your Heavenly Father and the exact same principles apply to us as spiritual children of His, so there's something here for everybody. Now the way these verses divide up, it becomes apparent that there are two kinds of children and you get to choose which kind you want to be. When we categorize young people, we think in terms of well-behaved or unruly, intelligent or slow, handsome or homely and a whole host of other things. God has a different set of values. He says, "Never mind all of that, forget those labels; here are My labels... you are either a wise son or daughter or you're a foolish son or daughter". And that's determined by the way you're acting and the choices you're making at the moment. In everything you do, think and choose, you're either being wise or foolish. Now let's look at:

I. The Wise Son Or Daughter... And please let me say from the start that wise in the Bible has nothing to do with IQ, with how smart you are, with how many A's you get on your report card or your SAT scores. To be wise in the Bible is to think like God thinks. It is to act like He acts, to choose like He chooses, to reason like He reasons. It is to choose to reflect His mind and character in your life. Now the wise son or daughter, first of all:

1. realizes the impact he has on his parents (10:1) Oh, and I hope you don't mind that I didn't put he/she and his/her all through the outline; you know that I mean both. Young people, I hope you realize how much the choices you make impact your parents. When you choose to act foolishly, it not only makes your parents mad, but if they're honest, it breaks their hearts. It grieves them. And when you make wise and godly choices it fills their hearts with joy and gladness, if they love the Lord, anyway. It's interesting that Solomon relates the joy to dad and the grief to mom. She's always the one who seems to feel it the worst. Young people, let me tell you a little secret about parents: when you mess up seriously, they tend to blame themselves. If you walk away from the Lord or you get into serious trouble, they ask themselves things like, "Where did I go wrong? What did I do to cause this?" It may not be their fault, but they take your choice seriously. And when you stand up and tell the truth or when you work hard and achieve some difficult goal, it makes them beam with a good kind of pride because they love you. You see, when you're young, you tend to think only about yourself, what you want, what you have, what you see. Here's a truth you can't escape and should always remember: Everything you do impacts somebody else. Everything! And particularly it impacts your parents. A wise son or daughter learns to think about how what they do is going to impact the people that love them the most. If I choose to try drugs, if I choose to get sexually involved outside of marriage, if I steal or cheat, what's it going to do to Mom and Dad? *Over 150 years ago five young men from Pennsylvania left their homes as pioneers to go west. After many years one returned to visit his parents. He had become a strong Christian. When asked why he had not followed the sinful ways of his four companions, he said, "Because I carried in my heart a picture of my Christian home. Our last morning together after breakfast, Father took down the old family Bible (like always) and started to read a favorite passage. He was soon choked up by tears. Mother finished the passage and we all knelt to pray. Father cried again and Mother put*

an arm around me and asked God to keep me in His care. The vision of that morning in my godly home and that tender petition has steered me right. I couldn't bear the thought of breaking the hearts of my Christian parents and dishonoring the Savior they taught me to love." We need to think how what we do impacts our loving parents and the thought of breaking their hearts should move us! And I think all of us as God's children need to think that way about our Heavenly Father! He loves us incredibly. What are we doing to His heart by our behavior, by our choices, by our attitudes? A wise son or daughter realizes the impact his choices have on his mother and father and on His heavenly Father. Secondly, he:

2. responds to his parents' discipline (13:1) The NIV *instruction* is literally the word *discipline* in the Hebrew. How do you react when your parents correct you or discipline you for something you've done? Do you get angry and resentful and bitter in your heart? Do you say all kinds of nasty things about them in your mind or tell yourself that they just don't understand, that they're stupid and old and they shouldn't have the right to do this to you? After all, who do they think they are, not letting you watch your favorite TV show! Assuming you have godly parents who love you and want what's best for you, that's being a mocker, a scorner, an arrogant proud person, even if you don't say it out loud! A wise son or daughter is humble enough to accept it when his parents make corrections in his life, even if he doesn't fully understand them just yet. He's humble enough to look for and to learn the lesson they're trying to get across. You see, believe it or not, your parents were once kids too. They thought and acted just like you and made all the same mistakes. But now they've got a few years of experience under their belts and they can look back and help you to avoid some of the mistakes they or their friends made so you don't have to learn them the hard way. They're not out to squash your fun and make you miserable; they love you. You've got to trust them and believe that God gave them to you to keep you pointed in His direction, even if it hurts sometimes. And by the way, how about your Heavenly Father's correction; what do you do with that? Remember *Prov. 3:11-12*, *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.* A wise son or daughter responds to his parents' discipline and also responds to the Lord's discipline in his life. Thirdly, a wise son or daughter:

3. relishes his parents (17:6) Sorry about the word relish. I could have used *delights in* or *glories in*. You know how grandparents dote over their grandchildren. They're so proud of them and carry their pictures around and talk about them to all their elderly friends and when you come, they pinch your cheeks and announce, "Isn't she cute?" They just relish their grandchildren and delight in them. But wise children delight in and appreciate and value their parents. Little kids do this pretty easily. They're always saying, "My daddy this...my daddy that...when I get big, I want to be like Mommy..." Did you hear about the *"Three little girls that were talking about their dads? One said, 'My father is a doctor, and he practices medicine.' Another said, 'My dad's an attorney, and he practices law.' The third said, 'My father is a Christian, but he doesn't practice any more.' There are a lot of dads like that today."* [John Brokhoff - *Pulpit Digest*, Mar/Apr 1991. Page 66.] Parents, we've got to give them something to delight in! But when we kids get a little older and figure out that our parents have faults and make mistakes and there's lots they can't do, that they don't really play baseball like a pro as you thought they did or they begin to look a little uglier, that natural appreciation and awe kind of disappears. But a wise son or daughter sees their love and all the effort they put into parenting and chooses to delight in them, to honor them and appreciate them and treasure them, to not take them for granted. And oh, how we fail so often to delight in our Heavenly Father who loves us! How we take Him for granted! But a wise son or daughter relishes the godly parents he has and also the wonderful Heavenly Father who adores Him! Then fourthly, a wise son or daughter:

4. respects his parents (23:22) What does it mean to respect your parents? Well, notice that there are two extremes of life in this verse, the giving of life, that is, the time of birth when you are young (and so are your parents, relatively) and the time when they are old (and so are you relatively). And there are two verbs, *to listen* and *to not despise*. Respecting your parents means:

a. he listens to them when he is young When you are young and under their care and supervision, respecting your parents means listening to them. And you all know how tough that is. A man named Mike High says, *"When I was a kid, I was watching television in the basement one evening. My dad called down to me, 'Mike! Come up for dinner!' Twice I ignored his calls. Just as the show ended, he shouted, 'Mike! Get up here now!' Sound familiar? As I leaped to the top of the stairs, he yelled, 'Where have you been?' I looked at him innocently and said, 'I didn't hear you when you called me the first two times.'"* [Parables, Etc. Sep 1995. Page 1.] Get it? Listening is not so much about hearing as it is about obeying, about doing what they ask. Paul said, *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."* - Eph. 6:1-3. It's right; it's the right thing for children to respect their parents and to choose to do what they say without having to be forced into it. Of course, the verse has that phrase, *in the Lord*, in it. If they tell you to steal or lie or cheat, of course you know you have to obey God first, but parents generally aren't like that. And parents, that lays a heavy burden on us! We'd better be asking godly and right things of our kids if we want the respect of obedience. If we're just asking selfish and personal things to make them serve us, that's bad. By the way, a wise child of God listens to His Father instead of doing things his

own way too! But then you grow up and move out and become an adult and those parents are still around. But the wise son or daughter:

b. he values them when they are old The word *despise* means to treat someone with contempt and look down on them or to treat them as insignificant, as though they don't matter. Here's where we adult children are often guilty of disrespect. We dismiss them lightly because all they do is sit around and talk about the old days and we've heard all that before. Or we fail to get involved and see that their needs are cared for. Just think how they cared for us and fed us and dressed us and changed our diapers and worried over us and took us places and read to us and all the other great things that parents do. Guess what, when they get old and need our attention and care, shouldn't we be there for them? Shouldn't they be important enough to us to listen to them and involve our lives with them and care for their needs first and above a lot of personal stuff we'd like to pursue? I'm not saying that every one of us has to take our parents into our homes and directly provide nursing care; I am saying that as they grow old, we need to parent them with the same love and care that they parented us!

That's the wise child. Now let's switch gears and quickly look at what Solomon has to say about:

II. The Foolish Son Or Daughter... First of all, he:

1. spurns his parents' discipline (15:5) He or she says, "I know best. My parents are just old and selfish. I want what I want and I have a right to have it. I may have to do what they make me now, but once I'm older and they can't keep track of me or I'm out on my own, I'll do what I want to do." Young people, that thinking is a lie from the pit. Eve bought it, way back in the garden. "I know better than God and I don't have to do what He says." That is the doorway to a downward spiral in life that ends up in a pit. Samson's parents begged him not to marry a pagan Philistine woman and pleaded with him to marry an Israelite woman who knew the Lord. But he told them, "I want what I want". He chose the foolish route; he "knew better" than his parents and ended up a slave with his eyes gouged out and died under the wreckage of a pagan temple. But you're free to choose to be foolish if you like. Then the foolish child:

2. breaks his parents' hearts (17:21, 25) He doesn't care how what he does impacts his parents. He doesn't care that his choices bring them pain and sorrow and break their hearts. He wants what he wants. It makes him happy and that's what counts. He has one concern, self, his own rights, the freedom to do as he pleases. So, they weep and they plead and they pray but it doesn't impact him. Eli's sons, made a mockery out of their priesthood; they forced people to give them offerings by violence and slept with women right at the Tabernacle. Eli begged and pleaded with them to turn from their sinful ways, but they wouldn't listen. And the Philistines came and they were killed in the battle and poor old blind Eli was sitting on a stool by the road when the news of their death and the loss of the ark of God came and he was so grieved that he fell off the stool and broke his neck and died. But really it was a broken heart that caused it. It'll impact your parents but you can still choose to be foolish if you like. Further, the foolish child:

3. brings his parents trouble (19:13) Ruin, calamity, misfortune, trouble. The consequences of his choices impact his parents lives in very tangible ways as he grows older. Now they not only feel awful, but pay real penalties for his sins. They face the officer when he arrives, their car is damaged, they end up responsible for things he has done and face a constant round of having to answer for his choices. They end up caring for the financial burden of mistakes that he's created or he ends up at the end of his rope and dependent on them when he should be caring for them! And then to top it off he:

4. mistreats his parents (19:26, 28:24) He may actually assault or get violent with his parents. He may even steal from them. I know that's hard for us to imagine, but it happens. My one nephew when he was 18 or so got fed up with life at home and stole his dad's truck and some belongings and took off for parts unknown but got caught. But it can be more subtle than that. I have heard of grown children who were more concerned about preserving about the size of their inheritance than about taking proper care of their parents to whom it really belongs. I've heard of children putting their parents in a home and never going back to visit them! Go ask some of the residents in these places how often their children come! A foolish child mistreats his parents because he thinks only of himself. And you can choose to be like that. But eventually you:

5. will pay a great price (20:20) The lamp being snuffed out in darkness is a metaphor for death. That warning was in the command, "*Honor your father and mother*"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "*that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*" - Eph. 6:2-3. If you don't, you reap what you sow. You can choose to be foolish but you will pay the price of missing out on all the companionship, wisdom, advice and joy that your parents could give and you will pay the price of choosing sin and all the misery it brings and maybe even a premature death. I still remember in my very first church a pretty young lady named Mary Ann. She was raised in the church and her mother was a believer. But in college she got away from the faith and ran off to marry one of her non-religious college professors. Her mother begged her not to do it; her teachers at church begged her not to do it. But she broke her mother's heart and did it anyway and it failed and she ended up divorced and alone and eventually became seriously ill. She came back to her mother, to the church and to the Lord; I remember her asking me one sad night wheth-

er she could be forgiven and how God viewed divorce. But sadly, she never overcame the illness and we buried her before the age of 30. Her few years as an adult were wasted because she chose to be a foolish daughter.

Young people, you can choose to be a wise son or daughter or you can choose to be foolish. But it's a serious choice and you make it daily. With every passing year the choice grows more and more serious because the options are bigger and the consequences are bigger. **Remember** that your choice impacts your parents. **Respond** to their discipline and correction. **Relish** them and treasure them always and **Respect** them by listening when you're young and by caring for them when they're old. It'll not only gladden their hearts but it will certainly better and maybe even lengthen your life.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom For The Workplace (I): Some Important Principles

Have you ever thought about where you spend most of your time? I did some figuring with a calculator the other day and the average person has about 112 hours a week when he is awake. Between the ages of 20 and 65 the average person spends 40-50 hours per week at work, at his or her workplace. That's almost half of your waking hours and it doesn't include transportation time to get there and home again. That's 90,000 hours over a working lifetime or the equivalent of 15½ straight years of waking time. No matter how you cut it, that's a hefty chunk of your life! So how you see those hours and what you do in them is pretty important! It is the one thing in which most of us will invest more of our life than anything else. In fact, you might say that it amounts to our life's work! We'll spend 3 weeks looking at Solomon's wisdom for the workplace, but as we begin, there are two very dangerous extremes that we may fall into concerning our work and either one is deadly. Put simply: on the one hand we can turn our work into a god; on the other we can take God completely out of our work. Both Paul in the New Testament and Solomon in his wisdom recognized those two dangers and had a lot to say about them. The first is this:

I. We Must Avoid The Trap Of Materialism - 1 Tim. 6:6-11 Paul is warning us to avoid materialism. What's that? **Materialism is valuing money or possessions as ultimate.** My daughter started a new summer job one year in the collections department of a mortgage company and during the orientation time, her boss took her into his office and encouraged her to have a visible reminder of her goal where she could see it so she could keep her thinking straight. And he pointed to his wall and there hung a picture of a beautiful Mercedes. And he said, "That's my goal; one day I'm going to make enough at this job to afford one of those. That's why I'm working and while I'm on the phone with people collecting the money they owe; I look at that and it helps me to remember why I'm in this." Do you hear what he's saying? "I'm not working to help the customer with their problem; I'm not working to get the company what they're rightfully owed; the bottom line in this is I'm working for me to get what I want and what I want is money!" Isn't that sad? Most people would not be that blatant about it, but if truth be told there are a whole lot more folks who have a little picture of something hung on the wall of their minds, whether it be a home of their own or the image of a particular lifestyle or a specific sort of job or position they want. Materialism is a disease that is epidemic in our culture and it is extremely contagious. Almost unknowingly the picture on our wall can change from being that of a servant falling at Jesus feet to that of a servant living in a 3 room tent riding a high-test camel. As you work, how do you guard against seeing it in purely material terms, against the desire to have, to possess, which is innate to all of us? Solomon has 3 main suggestions:

1. regard material possessions as a means not an end Or to change the image, they are a tool, not the product. Imagine I'm holding a pair of pliers. Now a pliers is a very important thing to have. You can twist, bend and cut wire; you can turn nuts; you can hold things too hot or sharp to handle. They are extremely useful but not one of us has a pair of pliers framed on our wall! Nor do we keep a pair in our safe deposit box or wear them on a chain around our neck. Nobody sees the pliers as an end; nobody wants a pliers just to have a pliers. It's a means, a way of accomplishing other things that are more important. That's how money and all material possessions are. We must not forget that:

a. they are transitory and easily lost (23:4-5, 27:24) They don't last. They tend to disappear and disperse. They can all be lost in a moment. *William Cook describes a meeting in 1923 of a group of business tycoons. Together these men controlled unthinkable sums of wealth, and for years the media had trumpeted their success stories. On this day in Chicago, they assembled to enjoy their mutual success. Dr. Cook relates what happened to these men in the years that followed: "Charles Schwab, the president of the largest independent steel company, lived on borrowed money the last five years of his life and died penniless. Richard Whitney, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, served time in Sing Sing Prison. Albert Fall, a former member of the President's cabinet, was pardoned from prison so he could die at home. Jesse Livermore, the greatest bear on Wall Street, committed suicide. Leon Fraser, the president of the Bank of International Settlement, committed suicide. Ivar Krueger, head of the world's greatest monopoly, committed suicide. The success they celebrated proved illusory."* [Leadership, Fall 1991. Page 45.] When pursued as a goal, riches are just that, an illusion. The truth is that:

b. they have no eternal value (11:4, 28) It's so easy to trust in them, to look at them as your security and your protection from trouble. But they have no value eternally. It is not riches but righteousness that God is after. Riches have this power to blind your eyes to righteousness as soon as they begin to play an important role in your life. But you brought nothing with you into the world and you certainly won't carry anything material out of it. Material possessions are something that God has given you to work with as a tool during the short time you're here. So:

c. they are God's means of caring for you and for others (3:9-10) Honor the Lord with your possessions and God will use them as a means of caring for you and meeting your needs, feeding you, clothing you. But He will also use them as a means for accomplishing His purpose toward others through you. Money can be translated into eternal things, eternal benefits. As we gave this morning, that plate full of purely material stuff will be translated into eternal benefits in lives. It is translated into counseling and comfort for people who are suffering, into the conveying of a life-changing message to 100 pioneer club kids, to 34 Nursery Schoolers and their families. It is translated into meaningful worship that ascends through to the throne and pleases God and it is translated into eternal life for people around the world through the lives of 26 missionaries we support. But it's only a means, a tool, not the end product! It sustains your life and equips you to give life to others. Regard it that way. Secondly Solomon says:

2. remember that other things are of far greater importance in life Like what? Well, for instance:

a. like your relationship with God (15:16) The depth of your relationship with God and how you walk with Him and how He walks with you is a whole lot more important than things. Or:

b. like love in your home (15:17) Where would you rather live, in a home where you have everything you want but no love or with a family that loves and supports you but doesn't have very much? Love in your home is a whole lot more important than money. Or:

c. like a righteous character (16:8, 28:6) Would you rather be a rich person that made all his money illegally or immorally or a poor man who makes his little bit the honest way? When you stand before God, it's not your money that will be first on your mind but your character. Being pure and holy is a whole lot more important than how much you have. Or:

d. like wisdom and understanding (16:16) Or:

e. like a good reputation (22:1) There are 1001 things in life that are eternal, that shape and effect eternity and really matter. The getting of material things means nothing at all unless they are used as a tool for the right end. So, Solomon warns us that we need to:

3. realize the great danger in pursuing material possessions When they become the goal and we start to chase after them:

a. they can produce pride and false security (18:11) But it isn't unscalable is it? Remember the list of rich men we read earlier. If you have money, you feel impregnable, like you can fix anything or buy your way out. But you can't. And that kind of success makes you proud. **(28:11)** You think you have it all and know it all and have it together. But others can see right through it. Riches remove from us a sense of need and without a sense of need, God is shoved out of our life or put on a shelf. I'll tell you right now that's why people are coming to Christ by the hundreds of thousands across the world, everywhere but here, because our material prosperity has given us a false security and pride and robbed us of our sense of need! It can happen in you and I too! We can prosper and push Jesus into a backseat in our lives. But that's not all:

b. they can produce a lack of concern for others (18:23) Riches can change your attitude, can make you think more of yourself than you ought, can make you look down on others, keep you from seeing your own wrong. They can embolden you to treat others harshly and roughly, to lose your caring and concern for them. And worst of all:

c. they can turn your heart from God (30:8-9) I remember a rich young ruler who turned away from Jesus sadly because he discovered that he loved his possessions too much to let them go. And Jesus said it is harder for a rich man to come to faith than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. If we don't keep them in perspective, riches can displace God in our lives. Money is never a goal, never an end. It's a means that God can and will use for wonderful purposes but oh how careful we have to be to keep our thinking straight or it will take on god-like qualities in our life and we will serve it instead of Him! Work and material things must never in any degree become our god!

But then there is the danger at the other end of the spectrum:

II. We Must Avoid The Trap Of Secularizing Our Daily Work To secularize is to disconnect our work from our faith. We can compartmentalize our life in such a way that work is some necessary drudgery kind of thing that I do because I have to in order to eat and feed my family, but spiritual things and ministry happen on the weekends, in church or family and neighborhood situations. There's work and then there's ministry. Look at **Col. 3:22-4:1**. Paul is talking to servants and masters, to those whose lives are totally given to working for others and to those whose work is to be in charge of the work of others. And do you see what he is saying? Work IS a spiritual thing! In fact, I would go so far as to say this: for those of you who work, your work IS the major ministry of your life! Let me correct a misconception. We are ALL in full-time ministry. It is not that I am in full-time service and you only serve part-time. I am able to give full-time to the ministry

of this particular church. But we are ALL in full-time ministry for Jesus Christ and that means that in all those hours, those years you are at work, you are at work for Jesus Christ. You may have a ministry outside of that in the church or the neighborhood, but that is a major part of your ministry! So:

1. remember who you are working for When you go to work tomorrow:

a. you are not merely working for self (16:26) Literally, *The laborer labors for himself driven on by his appetite.* That's all the folks around you. They work for themselves. They are driven to work by the fact that they have to eat, they need a place to live, they need to survive. What a sad thing? But you are not like that majority; you are not simply working to get something for yourself:

b. you are working for the Lord (19:17) There's the principle: whatever you do to the poor, you do for the Lord. Whatever you do at your job, you do for the Lord. You sell cars for the Lord; you book travel for the Lord; you run a register and stock shelves for the Lord. You assemble engines for the Lord. You landscape for the Lord. Whatever your work, it is the Lord Christ you are serving. And because of that:

c. the daily work you do has intrinsic value (14:23) All work, all labor brings a profit; it accomplishes something; it serves a purpose. I don't care if you collect garbage or sit and assemble nuts and bolts all day, whether you repair streets or telephones. All work has a purpose and plays a part in God's overall scheme of things. It's almost like Paul's analogy of the body where he says that all the parts of the body, no matter how insignificant they may appear to be, are necessary and serve a purpose. I don't care what you do; as long as it's moral and ethical, it serves a purpose that benefits people and it serves the Lord in His scheme of how the world runs. The work itself has value but there is an even more important thing:

2. recognize that the way you work impacts people In the process of your work, God intertwines your life 8 hours a day with a group of people who can't escape you, whom you will have an impact and an effect on. Robert Mattox puts it this way: *Look at Frank, the alcoholic at your office. He won't go to a revival. He won't go to a Christian Businessmen's meeting. He won't go to a prayer meeting. He won't even watch an evangelist on television. So where will he go? Where does he have to go? To the office. As for you, you won't go bar-hopping. You won't go to a stag party. You won't play golf on Sunday morning during church time. But where do you have to go to associate with non-Christians? The office. If we had our way, we would live Sunday every day. If Frank had his way, he would live Saturday night every day. We both would be completely content to totally separate our lives from each other. But God had another plan...He has arranged the system so that we are stuck with Frank and Frank with us. [The Christian Employee, p. 6-7]* Do you see? God has planted you full-time smack into the lives of a bunch of people that He loves and wants to touch with the Gospel. The way you do your daily work has immense impact **(25:13)**. Here's a guy whose work is to be a messenger service. The way he does his job has an impact on his boss. If he does it faithfully and trustworthily as to the Lord and the messages get through accurately and on time, it is a refreshing, uplifting, inviting thing to his boss. But look at **(10:5)**. Here's a son or an employee whose job is to harvest the crop. But when his dad or his employer checks on him, he finds him sleeping, goofing off! He's lazy and doesn't do his job unless somebody's eye is on him. What impact do you think he has on the other workers? Not very good! Now suppose they find out he goes to church on Sunday and is a Christian. How does that reflect on the Lord? Not very well! You have to:

3. realize that your faith should govern the way you work (16:11) I can give you 10 reasons to cheat on the accuracy of the weights on your scales and every one of them boils down to selfish profit. I can only give you one reason to make dead sure the scales are honest: You're working for the Lord and He despises dishonesty, cheating and stealing. If you do what you do for the Lord, it will transform how you do it! If you're an employee, you'll be:

a. serving those you work for faithfully (27:18) You'll be tending your fig trees well and you'll be serving your employer well. It will be profitable and it will be noticed. It will draw him and other employees around you toward you and toward the One who has caused you to be this way. It will open tremendous doors of opportunity to share, to share why you're not caught up in the materialism they're caught up in! To share how you can face the difficulties they face with peace and even joy. On the other hand, if you're an employer you'll be:

b. treating those who work for you well (29:21) The meaning of the Hebrew phrase translated *grief* here is uncertain but listen to the (NASB), *He who pampers his slave from childhood will in the end find him to be a son.* Likewise the KJV, *He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become [his] son at the length.* If your faith is governing the way you work, you'll treat those who work for you well and decently, with kindness and understanding. And it will impact them and endear you to them and draw them toward the Savior! So, what am I saying to you?

4. regard work as your primary arena for sharing faith (11:30) You're a life-giver and your work is the primary area where you can show forth the fruit of the Spirit and the life of Christ within you and have it impact unbelievers. You are God's agent, planted wherever you work, to be a living epistle, known and read by all those you work with, to bring life to them. Get ahold of that and it will transform your Monday morning back-to-work blahs! Don't separate your faith from your work; let it transform your work into ministry!

Many of you have seen champion figure skater Paul Wylie on TV. What you may not know is that he is a cum laude graduate of Harvard and a born-again Christian. His mother always wanted him to be a minister, but he decided to study law. He believes he does not possess the gifts required for pastoral ministry, but he insists--and rightly so--that whether he's performing on the ice or reading in the library of Harvard Law School, he can serve his Savior Jesus Christ. He says, "I think that every Christian is called to be a minister in his place of work, so I try to be a minister wherever I am. When people come up to me and ask questions, I tell them the truth." Whether we are figure skaters, law students, homemakers, mechanics, nurses, bankers, or have some other job, we can serve Jesus Christ.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom For The Workplace (II): Some Important Practices

In the first message on the workplace, we talked about two basic principles: (1) you don't work for money (it is a means, not an end; beware the danger of materialism) and (2) you do work for Jesus (your work IS your ministry and a primary arena for sharing your faith). Now if you truly work for Jesus, that will impact many things about the way that you work, the way you do your job. Today I'd like to focus on five important practices that Solomon mentions which will be a vital part of your work life if you are truly working for the Lord. The first is:

I. The Practice Of Maintaining Absolute Integrity (11:3) Here's the Kless translation: a person who is straight on the inside will be guided by that integrity in all that he does, that is, he will act like who he is. A person who is crooked or twisted on the inside will also act like who he is and it will lead to destruction. Solomon is reminding us that:

1. moral integrity must serve as the basis and guide for all you do In the workplace, it must matter more to you to do what is right than to do what makes the most money or what is most convenient or what gets you the most recognition. The standard worry is that if I do what is right, if I tell the customer the truth, if I don't try to sell someone a service or a repair they don't need, that if I don't give my employer my highest allegiance and sacrifice significant time with my family, that I'm not going to succeed. I'll never make money; I'll never climb the ladder; I'll never be moved up and get ahead. Well, let me assure you of something you can't escape:

2. your future in the workplace is determined by God (29:26) Literally, *that man gets judgment*. The workplace is filled with people trying to curry favor with those in charge, to impress the boss, the employer, to catch his eye in hopes of moving up and having security. It is also filled with people competing with each other and companies promote that sort of negative competition. But your true judgment doesn't come from an employer; it comes from the Lord. You'll neither be promoted, demoted, fired or hired without the Lord being in control of it. Listen to **Ps.75:6-7**, *No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another*. The president of your company is there because God put him there, whether he knows it or not, and you are where you are because God put you there. Ultimately, the One you need to fear and worry about impressing is God! And His only standard is moral integrity, not output, profit margin or anything else. He expects you to act like who He's made you to be inside, righteous. So you need to enter the workplace counting on this fact:

3. your circumstances in the workplace are ordered by God (16:9) There's a lot of fear in the workplace today. Businesses are downsizing and senior people are losing their jobs. There is no security out there and we're tempted to try to seek it by any means, by performance. But let me tell you, your steps, what actually happens to you, whether you work, where you work, what department you're in, who you work with, who's over you, it's all a Divine Sovereign choice. If you worry about manipulating all that stuff, you'll go crazy. It's your business to choose to please Him; it's His business to order what happens to you. You don't need to worry about His part of the bargain, only yours! *Queen Elizabeth once sent an ambassador far away on important and difficult business. He objected, saying to the queen, "But what will become of my business and my family?" The queen replied, "You take care of my business and I will take care of yours."* Remember what Paul said, "It is the Lord Christ you are serving!" If you take care of His business which is righteousness and integrity, He will take care of yours. **Ps. 37:23-24**, *If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand*. But the only way which the Lord delights in is the way of absolute integrity. If you want Him to uphold you and care for all your needs, you need to focus on maintaining His way! The second key practice is:

II. The Practice Of Working Hard (10:4, 14:23) We all know there are people who talk about work and about all the work that needs done and then there are people who actually work! And they work hard. God set up the way things are in this world back in the garden. He said, *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the dust...* In other words, as long as you're alive in this age:

1. hard work is necessary to produce a valuable result God did not intend for any of us to sit around and watch others and live off their labors, but to work with effort and purpose at what we do. Paul emphasized this and said to those who wanted to sit around and do nothing and trust Jesus to take care of them, *For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."* We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. - **2 Thes. 3:10-12**. Boy is that different from the attitude you find in the workplace today. Everybody's

goal seems to be to find a way to get paid a lot for doing very little or to do as little as possible to get as much as possible. So, on one hand, we have people who can get away with it who charge enormous fees all out of proportion to what they do and on the other, we have people who get paid but produce very little output. The principle is simple, God has ordained that we're to earn what we receive, to put out in order to get, so that each of us produces valuable output to the society around us and together our physical needs are met. You can either spend your life trying to beat and escape that system or you can accept it and find value and meaning in it! So do a good job of what you do! Put the required amount of time in and during that time give it your full attention and effort, no matter if you're a secretary typing on a computer or a ditch-digger or a doctor. But the other side of this issue is that:

2. hard work must be balanced with rest and family responsibilities While the flesh of most of us is prone to laziness; there are others of us who are so driven to work hard that we never rest our bodies and do them damage. God also says that there is value in rest; He himself rested on the seventh day of creation. And then there are those of us who are so driven to work that we neglect the responsibilities that we have to our spouses and families. I grew up with a dad who worked so much (and then drank afterward) that I didn't see him for days at a time. He'd be gone before I was up and not get home until I was in bed. Balance is such a key concept in the Christian life. When you're at work, work hard; do a good job. But don't let work become your life. Work to live but don't live to work and above all:

3. hard work must not become an idol to trust in (3:5-6) It's really easy to trust in yourself and your hard work to achieve whatever you want. The truth is you can work all you want and where it gets you ultimately depends on God, as we've seen. I remember old Nebuchadnezzar walking around his palace, saying to himself *"Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"* - Dan. 4:30. Man, if you ever get to that place, where you look around and say, "Look where I've gotten myself; look at the great job I've done...", God will just have to show you what a helpless creature you really are! He showed old Nebby! The old saying goes: Work like it all depends on you; pray like it all depends on God (which it does!). Work hard but trust in God. The third key practice is:

III. The Practice Of Humbly Seeking Advice (15:22, 20:18) The practice of being humble enough to value the advice and guidance of others is one of the best principles there is for the workplace. Decisions, big and small, are made there every day, as well as in financial decisions at home that impact the future and the lives of people; only a fool makes them without seeking the input of others. Now there are a couple of things you should remember about seeking advice. First:

1. it must be sought from the right people You don't ask your auto-mechanic where to invest your retirement funds nor do you ask your doctor how to fix your car. You seek advice from people that have knowledge and experience in the area you're considering. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, wanted to know how to rule the kingdom so he asked the young men he grew up with and they told him, "Be tough; use force; make people follow you!" Then he asked the older men who had advised his father and they said, "Lighten up; these people are already overdriven; cut them a break and they'll follow you forever." He listened to the wrong advisers and lost 5/6 of his kingdom! Also, you don't ask a lazy man how to improve plant output nor a dishonest man how to improve company security. You seek advice from someone who has the same heart goals that you do. You should seek advice but from the right kind of person and then note this:

2. it should be confirmed by more than one of those people Many advisers bring success. You could ask just one and he could have a bad day or not hear you right and steer you wrong. But when two people with experience give you the same answer, your confidence is increased and when there is a third and a fourth, it becomes easy to know what's the right path. But note:

3. the more serious the endeavor, the more it's needed If you're going to choose where to take your client for lunch, you might make that decision yourself. The consequences don't matter much. But if you're doing something serious like going to war, which is going to impact the lives of people in a serious fashion, you'd better have LOTS of good advisors agreeing! Develop some people that you go to in the various areas of your work life who have wisdom to help you make those choices and solve those problems. The other reason seeking advice is important is that:

4. it is necessary for developing skill (22:29) God values skillfulness, being able to do what you do well. How do you become skillful? Mostly by learning from others! The person whose skill grows the fastest is not the person who learns the hard way, but the person who learns to seek out wisdom and advice early on, which his own experience will then build on. The fourth key practice is:

IV. The Practice Of Avoiding Hasty Decisions (19:2, 21:5) Verse 19 has in it a good definition:

1. haste is zeal without knowledge, acting without proper information It does not simply mean to do something in a hurry. Sometimes the wisest course is to hasten, to hurry, to rush. To be hasty is more than that; it is to act before you know what you're doing, to act without information you need to make a wise choice, to act because your feelings tell you to do this, to buy because you have an impulse, to quit because you're upset, to promise before you know you can keep it. Jesus used some practical:

2. examples - Lk. 14:28-32 If you're going to build a house, you first sit down and figure out the cost to see whether you can afford it before you start the building process, don't you? How many times have you seen half-finished buildings just sitting there because somebody jumped in with poor planning? Or if you're going to tackle some task, whether it's a war or cleaning the church windows, you first stop to make sure you have enough resources for the job. Now I know Jesus was using these to teach a lesson about counting the cost of the Christian life but Solomon is trying to teach us:

3. the wisdom of well-thought-out plans (24:27) If you wait until you build your house to plant your fields, you'll be planting in August when it's too late and there'll be no crop to sustain your life! Think it out. Do what has to be done first, not just what feels most important at the moment. It's better to spend a couple months in a tent than to have nothing to eat all winter. Avoiding hastiness means gathering all the information you can and laying out a plan of action to accomplish your goal and then letting God alter that by circumstances if He chooses. That is so important in your work life. And finally, there is:

V. The Practice Of Careful Stewardship Of Resources Nobody succeeds well in the business world or the workplace or even at home unless they learn to use the resources they have wisely. Careful stewardship involves two areas. First is:

1. the importance of wisely conserving what you have (21:20) Have you noticed there seem to be two kinds of folks. The first spends every nickel they get as soon as they get it. They get paid today and it's spent tomorrow. If they want something and the money's in their pocket, it's bought, regardless of whether the rent's due next week or not. The other guy is always looking for ways to save, thinking about expenses and needs that are coming up and planning toward them. He always seems to have on hand what he needs because he's put some aside and he chooses carefully, spending on what's important and saying no to what's not. Careful stewardship is to conserve what you have and use it wisely. And secondly a steward knows:

2. the importance of continually maintaining what you have (27:23-27) If you don't take care of your flocks and feed and water them and watch them carefully, there won't be any food and clothing next spring. Yet how many people don't pay attention to and maintain properly what they have. Their house has peeled paint and rotting wood; their car has rust holes, things that could have been fixed early and prevented with some simple attention. In the workplace it means not only caring for your equipment and maintaining it but it also means caring for your employees and their needs so that they can continue to produce. Neglect is a killer! We live in a universe where the second law of thermodynamics is at work, where anything that is neglected degenerates and falls apart, whether it's your own body, your relationships, your family, your possessions, your workforce or your sales contacts. Maintenance is always crucial.

Well, these are some important practices for life in general and especially for the workplace. What you do with them is up to you. The tendency of the flesh is to look at yourself and say, "Yeah, I've got it pretty well together; I do all those things." But that won't help you much. Let me tell you a Jewish folk tale: *Once a rabbi decided to test the honesty of his disciples, so he called them all together and posed a question: "What would you do if you were walking along and found a purse full of money lying in the road?" he asked. "I'd return it to its owner," said one disciple. "His answer comes so quickly, I must wonder if he really means it," the rabbi thought. "I'd keep the money if nobody saw me find it," said another. "He has a frank tongue, but a wicked heart," the rabbi told himself. "Well, Rabbi," said a third disciple. "I believe I'd be tempted to keep it. So, I would pray to God that He would give me the strength to resist such temptation and do the right thing." "Aha!" thought the rabbi. "Here is the man I would trust."* [The Book of Virtues by William Bennett. Simon and Schuster, 1993. Page 762.] The wise man is not the one who denies his failures nor the one who simply admits and lives with them. It is the one who recognizes where he's tempted and cries out for grace to follow God's path because he knows he can't do it in his own strength.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom For The Workplace (III): Some Unwise Practices

Have you noticed from our study of Proverbs how nothing ever really changes? The same things that were wise practices in working life 3000 years ago are still around and wise people apply them today. And it's also true that practices that were unwise and wrong back then are still around, are still being used and still need to be recognized and avoided by us today. To get specific, Solomon mentions three:

I. Practices Which Require Extreme Caution They are not wrong in themselves or under every circumstance, but are things which you should enter into with your eyes open and very carefully. The first one is:

1. becoming security for someone else's debt (6:1-5) In our day becoming security would be cosigning for somebody to get a loan, maybe to start a business venture, maybe a loan to finance education or perhaps a mortgage, somehow making yourself responsible for another person's debt. Solomon warns against this several times and how dangerous it is. In our day we take such things a bit more lightly. Credit is easy. A few signatures and you can get piles of money available to you. "Cosign a note? Sure, I'll never have to pay it. The person can always find another way to

borrow somehow; it's just a formality!" But Solomon reminds us that when you become security for a debt for someone else, ultimately many people don't use good judgment in their borrowing and they default. Or sometimes they fall ill or lose their jobs and sooner or later it is conceivable that you WILL have to pay! So here are two pieces of advice about becoming security:

a. only do it if you are actually willing to pay the debt (11:15, 17:18) It is likely you'll have to pay so don't do it with a wrong expectation, with foolish judgment. Only do it if you are actually willing to pay the debt for the person and that's what you intend to do if it doesn't work out for them. Many times we do this for our own children, for example with college or car loans and such and we do it out of this sense of love. But only do it if you are so committed to the other person that you are willing to pick up their debt as a gift to them if need be. And:

b. only do it if you are actually able to pay the debt (22:26-27) No matter how positive you are that you'll never have to pay, don't become security unless you actually have the ability to handle that debt. You could lose your own home and endanger your immediate family. Enter into it as though it were a loan you yourself were making and be sure you have the means to cover it. If you don't, it's an unwise practice. The second practice that requires caution is:

2. lending money expecting a repayment (20:16) Now the shoe is on the other foot: you're the one being asked to lend money to someone. Of course, banks and finance companies make an entire business of doing just this and this isn't the place to talk about commercial lending. But when we face the prospect of personally lending our own money, there are two things Solomon mentions, which even commercial lenders follow, that we may not. First of all:

a. it is not wise to do it without collateral, to just loan unsecured money. When a bank loans you money for a house or a car, they keep the title to the car; their name appears as lienholder on the title to the house. They have something of value they can take if the borrower defaults or refuses to pay to recover their money. But more and more money is being lent unsecured. Preapproved credit card offers arrive nearly every day that mail is delivered. Thousands and millions of dollars are being loaned unsecured for the sake of the interest. But it's a dangerous direction to go! Trying to get someone to pay when there is nothing that belongs to them at risk is a tough deal! It's not wise. And:

b. it is not wise to ignore the character of the borrower It pays to check out the character and integrity of the person you're lending to. If you want to see your money again, be sure they're the type with a history of paying back and financial integrity. If their habit is to always borrow and borrow to cover the next emergency and never get around to paying back on time, maybe it would be better, even for them, to let the emergency happen instead of rescuing them! So, here's a wise principle:

c. only lend personally when willing to forego repayment I realize that a bank can't do this, but you can when you make personal loans to people. Only do it as an act of love that is willing to forego getting anything in return, if it comes to that. In **Lk. 6:35** Jesus said *...love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.* Whether it's your enemy or your own children, when you lend, lend with the expectation that you may never get paid and if so, you're willing to make it a gift of love from your heart. In fact, an outright gift is often a better idea than a loan and keeps your heart in the right place. Now here is a third practice to be very cautious about:

3. borrowing money (22:7) Now understand that the Scripture never says that you should not borrow. It does not prohibit borrowing; it simply says you should pay whatever you owe, meet your obligations, pay your debts. We all have them. And as I've mentioned, it is the easiest time in history to borrow money. You don't have to ask somebody; they're asking you! Daily! "Please borrow our money!" And before you know it, you can be thousands of dollars in debt. And many people have a number of cards! The only trouble is that it's all got to be paid back! And in the meantime, you're losing sometimes 18 and 20% interest, hundreds of dollars a year! Solomon warns us of two things we need to think about before we borrow or buy on credit:

a. borrowing gives a degree of control to the lender It creates a bondage, a servitude of sorts. You lose freedom to the degree that you are obligated to make the repayment. And the larger the debt looms the more you are forced to work, to scrimp, to take extra jobs, to manipulate your life because of the stranglehold it has on you. If the debt you owe is to a relative or friend, it can easily cause you to feel controlled by them or angry at them and ruin the relationship. So, it's wiser not to borrow if you don't have to. But beyond that, Solomon's thought encourages you to:

b. borrow only what you have reasonable assurance of paying back Obviously nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. You could get sick and not be working, or whatever. But because it is so easy to borrow, it is also easy to borrow much more than you can possibly repay on your income. Before you know it, you've got a huge mortgage payment on your house, you owe many thousands on a new car, maybe several credit cards, a couple of store charge cards and you're always tapping MAC and depleting your cash supply. A college student today could

easily graduate with \$50,000 or \$100,000 or more in educational loans that all has to be paid back. A small businessman could easily buy more equipment than he can pay for. The wise road is to be careful about borrowing and to always have a plan for paying it back that is reasonable. Otherwise, it may be best to wait and save and do without.

Becoming security, lending and borrowing: these are three practices that are not wrong, but require great care and caution as you enter into them. But there is:

II. A Practice Clearly Condemned in the Scriptures: Dishonesty in the way you earn your living. When I was in Kyrgyzstan in 1997 teaching this very principle in the College of Tourism the students were just aghast at me. They thought I lived in some kind of unreal world. One said, "We deal with thieves and crooks every day!" And they're right, they do. They can hardly imagine an honest business. One worker went in to pay his first electric bill. The clerk took him aside and said, "No need to pay all that. Just pay me this and I'll change it for you!" Bribery. That whole region of the world is filled with it! But it's not only over there; there's plenty of it here too. Dishonesty is everywhere in the workplace and it's so easy to get sucked into because everyone else is doing it. Solomon mentions:

1. some examples of dishonest business practices One is:

a. unfairly exchanging goods or money (11:1) You cheat a little so that the scale reads a little heavier than it should so your customer gets a little less than he should and you make more than you should. That's a trick as old as antiquity and it's the reason why every scale and gas pump here has to be certified periodically. We have a whole bureau set up to ensure honesty in this area. It could be giving small portions in a restaurant or an exchange rate for currency that is higher than the official one. Anytime you don't give someone what they legitimately believe they've paid for, it's an unfair exchange. Another dishonest practice is:

b. exploiting others to make profit (11:26) Here's a guy who buys up all the grain and hoards it during a time when there's great need and drives the price up. He creates an artificial shortage. The whole thought is that you exploit others' desperate situation or their ignorance and take advantage of them and make them suffer for your own profit. *Once upon a time there was a man out West who owned a general store. He had a habit of reciting a Scripture verse to every customer. He was very clever at coming up with something that related to what the person had purchased. As is typical of such stores, there was almost always a little group of men sitting around the cracker barrel or the pot-bellied stove. They always took great delight in the store owner's imagination. One cold January day a Texan come in the store wanting to buy a blanket for his horse. The locals all knew the store carried only two types of blankets--one that sold for \$40 and another that cost \$80. The storekeeper showed the stranger the first, and he said, "No, that's not good enough. I want something warmer for my horse." So, he pulled out the second type and told him the price. "That's still not good enough," said the Texan. "Don't you understand, this is for my horse. Show me your most expensive blanket." The guys around the stove watched closely to see what the storekeeper would do. He reached under the counter and pulled out a plaid version of the \$80 blanket and spread it out with great finesse. "This is our finest, the only one in stock. It's 100% wool, a very tight weave. It sells for \$250." "Now you're talking," said the Texan. "I'll take it." He counted out the money, folded the blanket, tucked it under his arm, and walked out the door with a big grin on his face. As the storekeeper put the money in the cash drawer, he said, "Matthew 25:35...he was a stranger and I took him in." [Journal for Preachers, Advent, 1996. Page 18.]* When one of our missionary partners was in China some time ago, a lady traveling with him snapped a picture of a local person without asking permission. The local then demanded a fee about ten times the going rate, ten yuan. When an American who lived there came up, he said, "Why are you trying to take advantage of these foreigners?" and paid her 1 yuan! There's always somebody waiting to take you in; just don't you become the perpetrator. When you sell somebody what they don't need or want or convince them they have to do something they really don't have to do, you're exploiting them for profit. Another dishonest practice is:

c. bribing officials for unfair advantage (15:27, 17:8) I already shared an example of this. It's everywhere. Pay someone off or do a "favor" in return for their cooperation. Our elected officials know all about it and every so often one of them is charged with accepting campaign contributions from parties with vested interests in exchange for voting their way. When you try to influence someone to do something dishonest or illegal or unfair using your money or power or influence, it's dishonest. And so is:

d. misrepresenting goods or services deliberately (20:14) You've all been at that yard sale and heard, "Why that's just trash; I'll only give you a dollar for it." And then the person runs home and boasts about how they got this valuable item for a dollar. Or the seller represents his item as the latest and greatest and you pay full price only to get it home to find out it's junk. Ever been sold a used car that was "owned by a little old lady from Pasadena who only drove it on Sundays," only to find it had been in a wreck and was repainted? I hope none of you are car salesmen because they're the worst overall lot at this that I've met. Any time you misrepresent something, pretend that it is more or less than it really is, for your good and to deceive the other party, that's dishonest and God abhors it! Of course, the most clearly dishonest practice is:

e. stealing what belongs to others (22:28) When nobody's looking you move the property line marker over and steal a foot or two of the other guy's property and put the grass back undisturbed. Or maybe you just juggle the figures on the books so you don't have to pay what you legally owe the government. Or maybe you help yourself to the stuff in the stockroom at work and take it home. You don't have to shoplift to be dishonest. There are lots of crafty ways to take what rightfully belongs to others for yourself. And finally, you're dishonest when you're:

f. charging exorbitant interest (28:8) Charging interest in itself is not wrong; it is a legitimate way to make income. But when you're in the position of lending and you take advantage of others in need by charging them two and three times the interest that is fair and right, you're on thin ice with the Lord and you'd better watch it.

Oh, you can make a lot of money being dishonest. People get rich that way all over the world. By exploiting others and lying and bribery and stealing and overcharging you can amass a fortune. But in reality, it doesn't pay. And Solomon gives us four reasons why:

2. some reasons that dishonest profit doesn't pay First:

a. ill-gotten gain is worthless (10:2) Make all the money you want; it has no real value. It can't save your life or your soul. When you stand before God, all you've struggled to wrongly amass and enjoy will be just a puff of smoke. Righteousness is what pleases him. Plus:

b. ill-gotten gain is fleeting (13:11) It tends to dwindle away, to slip through your fingers. God doesn't bless the process so you're on your own and He's working against you to hinder and stop you, so you can expect to lose it. What's more:

c. ill-gotten gain is deceptive (20:17) It blinds you to the consequences. It tastes good up front but and the good taste blinds you to the mouth full of gravel you'll taste when you get caught, to the suffering that the consequences will bring upon you eventually. And in the end:

d. ill-gotten gain is deadly (21:6) Paul said this, *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* - 1 Cor 6:9-10. People who live dishonestly as a lifestyle give evidence that their hearts are not changed; they are not truly saved and regenerated by the spirit of God. Righteousness doesn't dwell in them. If you don't want to come to Jesus because you'd have to give up being dishonest or if you can live in sin and not be bothered and convicted by it, then you'd better check on your salvation because you're liable to check out and find yourself in the wrong place!

Now I don't know what good this sermon has done for you. It may have bored you out of your mind, so let me close it with a story. *There was a butcher who ran a little shop on the edge of London. He decided one Sunday that he would go into town and hear the great preacher, Charles Spurgeon. His wife chose not to go with him. So the butcher went to town, went to church, and returned home. That afternoon his wife began to question him about the service. "What songs did they sing?" He said, "I don't remember" "What was the preacher's subject?" He said, "I don't remember." "Well, what was his text?" Again, he said, "I don't remember." Somewhat exasperated, his wife wanted to know, "Well then, what good did it do for you to go to church this morning?" The butcher was quiet for a moment. And then he said, "I'll tell you. You know those scales in the shop that weigh 14oz. to the pound? Before we open for business, I'm going to correct those scales to where they weigh a full 16 oz. to the pound!" The practices we've talked about this morning are normal in the workplace and all around you. It's easy to get sucked in. I don't care if you remember what I've said this morning but I do hope you'll go home to take stock of your own life and wherever your scales don't weigh true, fix them.*

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About Government (I): Nations And Righteousness

Everybody's attention this weekend is focused on celebrating the 222nd birthday of America, the nation of which we are a part. For most folks it's just another holiday, a time to be off from work, to picnic and party, to enjoy family times and special entertainment and for some even a day to drink and carouse. On Nov. 19, 1863 President Abraham Lincoln stood on the battlefield at Gettysburg where 6,000 men had died and another 27,000 were wounded in just 3 days, painfully aware of the cost of maintaining this nation, and spoke these words: *...our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.* The United States of America is the grandest experiment of history, a political entity with a government unlike any other, one dedicated to the freedom of its subjects, a government composed of the people themselves, directed by the people and for the benefit of the people. The Civil War was indeed a great test of whether this nation would endure. But I would echo Lincoln's words to say to you that today in this generation we are engaged in a great civil crisis which will indeed prove to be the test of whether this nation will long endure or not. It is a moral crisis, a battle about righteousness which will determine our future.

Solomon was given understanding from God about this whole matter of governments, nations and righteousness. And if you go with me to that famous Proverb, 14:34, I would like to first of all point out to you that:

I. We Are Members Of A People (14:34) Now you need to understand the Biblical:

1. the concept of a nation or people The word *nations* in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *goyim*; in the New Testament it is *ethne*. It does not refer to political, geographic nations or countries but to people groups. Look with me at the first phrase of **Jer. 18:7**. Note the two words *nation* and *kingdom*. Those are two different things.

a. a nation is a people bound by roots/language They have common ancestors, a common history, a common culture and speak a common language. The story of America is not just one of gaining political independence but of something unique on earth: the actual creation of a people. Our country has been populated almost solely by immigrants, remnants of peoples from other parts of the world, British, French, Italian, German, Hispanic, Black, Russian and hosts of other ethnic peoples who came here seeking freedom. But America has been called the Great Melting Pot. These peoples lived together and worked together and intermarried so that the longer we go through history these peoples are merging more and more into one people that we might legitimately call **the American people**. My grandparents were German and Yugoslavian but my generation and those younger no longer feel those cultural ties. We are Americans. Our roots, our heritage, our language our culture, our identity is solely American. You and I are part of the American people. Now the other word God uses to Jeremiah is *kingdom*:

b. a kingdom is the dominion of a king or government, an area ruled over by a particular government, a kingdom, an empire, a country. And we are also that, **the United States Of America**, a territory lined out on a map, populated by 250 million people and governed by a central authority. In Solomon's day, Israel was a people descended from Abraham but she had also become a kingdom among the countries of earth which Solomon ruled. So, we need to see ourselves in two ways. We are an integral part of the American people but we are also citizens of the republic of the United States of America. And I'd like to talk about both roles this morning. Now go back to 14:34.

2. the quality God desires in any people is moral righteousness (14:34) Remember, the word *nation* doesn't mean a country but a people group as the second line says in parallel. God is concerned about the character which a people display corporately. The more that a culture practices righteousness, the more it is lifted up, and the more that evil is entrenched in it, the lower it sinks. God:

a. He desires clear standards of righteousness (24:24-25) It is amazing how almost all the peoples of earth display some clear knowledge of moral right and wrong, remnants of the knowledge of a holy God. Almost all recognize and practice a permanent commitment of marriage, the majority between one man and one woman. Murder, the deliberate taking of human life, is universally recognized for the evil it is. Stealing, lying and adultery are seen by almost all peoples as evil and are punishable. When a people begins to say to those who practice those things, "You are innocent; you have done nothing wrong," and so remove those basic standards, it risks not only its reputation in the earth but incurs for itself the judgment of God. The American people were created and formed, melted together under those basic standards, but in this generation, more than any other time in our history, we as a people have begun to practice en masse the very things that God abhors. *Chuck Colson was invited to a luncheon by the publisher of a major American newspaper chain. It was a meeting of the editorial board, and the topic for discussion was criminal justice. Before the actual program began, the publisher turned to Colson and asked, "You're one of those guys who go around talking about the Bible, aren't you?" When Colson admitted that was true, the publisher went on, "I suppose you think it's a good idea to post the Ten Commandments in school classrooms." "Yes, I do," said Colson. "Well, we sponsored a campaign in this city to take the Ten Commandments off the walls of every classroom." Colson asked him why they did that when Jews believe the Ten Commandments, Muslims believe in the Ten Commandments, and Christians believe in the Ten Commandments. Colson said, "How many Buddhists do you have in this city?" The publisher responded with a lame statement about needing to be enlightened. "Enlightened?" replied Colson. "How about teaching them history? Teach them that the Ten Commandments are the basis for our laws. That's why there's a portrait of Moses just above the Speaker of the House in U.S. Congress." "We can't do that in this country," said the publisher, "if we want to be enlightened." Then, just a few minutes later, in the middle of the program, the same man cited statistics showing that 50% of public school students steal from each other. He lamented this as a terrible situation and asked the group, "What can we do about this?" Colson spoke up: "Well, maybe we should post a sign on the classroom wall that says, 'You shall not steal.'" [Citizen, Jul 22, 1996. Pages 6-7.] We as a people have stopped making it clear that stealing is wrong, that adultery is wrong, or even that killing is wrong, as long as the victim is either unborn or elderly and infirm. As a culture, we have said to the guilty, "you're innocent!" but God desires a people to have clear standards that promote righteousness and:*

b. He desires an attitude that encourages righteousness (11:10) The whole city should cheer when people tell the truth, when they accomplish things the honest way, when they catch the criminal and carry out justice. There should be an attitude among the people of joy in that which is morally right and in the defeat of evil. There should be a sadness and a mourning in the city when evil triumphs. Yet in our own city of Philadelphia just a few weeks ago, despite all the protest that was amassed by churches and other organizations, we became one of the few cit-

ies in the nation to legally recognize same-sex marriages and domestic partnerships. As a people, our attitude is becoming more and more accepting of unrighteousness and less and less encouraging of that which is right. But God desires more than just an attitude:

c. He desires actions that control unrighteousness (17:15) He wants the innocent acquitted and their righteousness justified. And he wants the guilty convicted and sentenced appropriately. Don't get me wrong; He also wants them saved and forgiven and transformed by the power of Jesus, but He definitely wants any people, any culture to practice justice, to take active steps to stop unrighteous behavior and control it! That is his plan. And so:

3. a people's future depends on their moral character (11:11) When the upright, those in favor of right moral standards, hold sway it tends to impact their future in an uphill direction. When the wicked, those who practice immoral behavior, dominate, it tends to impact their future toward destruction. Look with me now at the whole of **Jer. 18:7-10**. It doesn't get much clearer than that. When a people adopt unrighteous standards of morality, God sets his hand against them and unless they repent, destruction comes. In the long run of history righteousness tends toward blessing; evil tends toward destruction.

Take one small isolated example. The Waorani people (better known as the Aucas) live in the jungles of Ecuador. For 200 years they killed with spears every stranger that set foot in their territory so they were left alone. But among themselves they had developed a culture of revenge. When one was angry, he would take personal revenge and spear his unsuspecting adversary. Then a relative of that person would gather some help and spear to death him and as many of his family as they could catch. Then one of his relatives would eventually spear the other man and his family or one of his relatives. Every time one of these killings occurred the whole family would flee and move and hide. They killed wives along with their dying husbands. They abandoned or buried unwanted babies. They speared the five missionaries who had made months' worth of successful attempts to befriend them. The tribe decimated its own ranks so that only a few hundred were left until finally one of their number who fled to the outside was converted and went back and took the Gospel in and gradually the killing stopped! Today you can go visit them as a tourist! Any people apart from God's mercy and grace left to themselves will bring great suffering upon themselves and self-destruct! The world is filled with current examples of it. Look at the time of the Judges in Israel's history, when every man did that which was right in his own eyes and how the people suffered for it. What's my point? The western mindset tells me, "I am an individual. I control my own destiny and make my own choices and future." But America is a people. We are part and parcel of a people and that people is morally disintegrating at a rapid pace. It is bound to impact the future of our people! Among our people we must shine for righteousness! We must hold up the standard for our people. We must by our words and by our lives be a light in our people's darkness, a shining example of true life. We must strive and be burdened to bring our own people the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ! We need a heart like Paul who said, *I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel... - Rom. 9:1-4.* When we have great sorrow and anguish in our hearts for our people and a deep desire to see our people won for Christ, to see a church-planting movement among the American people instead of a church-closing movement, that is what will impact our future for the good! Now we come to my second point. We are not only members of a people:

II. We Are Subjects of A Kingdom America is not just a people but a political country. We are citizens under the ruling authority of the government of the United States Of America. When it passes laws, we are subject to them. When it levies taxes; we are obligated to pay them; when we break its laws, we are subject to its officers, judged by its courts and under its penalties. The bottom line is that we are subjects under authority just as much as the people of Solomon's kingdom. Now here's our confidence:

1. God ultimately controls those who rule over us (21:1, 16:10) God ultimately controls the king's heart, the king's mouth, and the king's judgments. The ruling authority does nothing that is not subject to the control of Almighty God. Paul put it this way, **Rom. 13:1**. You mean, Saddam Hussein? Yes. You mean the government of Sudan that is committing genocide on the Christian citizens of its southern half? Yes. Even President Clinton? There is no ruling authority that God has not allowed and does not ultimately control and use to accomplish His glory, even when it looks like they are out of control! The government we have, righteous or not, the officials we have, righteous or not, the laws we have, right or not, have come to be in place through the hand of God. Therefore:

2. we should obey the authority that rules over us (24:21-22) Fearing the Lord is obeying the authority. That is His desire and command for us. Look back at **Rom. 13:2**. God's plan is for us to be good citizens, faithful subjects, to obey the laws, to pay the taxes, to register for the draft, to accept your turn on the jury, and whatever else the ruling authority requires:

a. unless that authority contradicts God You know very well Peter's words in **Acts 4:19**, *But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.* And in **5:29**, *Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!* When government tells me to disobey God, to kill, steal, lie or stop worshipping Him, then I must out of obedience to God as a higher authority disobey on those matters, at the same time realizing that I must be:

b. and we are willing to pay the price (20:2) In your Missions Hot Sheet today is a request for 102 believers arrested for their faith in Saudi Arabia who are imprisoned and probably being tortured. Pray for them. That day has not come here yet but one day it may.

But normally Christians make the best citizens a country can have. They have a high moral fiber and submit willingly to the authority over them. They pray for those in authority! Why? Because:

3. authorities are God's normal means of promoting righteousness Ruling authority, human government, is how God prevents the world from becoming like it was before the flood once again. Flawed as it may be, governing authorities generally:

a. they reward righteous behavior (16:13, 22:11) Generally authorities reward truth and honesty and require it. Look at **Rom. 13:3**. The fear of human authority drives people toward right behavior. Just think how you drive when you see a policeman in your rearview mirror! And:

b. they punish evil behavior (20:8, 20:26) They punish the criminals who steal and kill. Compare **Rom. 13:4**. The authorities serve God, knowingly or unknowingly by to some degree controlling evil and promoting righteousness among their subjects. So:

4. our obedience is rooted in conscience, not simply fear (24:21) We reverence the king because we reverence the Lord. Compare **Rom. 13:5**. We know that governmental authorities are necessary and that God uses them so we submit to His choice and not merely out of fear of being punished like much of the world does.

We are a fortunate people. The government of the United States of America may not be perfect. It may have flawed people and some unfair and unrighteous laws and make some unjust and wrong decisions. But of all the governments of earth, it still ranks among the best at accomplishing what God has intended it for. Plus, we are very fortunate that in our country, WE have a role in selecting government officials and in changing laws and as loyal subjects we should use that privilege to the hilt and influence the authority over us toward righteousness in any way that we can. Get informed. Vote. Participate in the process. Don't leave the future of our dominion to unbelievers. I leave you with the words of Abraham Lincoln once again: *It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us - that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion - that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain - that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom - and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.* This 4th of July let's renew our commitment to be loyal subjects propelling our government forward toward righteousness and to be those with a burden for their own people that they be won to Christ and to righteousness.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About Government (II): Rulers And Justice

For thousands of years men have devised and debated various forms of government from monarchy where one person governs, to democracy where all people have a say. They have practiced everything from feudalism where the rich lords rule, to communism where the poor masses supposedly rule. And the thing that's wrong with every government ever devised is simply that it is composed of people! No matter which form it takes, there are always rulers, those invested with authority, who govern the rest. And it is the character and the quality of those leaders who rule that impacts profoundly the society or country which they govern. There have been kind benevolent kings and even dictators who blessed their people tremendously. And there have self-centered, pocket-lining, duly elected representatives who proved to be a curse to those who put them in power. Solomon has a lot to say, both to and about rulers, those who hold governing authority. First of all, let's look at:

I. The Responsibility Of Those Who Are In Authority (16:12) This is how it is supposed to be. Governing authority is to be founded and established on righteousness. Those in authority, kings or presidents, ought to detest moral evil and to stand for righteousness. Joan Clayton wrote: *There is a very noticeable absence of moral leaders today...leaders who stand for morality, integrity, honesty and character. Leaders who are not driven for personal greed or self-promotions., but men and women who love this country and are willing to sacrifice while leading the nation in the best possible way. A society which allows prayer to be removed from public places cannot produce good leaders. [Pulpit Helps, July 1998, p. 4]* You see:

1. leaders are God's normal means of promoting righteousness Ruling authority, human government, is how God prevents the world from becoming filled with evil behavior once again, as it was before the flood. Flawed as they may be, governing authorities generally have two functions:

a. they reward righteous behavior (22:11) Now I don't think that means that if you're really a good person and love purity that President Clinton will be at your next birthday party. I think it means that, generally speaking, kings and rulers reward truth and honesty and require it. Look at **Rom. 13:3**. The fear of human authority drives people

toward right behavior. Just think about how carefully you drive when you see a policeman in your rearview mirror! Leaders are to promote and reward right behavior and:

b. they punish evil behavior (20:8, 20:26) This is how it's supposed to work. Rulers punish the criminals, those who cheat and steal and kill and prey upon others. Compare **Rom. 13:4**. The authorities serve God, knowingly or unknowingly, by at least to some degree controlling evil and promoting righteousness among their subjects. Some do it better than others but that is their primary purpose, to promote righteousness in a society. But they also have another function:

2. leaders are intended to serve as advocates (31:8-9) In the first nine verses we have the advice which the mother of a young king gave to her son. Lemuel has been traditionally regarded as a pet name for Solomon, which means "belonging to God", and this whole passage as advice that Bathsheba gave to him as a young boy. At any rate this mother knew that her son would one day be THE source of ruling justice in Israel and she trained him to believe that a leader is more than just a just judge; he is an advocate, someone who comes alongside those who are in trouble to help! We live in a race of people who, though they were created for higher things, often live by the rule that dominates the animal kingdom, survival of the fittest. In this world strong people often get ahead by preying on other people who are physically or financially or circumstantially weaker in some way and can't defend themselves. A missionary friend wrote to me some time ago that in Kyrgyzstan when a person is appointed to an office, the general attitude is, "I have about a year to get as rich as I can before this ends." But God intends leaders to swim against the tide, to serve as advocates for the downtrodden and forgotten, as somebody to turn to for help and aid to see that truth and justice prevail. So, Solomon's mother taught him a leader ought:

a. to be a voice for the helpless, those who can't speak for themselves, who have no chance to tell their story and get a hearing, the young, the immigrant, the minority. Millions of children around the world are denied the right to be human; they are forced into slave labor in factories, sold into the thriving sex trade for prostitution or brainwashed, given a rifle and sent out to be slaughtered in wars. They have no way to cry for help! Saddam Hussein waged a ruthless campaign of genocide against the Kurdish minority in Iraq which nobody knew about until the Gulf War stopped it. And in this country who is more helpless and silent than the thousands of infants who are killed before they're born. Leaders are to speak up for those who suffer in silence. And they're:

b. to be a defense for the perishing The NIV *destitute* is literally *sons of passing away*, those whose lives are slipping away. It means the ill, the aged, the infirm, those who could easily be preyed upon by the greed of others in their weakened condition and stolen from, mistreated or locked away and warehoused or eliminated altogether. Leaders are to defend the perishing, to see they are protected when they cannot do it themselves. And they are:

c. to be a fair judge for the oppressed *Poor* is literally *afflicted*, those who are receiving unfair treatment, who are being persecuted or refused because of the color of their skin or their ethnic heritage or their religious beliefs. In a number of countries Christians are singled out as targets of animosity and persecution and may lose their jobs, be thrown out of their family or community or even be beaten or jailed. Leaders are to see that those who are oppressed receive the fair and just treatment they deserve. And they are:

d. to be a help for the needy Jesus warned that we would always have the poor with us. Today fully half the population of the world has an income of less than \$500 per year. Millions go to bed hungry. They suffer from malnutrition. Their babies die in infancy from illness or ignorance. Adults die of simple illnesses because there is no medicine. There is no education or opportunity to go elsewhere or do anything other than simply survive. Leaders are to help those who have no way to feed and clothe themselves.

God never intended that leaders should rule for self, for their own benefit, that they should use their power for their own advantage and enrichment. They are to be the champions of the weak and advocates for the helpless. But sadly enough, not many of the leaders of earth, even here in the most advanced country in the world, take that role seriously. Instead, they get involved in all the things Solomon's mother specifically warned him against. Here are:

3. some things leaders must carefully avoid in order to rule well. First, as you might expect, is:

a. sexual promiscuity (31:1-3) The first thing every king wants is a harem and many a president or congressman wants a mistress or three or four. But it destroys leaders. It robs their time and energy; it clouds their thinking and obstructs them from the justice they are charged with dispensing. Despite the warning, Solomon collected his harem and in later years it led his heart away from God to idolatry. Immorality is a deathtrap for anyone, but in a leader's life it can impact his whole realm and do serious harm. So can:

b. chemical addiction (31:4-5) The pressures and demands of leadership can tend to drive a person toward drink or toward drugs as an escape. Recently I had somebody I barely know send me a series of three or four email messages which they wrote when they got drunk and were on a roll and I was appalled at what prejudice and hatred and filth can come out of a person when they're not in control of themselves. A leader who's not in control, who's under the influence of a chemical, could do tremendous damage. So could:

c. partiality and bribery (24:23, 29:4) A leader who looks out for #1, who does favors for all his friends and relatives or whose influence can be bought with a gift or coerced with a threat, that leader will do great damage to those under him. And so will a well-meaning leader who is fed:

d. misinformation and lies (29:12, 25:2) You can practically guarantee that any leader, any officer, any judge will be lied to. He will be given only one side of any story. People are always seeking to enlist him in their cause, but he or she must be diligent in seeking out the truth, in seeing the whole picture, be wise enough not to believe everything they're told or before you know it some wicked Haman will have all the Jews executed before the king even knew the decree was signed with his ring!

A leader is to stand for justice and righteousness. A leader is to be an advocate for his people. A leader is to avoid promiscuity and addiction and partiality and naiveté. That applies to leaders of countries, to leaders of counties, and even to leaders of churches. Leadership is always for the good of those being led. Now let's put the shoe on the other foot. What is:

II. Our Responsibility Toward Those Who Are In Authority Obviously there aren't a whole lot of leaders who are fulfilling their God-given responsibilities very well. Some do pretty well and are an overall benefit but others blatantly abuse their authority and power. How are we supposed to relate to those that are in ruling authority over us? Well, our response begins with understanding this truth:

1. God ultimately controls those who rule over us (21:1, 16:10) God ultimately controls the king's heart, the king's mouth, and the king's judgments. In the final analysis, any leader in authority does nothing that is not subject to the control of Almighty God. Paul put it this way in **Rom. 13:1**. There is no ruling authority, no leader that God has not allowed to be in power and does not ultimately control and use to accomplish His glory, even when it looks like they are out of control! The government we have, righteous or not, the officials we have, righteous or not, the laws we have, right or not, have come to be in place through the hand of God. Therefore, as we've said before, the Scripture tells us that:

2. we should obey the authorities that rule over us (24:21-22) Fearing the Lord means obeying the authority. That is His desire and command for us. Look back at **Rom. 13:2**. God's plan is for us to be good citizens, faithful subjects, to obey the laws, to pay the taxes, to register for the draft, to accept our turn on the jury, and whatever else the ruling authority requires:

a. unless that authority contradicts God's command and we are willing to pay the price (20:2) That's the price. You know very well Peter's words in **Acts 4:19** when he was commanded to stop teaching about Jesus, *...Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.* and a second time in **5:29**, *Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! When government tells me to disobey God, to kill, steal, lie or stop worshipping Him, then I must out of obedience to God as a higher authority disobey on those matters, at the same time realizing that I must be willing to pay the price of that rebellion. But normally Christians make the best citizens a country can have. They have a high moral fiber and submit willingly to the authority over them. Why do we do it?*

b. our obedience is rooted in conscience not simply fear (24:21) We reverence the king because we reverence the Lord. Compare **Rom. 13:5**. We know that governmental authorities, that rulers and leaders are necessary and that God uses them for our good so we submit to His choice, not merely out of fear of being punished like much of the world does, but because it is God's desire for us. But there is one more responsibility we have:

3. obedience includes praying for our leaders - 1 Tim. 2:1-2 The only possible way that leaders can benefit their people and bring about peace and harmony is if believers pray for them. Here's where I fall so miserably short. How can we ever expect our leaders to be leaders unless we pray for them? How could anybody handle the heavy load of responsibility that comes with leadership of something as large as a country or even as small as a church, without Divine help and without believers making intercession on their behalf. We raise our voices a lot to complain about leadership, even to ridicule our leaders, but we very seldom raise them to implore God on their behalf. Maybe that's why we are in the moral crisis that we as a people are in. We hardly know who our leaders are, let alone pray for them. How can we ever expect the leaders of the world to care for and nurture their own people and to stop persecuting believers and open their permission for the Gospel, if nobody prays for them? How can we expect our own leaders to fill their role in our society, to promote righteousness and purity, if we don't pray for them?

John Ashcroft tells the story of how an old man accompanied his son to Washington, D.C. The son had been elected senator and was to be sworn in. The father was eager that the son serve well. In a prayerful time of dedication, commitment, and devotion on the morning of the swearing-in ceremony, the elderly father told his son that "the spirit of Washington is the spirit of arrogance, but the spirit of Christ is the spirit of humility." He looked his son directly in the eye and admonished him with a clarity which went beyond speaking. He said, "Nothing of lasting value in the world has ever been accomplished in the spirit of arrogance." As the group of friends and family assembled around the son to pray, the newly-

elected senator noticed his father trying to get up off the sofa to join with the group in prayer. Noticing the father's struggle, the son turned to his father and said, "Dad, you don't have to struggle to stand." His father with weakness but clarity said, "Son, I'm not struggling to stand; I'm struggling to kneel." And he knelt by his son and prayed that the Spirit of Christ would be a mantle which would cover his son in humility so that he would have no regrets. "That day," says Senator Ashcroft, "was the last day of my father's life. He died on his way returning home to Missouri. If you can freeze that frame for a moment--an ailing, aged father not struggling to stand but struggling to kneel and pray beside his kneeling son--you can observe a picture of what will help save America." [Intercessors for America Newsletter, Dec 1995. Page 3.] I guess my challenge this morning is that you and I should be "struggling to kneel" over our sons and daughters who will become the future leaders of America and of the world and also that we should be "struggling to kneel" over kings and all those in authority right now in the nations of earth and our own, that we might move the hand of God that moves hearts of kings that the peoples of this world, including our own might be touched for Him.

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom About Life (I): Pitfalls To Avoid And Pleasures To Enjoy

We are winding down to the end of our series of studies in Proverbs. I certainly don't want to leave you with the notion that we've exhausted it completely; there are dozens and dozens of verses we haven't even touched. And God can use any and all of them in your life as you read them personally. But we have covered almost all of the major themes found in the book. There are however a number of well known passages that don't fall into the headings of larger themes but shouldn't be ignored. I've put them together and called them "Wisdom About Life" and they take three messages to cover. After that we'll start a new study. But today's grouping of topics I've called, "Pitfalls To Avoid and Pleasures To Enjoy". First, let's look at:

I. Two Of Life's Most Common Pitfalls Now you woodsmen know that a pitfall is a trap you make by digging a hole in the ground and concealing the opening. An unsuspecting animal (or in this case a person) comes along and falls in before he realizes he's stepped into a trap. And Solomon's advice about pitfalls is simple: learn to recognize them ahead of time for what they are and by all means, **Be careful to avoid them!** One of the most common pits that people fall into in all generations and all over the world is:

1. the pit of alcohol and chemical abuse Quite frankly, the Scriptures do not teach that a believer should never touch alcohol and Paul even encourages Timothy to use a little wine as something that would be good for his body. In the Hebrew culture of the Old Testament, the Greek culture of the New Testament and in most cultures of the world today, it is quite normal, acceptable and even enjoyable to consume a little alcohol with meals or at least on festive occasions. But the Bible everywhere warns us about the danger of its intoxicating properties and commands us never to be "drunk with wine", not to be prone to drink "too much wine" and so on. Solomon warns us that:

a. its nature is deceptive (20:1, 23:31-32) It's like a picture I saw of a woman in India offering a bowl of rice to a beautiful hooded cobra to gain blessing for her family. On the front end, it sparkles and looks delicious and beautiful. It may taste good and go down smoothly. It may give a relaxing feeling and a release of tension. You think it's going to help and bless you and you drink more. But when you give in and let it control you, instead of you controlling it, it will bite you with a poison as deadly as any poisonous snake. It is deceptive. It is tremendously difficult to sense when you cross the line from you enjoying it to it impacting and controlling you. Even a small amount begins to impair your reflexes and your judgment, which is why it's illegal (not to mention dangerous and stupid) to drive a car when you're under its influence. And the person who is under its influence is usually blinded to that fact and unable to accurately assess their own condition. It's deceptive. And our society as a whole is waking up to it these last few years. You've got to realize that when you abuse it (when you begin to let it control you):

b. its effects are destructive And by the way, these effects would be the same for the use of any narcotic drug. We'll look at them quickly:

(1) it ruins you materially (23:20-21) It has a definite financial impact. Just the purchase cost alone must have taken hundreds and hundreds of dollars out of my childhood home over the years and we really could have used it! The estimated cost to industry of employees drinking and the resulting loss of efficiency or missed work is in the millions annually. People lose their jobs and eventually their homes and then their families as drink takes control.

(2) it causes sorrow and grief (23:29-30) It leaves a trail of broken homes, highway deaths, wasted lives and traumatized women and children.

(3) it produces conflict Many people undergo personality changes when they are under its influence; they become overconfident, critical, argumentative, sometimes mean and even abusive.

(4) it does physical damage that goes beyond redness of the eyes, vomiting and a temporary hangover. It can lead to bruises and broken bones from falling or having accidents or cirrhosis of the liver.

(5) it removes inhibitions (23:33) The NIV *strange things* is a word translated several times elsewhere as *strange women*. When you're drunk, your inhibitions are gone; you do and say things you'd never do in your right mind. Sexual sin often occurs under the influence of alcohol or drugs and the person is barely aware of what they're doing until they come to.

(6) it inhibits normal perception and function (23:34-35a) You may stagger and reel; you can't function normally. You can't feel normally. You can be badly hurt and not know it. Your perceptions are masked by the alcohol.

(7) it becomes an addiction (23:35b) Even after experiencing so many destructive effects, many people get up and seek it again. They're addicted, controlled. They can't stop without help. It's a huge problem in the US and worldwide. The CIS is riddled with it; people addicted to vodka or drugs trying to escape their miserable life. So, to legitimately enjoy alcohol as a God-given beverage is like using a gun or an automobile wisely and safely. You recognize its destructive power and carefully limit its use to that which it was intended for. It seems to me that you have to ask God for the grace of self-control to limit yourself to small amounts, a glass or two, and stop and ask for grace to recognize the warning signs your own body gives you that it is being affected. As for me personally, I grew up with it all around and saw the damage it can do, so I just make other choices and don't touch the stuff unless there is an official toast or something where the host might be offended. But however you deal with it, don't fall into the pit! And here's a second one:

2. the pit of immorality We did cover this one way back last fall when we looked at the lengthy warnings that are in chapters 2, 5 and 7, but it is such a common thing in our society and world today and there is another serious warning later in the book **(23:26-28)**. The symbolism here is that of literally falling into a deep, narrow well or pit. How many times have you seen on a news show where a child has fallen into an abandoned, covered well and had to be rescued? Immorality is like that. To understand that, you must understand:

a. God's path of fidelity His principle is simple and universal, **sex belongs ONLY in the marriage union**. God's design for the human race is that one man should be permanently united with one woman for a lifetime and sex is designed to be a wonderful, most intimate part of that union. But Satan is always trying to lure you to step into:

b. Satan's pit of infidelity So Solomon warns us of three things:

(1) it is deceptive: you will get hurt That other person looks handsome, looks beautiful. That's the camouflage covering over the pit. Those hormones inside you that God put there for your mate get a bit excited and your mind begins to wonder what it would be like to have a sexual relationship with that person and it begins to imagine and before you know it, you've stepped into the pit. But if you ever fall into a pit, you'll learn one thing immediately, it hurts! You will suffer for it. You will get hurt and so will a whole bunch of people who love you! Nobody tells you that on the front end! Young people, listen to me; it's not the heavenly thing the media and your friends and your hormones tell you it's going to be. Outside of marriage, it's a pit that ultimately hurts you deeply! Plus, this pit:

(2) it is deep: you will have trouble getting out Once you're involved, it will be difficult to let go. You will set forces in motion that are beyond your control that will strive to hold you there, to keep you from going back. You'll start out thinking once won't hurt and quickly find yourself in a lifestyle you can't stop. Plus:

(3) it is dangerous: you will become a victim You'll be like the mugger's victim or the lion's prey. You'll think you're in control until suddenly you find yourself the victim of the lion's grip and there's no way out. Am I sure? Compare **6:27-29**. You'll blow up your life. You'll blow up every relationship you've got, your wife, your children, your extended family members, your friends, your church. Mark it down!

So, Solomon warns us: watch out! Don't step into that pitfall!

Now I'd like to switch gears completely. Let's go from life's most dangerous pitfalls to:

II. Three Of Life's Least-Savored Pleasures Here are three things that Solomon says are wonderful and you ought to not let them pass you by in life, but instead **Be sure to enjoy them!** The first one you'll never believe is:

1. the experience of godly maturation (20:29, 16:31) Grey hair! It is a crown of splendor, yet so many of you are coloring it as fast as it appears! Our culture has sold us on the idea of denying the aging process as much as possible. Look young, hide the wrinkles, cover the blemishes, be a perpetual 29 yr. old! With us particularly there is:

a. the temptation: to see aging simply as an awful deterioration My body gets uglier and weaker. I can do less and less, eat less, work less, play less well. Everything is downhill until I die! And physically I guess that's true in some respect. Your body is dying from the day you're born and some of the things that go with that aren't fun. But here's:

b. the point: savor the beauty of the maturity God has produced through the righteous path of your life In many of the cultures of earth, older people are respected and honored for their wisdom and experience. In the villages of Kyrgyzstan, the most respected person is the *aksakal*, the “white beard”. He is the one who settles disputes and gives advice. There is a maturity that God can only produce in you through years of experience at living. That’s why Robert Browning wrote, “*Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be, the last of life for which the first was made.*” How many of us would honestly want to be a child again? Or a teenager again? Or 21 again? When we think about where we are now intellectually, we always say, “If I’d known then what I know now...” We do recognize it in a practical sense but look at it spiritually. **2 Cor. 3:18.** All through our spiritual lives the Spirit of God has been at work transforming us from one stage to another of reflecting His character and glory. We are more like Jesus now than ever in our lives and by the time I am a “white beard” think how much more spiritually mature I’ll be if I keep growing. So savor it, appreciate it, be thankful for it. I’m so glad God didn’t leave me where I was at 21 or at 24 when I came here. I am so glad for how God has opened my eyes to understand the Christian life as one lived by His grace and power instead of my own, to understand a little bit of the dynamics of how our personalities and behavior are powerfully shaped by the experiences of our childhood and youth, to understand and mirror just a bit of His heart’s desire that every people on earth should worship Him for His glory! I don’t ever want to go back to where I was, legalistic and judgmental and small-minded, and I’m so grateful for Him bringing me where I am. And I know I’ve got a long way to go but I’m enjoying being here and the process of growing to the next stage. Don’t let life just pass you by spiritually stuck at one place; follow His path of righteousness and let Him mold and shape you like Himself and savor it! Glory in it! A young man in his glorying will point to his muscles, his physical prowess. An older person who has gotten that way in the path of righteousness will point with a thankful heart to the beauty of the image of Jesus God has created in Him.

A second experience you don’t want to miss savoring in life is:

2. the experience of an unshakeable hope (23:17-18, 24:19-20) Contrast the difference between the two. The person without the Lord, the wicked person, may appear to do amazingly well here but he has no future hope. You on the other hand, no matter how terrible or difficult life may be here, have a future hope in Jesus Christ that is absolutely guaranteed! You see, as we go through life there is this temptation which Solomon mentions repeatedly:

a. the temptation: to envy or fear those who seem to succeed through evil Here are all these guys who are at high levels in business and make all kinds of money while you struggle to make ends meet. Here are all these people who have power and tramp on others, who can do you harm and you can’t seem to stop it. Here are all your neighbors who have all day Sunday free to relax because they don’t worship God and have all that extra money because they don’t tithe or send their kids to Christian school. And Satan plants that little thought of discontent, of envy, “Gee, what profit is there in living the way I do? I wish I was like them!” No, you don’t! Step back and look at the eternal picture. After a few short years of “success” they die and suffer forever in a lake of fire unless someone reaches them first. On the other hand, after a few short years of struggling, you die and spend eternity in glory with Jesus. Now which person would you rather be? But you don’t have to wait until you die to enjoy it!

b. the point: savor the eternal glory which awaits you through all the experiences of earth We believers are the only people on earth who can go through this life, miserable or nice, with the absolute assurance of a guaranteed glory in the end! But so many times we live with our heads buried in the sand, totally consumed with our problems and hurts and difficulties. Solomon says, “Look ahead and savor it now!” Look what Paul says in **2 Cor. 4:16-18.** It’s all in where you look. Paul says, “Look up! Fix your eyes up there. See the glory that awaits you; cherish it; savor it; long for it; wait for it expectantly.” The writer of Hebrews says, *God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure...* - **Heb. 6:18-19.** God intends for us to be continually encouraged as we go through the trials of life because our soul is anchored firm and secure to this future we have waiting for us. So, think about glory. Picture it. See yourself there with Jesus. Feel His love and the safety and the joy of seeing loved ones. Picture yourself falling with the redeemed before Him. Savor that hope! The hymnwriter said: *Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in His wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace!*

Don’t go through life bent over and looking down! Enjoy the gift of your future all the way through! And then a final experience you should savor:

3. the experience of giving life (11:30) You’ve heard this verse for years but maybe haven’t stopped to look at it. The point is not about you getting life; it is about you giving life. The Living Bible puts it more clearly, *Godly men are growing a tree that bears life-giving fruit, and all who win [or acquire, get] souls are wise.* As you go through life, there is:

a. the temptation: to place value on things you acquire or accomplish, the money you make, the job you have, the house you live in, the car you drive, the work you’ve done, the degrees you’ve earned. You’re so involved with all those things of earth that they easily take on a genuine value to you. But the scripture warns us clearly, *For we brought nothing into [this] world, [and it is] certain we can carry nothing out.* - **1Tim 6:7 (KJV).** All that stuff stays. Only one thing is eternal: people, the eternal souls of human beings. God didn’t plant you in this life to get things for

you. He planted you here to be a life-giving tree to attract others and impart life to them through the knowledge of His glory and gather them into His kingdom.

b. the point: savor the joy of the Spirit's fruit in you imparting His life to others Paul had done a great deal and been in a great many places and had a great reputation. But he didn't find joy in any of that stuff. Look at **1 Thes. 2:19-20**. He said, "You are my joy!" Knowing that God had produced fruit in his life that gave life to others was his joy. John wrote, *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.* - 3 John 1:4. Throughout your life invest yourself in giving life to others and rejoice in how God uses you to touch others with His life, your own children, those friends and relatives you've impacted, the people at church you've touched, the multitudes of people you've prayed and given for at the ends of the earth and God has answered. That's what life is all about and it's a joy you can savor your life long.

Oh, be careful to stay out of the dangerous pitfalls of life! Don't get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit. And flee from sexual immorality as far and fast as you can! But oh, be sure to savor the pleasures! Revel in what God has done in you (that beautiful maturity), what God has done for you (that hope that anchors your soul), and what God has done through you in spreading His life to others. Get joy out of heavenly things while you're on earth. I'll close with a legend: *There was an old man on the isle of Crete, and during his lifetime he loved many things. He loved his wife, his children, and his job, but most of all he loved the land. He loved the very ground he walked on, worked, and fought for. When it was time for him to die, he had his sons bring him outside his stone cottage and lay him on the earth. He reached down, grabbed a handful of Crete's soil and was gone. He arrived at the gate of heaven, and the Lord came out dressed in the long robes of a judge and said to him, "Old man, come in." As the old man moved toward the gates, the Lord noticed something in his hand and asked, "What are you clutching in your hand?" He said, "It is Crete. I go nowhere without it." The Lord said, "Leave it, or you will not be allowed in." "The old man held his clenched fist up and said, "Never!" And he went and sat beside the outside wall of the heavenly city. After a week had passed, the gates opened again and the Lord appeared a second time, this time in the guise of a man wearing a hat, looking like some of the old man's buddies down in Crete. He sat down next to the old man, threw His arm around his shoulder and said, "My friend, dust belongs to the wind. Drop that piece of earth and come inside." But the old man was still adamant, "Never!" During the third week the old man looked down at the dirt he was clutching and saw that it had begun to cake and crumble. All the moisture of the earth had gone out of it. Also, his fingers were arthritic and could hardly hold it. The earth began to trickle through his fingers. Out came the Lord, this time as a small child. He came up to the old man and sat next to him and said, "Grandfather, the gates only open for those with open hands." The old man thought about this, finally stood up, and did not even look down as the crumbled dirt of Crete fell out of his hand. The child took his hand and led him toward the glorious gates. As the gates swung open, he walked in. Inside was all of Crete. [Moments for Pastors by Robert Strand. New Leaf Press, 1994. Day 12.] Now it's only a myth, a fictional story, of course, but it makes a powerful point. Why cling to things of earth as though they had ultimate value and try to wring pleasure and satisfaction out of them, when all of glory, everything that's really important, lies just ahead of you? Invest your life in eternal things and get your joy out of them now!*

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life

Wisdom About Life (II): The Sin Of Greed And The Virtue Of Generosity

I probably should have included today's study back when we were studying wisdom about relationships, but at that time, I was looking at these verses as being about the practice of giving. Yet they're really not. They're about two diametrically opposed ways of life. They're about a deadly sin and a godly virtue. They're about the sin of greed and the virtue of generosity. They're about two kinds of hearts. And they tell us that:

I. There Are Two Kinds Of Persons You may have heard the saying, "There's two kinds of people in the world: there's givers and there's takers...and that one's a taker!" Now I don't know where that comes from, but Solomon said almost the exact same thing (**11:24**). Solomon said, there's one kind of person that we'll call:

1. the generous kind who gives freely The NIV *gives freely* is literally *scatters*. It's like a child who throws handfuls of bread to the birds. He's a person who takes what he has and, to all appearances, disperses it, gives it away freely and without necessity, hands it out in this direction and that one, to this person and that one, not because he has to but because he just wants to, so much so that it would appear that he is greatly diminishing his own resources and will have nothing for himself. And then, Solomon says, there is another kind of person:

2. the stingy kind who withholds unjustly He literally holds back what's due, what's right. He not only doesn't give anything away that he doesn't have to; he doesn't even pay his honest debts if he can get out of it, but tries to keep the money for himself. He never gives gifts or charity of any sort, cheats on his taxes, pays his employees below average and pockets the excess change from the cash register. The name Scrooge comes to mind as an example. And the force at work in him is greed.

Now these are obviously caricatures, exaggerated portraits. Very few people are completely generous and very few are absolutely stingy. Most of us probably see ourselves fitting somewhere on the continuum between the two; but the truth is

that we're likely much closer to the one or to the other than we would really dare to admit. Now let's leave this verse for a while and not that these two kinds of people:

II. They Build Two Kinds Of Relationships With Others The disposition of your heart on this issue deeply impacts your relationships with other people. Solomon says:

1. the generous attracts others and finds himself refreshed (11:25) Literally, *he who waters will be watered* and in a land where water is so important and sometimes scarce, that proverb had deep meaning. If you are generous and see the needs of others and "water them", refresh them, give freely out of your life to them, you'll find that others are drawn to you and relationships grow. And in fact, when the shoe is on the other foot, people will be there for you. Generosity is a natural builder of relationships, not in the sense that people always come to you with their hand out. But if you're a need-meeter, if you're always investing yourself in others, your time, your interest, your conversation and counsel and your money, they will be drawn quite naturally to love you. On the other hand:

2. the selfish repulses others and find himself cursed (11:26) The generous man who has a lot of grain when there's a shortage on and agrees to sell it and part with it is blessed by his neighbors. The selfish one who thinks only of himself and hoards it up cause he himself might need it another day earns their curses. And this principle is not only in economic terms. What happens when we keep to ourselves things that, if shared with others, would enrich their lives? We not only fail to increase their happiness, but we rob ourselves of the joy that generosity brings. I read about a man named *Luigi Tarisio who loved violins passionately. He spent his limited income buying the finest instruments he could find. He owned 246 exquisite violins, which were crammed into every corner of his otherwise barren little house. But they were never played! His obsession prevented those instruments from bringing pleasure to other music lovers.* Do you think that built him any friends in the musical world? Self-centeredness is a destroyer of relationships. It pushes people away. It robs you of joy, isolates you and hurts you as well as hurting others. Selfish people only have relationships with others who find a way to get something from them; their relationships are not built on love. And then if we look more deeply, the generous and the selfish:

III. They Have Two Different Roots In The Heart (11:28) They are trusting in, relying upon, two different sources of life:

1. the generous (the righteous) trusts in the Lord and flourishes Remember what is written about Abraham, how believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness? The righteous are those who trust God as the source of life, who believe that all things they get are a gift from Him, including their very breath and the strength in their bodies each day. I read in Deuteronomy the other morning, *You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant...* - Deut. 8:17-18. Every good and perfect gift, James said, comes down from above, from the Father of lights. Even our salvation is a gift; it's not something we can get for ourselves, so we trust in the Lord to give us the gift of righteousness made possible through Christ. The heart of the generous says, "I get it from God; He is the source of my supply; I give it away to others trusting that He knows my needs and will take care of me." But that's not how the other person thinks!

2. the selfish trusts in his riches and falls He's operating on a different wavelength. He sees himself and his work as the source of all he gets. "I take care of me and the only way I'll increase is by making it myself". The root of greed, of living a self-centered, getting, acquiring kind of life, is actually idolatry. Look with me carefully at **Col. 3:5**. Greed is putting self in the place that God should have in your heart. It is worshipping yourself, making yourself the primary factor in your thinking. And outwardly that shows in keeping back things, holding back what should be given out of kindness and love. You see, these two kinds of people:

IV. They Are Driven By Two Sets Of Desires (21:25-26) Notice:

1. the generous is moved to give by desire to help the other He gives and refuses to hold back because self is not his driving desire. He is moved by the need and the plight of the other. He is driven by caring and concern and focused out there. He has a desire to make a difference, to do something, to do what he can to make a difference in the other person's life. But:

2. the selfish is driven by the continual desire to have for self I...I...I. I want. I need. I have to have. I feel. I...I...I. Self is on the throne, the flesh is in charge and the order of the day is to meet my own needs. Now the way I've painted the picture, you're probably asking, "Who could be like that? I'm not that way!" And the sad answer is that any one of us could be and is that way at times. *Dr. James Dobson writes, "When it comes to purposes and goals, most people appear motivated primarily by the pursuit of money and the things it can buy. Back in 1967, my lovely wife managed to drag me to the 'Let's Make a Deal' television show. Shirley put toy birds all over her head and blouse and I carried a sign: 'My wife is for the birds.' It was good enough to get the host, Monte Hall, to choose us as lucky contestants. Finally, the cameras zoomed in on a brand new Camaro, the car of my dreams! Suddenly I was gripped by a spasm in the pit of my stomach. My mouth watered profusely and my heart began knocking on the sides of my chest. Desire came charging up my throat. I had been struck by gameshow greed. We guessed the price of the first three items, but blew it on number four. 'Sorry,' said Monte, 'You've been zonked, but here's a vacuum cleaner and three dollars.' On*

the way home, Shirley and I talked about the incredible greed we had experienced. I have since learned a very valuable lesson about lust and how it operates in a spiritual context: Whatever a person hungers for, Satan will appear to offer it in exchange for a spiritual compromise. If illicit sex is your desire, it will eventually be made available. If your passion is for fame or power, that object will be promised (even if never delivered). If you hunger and thirst for wealth--beware. You are in a precarious position." [Servant, Sum 1995. Page 4.] All too often that desire to have for ourselves, that "I" down inside, comes charging to the front, particularly when some tempting situation arises where you can get something. Or somebody asks you for money and that desire to clutch tightly to it wells up. Before we think that greed is not a vice we possess, let's look carefully in the mirror. And here's one way you can measure yourself. Solomon tells us that these two kinds of folks:

V. They Have Two Responses To The Need Of Others

1. the generous uses his open eye to see and respond (22:9) Literally the Hebrew says the man with *good-eye*, with an eye that works like it's supposed to. His eye sees the needs of others and looks at them like it's supposed to and he responds by meeting those needs. He sees what's in front of him without turning away and does something about it. But:

2. the selfish intentionally closes his ear (21:13) He hears the cry for help and deliberately shuts it out. He sees the crying need and turns his head away to ignore it. Isn't that a good way to measure what kind of heart you have? When there is need, do you turn away, do you shut out the voice, do you put it out of mind? Do you just forget it and say, "That's not my problem."? If that's what you do, then it identifies for you the condition of your heart. Or do you see it and weep over it and pray about it and do whatever you can to help? That tells you something about yourself too. Now let's turn back to 11:24 and consider this. These two kinds of folks:

VI. They Experience Two Very Different Results If you look again at verse 24:

1. the generous gives freely without losing (11:24a) It looks like this generous person is giving everything away. It looks like they should be losing money, depleting their store of things, running themselves into the ground, yet somehow that's not what's happening. Instead, they're doing well and even increasing. Here's the person who tithes faithfully, who gives away thousands of dollars every year out of their income, who has 3 or 4 missionaries they support personally and then gives special gifts to other projects all the time. Yet, they seem to be prospering and doing well. Here's the elderly widow who's always sending money to this cause and that one when she lives so plain and simply. One would think she'd be broke with all the medication she has to buy but she isn't. And people scratch their heads and can't imagine that you can give away so much and still live unless you're rich. How can that be? Well, hold on a minute and look at the other guy:

2. the selfish withholds greedily without gaining (11:24b) It looks like the selfish guy should be getting rich. He's so tight and hoards every penny and gives nothing to nobody, doesn't spend a cent he can get out of. It would appear that he should have a bundle, that he should be getting rich! But somehow, he isn't. Maybe he works hard, has an extra job, struggles and saves and does everything he can to increase income, yet it's like he's putting it into a bag with holes. It goes out faster than he can get it in and there never seems to be enough. He finds that he needs things and lacks things. How can this be? Those two things are not universally always the case. There are some generous people who are not well off and there are some greedy people who are very well off. But time after time, I've seen in my life and the lives of others that giving never seems to hurt you and many self-centered people are struggling. Why? Well, it's because there is another factor at work here, the Lord. You see:

VII. They Have Two Different Ends

1. the generous gives to the Lord and is rewarded (19:17) God blesses generosity. God meets the needs of those who meet the needs of others. Dr. James Dobson also tells this story about his father, who was an itinerant evangelist for a number of years: "Travel was expensive and we never seemed to have much more money than was absolutely necessary. One of the problems was the way churches paid their ministers in those days. Pastors received a year-round salary but evangelists were paid only when they worked. Therefore, my father's income stopped abruptly during Thanksgiving, Christmas, summer vacation, or any time he rested. Perhaps that's why we were always near the bottom of the barrel when he was at home, but that didn't stop my father from giving. I remember Dad going off to speak in a tiny church and coming home ten days later. My mother greeted him warmly and asked how the revival had gone. He was always excited about that subject. Eventually, in moments like this she would get around to asking him about the offering. Women have a way of worrying about things like that. 'How much did they pay you?' she asked. I can still see my father's face as he smiled and looked at the floor. 'Aw...' he stammered. My mother stepped back and looked into his eyes. 'Oh, I get it,' she said. 'You gave the money away again, didn't you?' 'Myrt,' he said, 'the pastor there is going through a hard time. His kids are so needy. It just broke my heart. They have holes in their shoes and one of them is going to school on these cold mornings without a coat. I felt I should give the entire \$50 to them.' My good mother looked intently at him for a moment, and then she smiled. 'You know if God told you to do it, it's okay with me.' Then a few days later the inevitable happened. The Dobsons ran completely out of money. There was no reserve to tide us over. That's when my father gathered us in the bedroom for a time of prayer. I remember that day as though it

were yesterday. He prayed first. 'Oh, Lord, You promised that if we would be faithful to You and Your people in our good times, then You would not forget us in our time of need. We have tried to be generous with what You have given us, and now we are calling on You for help.' A very impressionable ten-year-old boy named Jimmy was watching and listening very carefully that day. 'What would happen?' he wondered. 'Would God hear Dad's prayer?' The next day an unexpected check for \$1,200 came for us in the mail. Honestly! That's the way it happened, not just this once but many times. I saw the Lord match my dad's giving stride for stride. No, God never made us wealthy, but my young faith grew by leaps and bounds. I learned that you cannot outgive God!" [Time Out! A Men's Devotional compiled by Clint and Mary Beckwith. Evergreen Communications, Inc., 1989. Pages 107-109.] Paul wrote to the Philippians, For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need... I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. - Phil 4:16-19. God Himself is committed to care for those who trust in Him, for those who see Him as the source of their life and lean on Him and love others obediently out of the grace they've been given. I've seen it time after time in my own life. My prayer diary has page after page of financial needs that God has met, often in very dramatic ways. God rewards those who mirror His generosity and they are blessed, maybe not by material wealth but they know His blessing in ways that you can't put a price tag on. But:

2. the selfish withholds from the Lord and is cursed (28:27) He finds himself under many curses. Not only the curse of those he's rejected but he finds himself under the curse of Almighty God. Look at **Eph. 5:5-6**. Oh, how serious. A greedy man is giving evidence of the idolatry in his heart, that Jesus Christ is not His Lord, that He's never been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and begun to bear His fruit. And it is not just those with a lifestyle of immorality or of illegality that are outside the gates; it is the greedy who miss heaven because they find their life-source in themselves instead of in Jesus Christ.

Oh, why would we ever want to be like them? Yet so often we are. And we can so easily deceive ourselves because it's easy to appear generous in small ways, to give a few dollars here or there, to do things that we know won't cost us very much and require no sacrifice on our part. Jesus watched the giving line at the Temple one day and all kinds of very generous-appearing people passed through and dropped much into the treasury. But a widow came by and dropped in two copper coins and He picked her out and said, "This is the generous one. The others gave a little out of their plenty; she gave all she had." Generosity is measured in the heart's commitment to sacrifice for others, not in the amount given away. A businessman and a lawyer, both Christians were traveling in Korea. They saw in a field a young man pulling a plow while an old man held the handles. The lawyer was amused and took a picture, saying to the missionary who was guiding them, "I suppose they are very poor." He replied, "That is the family of Chi Boui. When the church was being built, they were eager to give so they sold their ox and gave the money. This spring they pull the plow themselves" The businessman said "That must have been a real sacrifice." "They did not call it that", said the missionary, "They thought it was fortunate that they had the ox to sell." Upon arriving home, the lawyer went to his pastor and showed the picture and told the story. He said, "I want to double my pledge I have never yet given anything to my church that cost me anything." Their hearts were generous; they gave out of love and saw need as an opportunity. How is your heart?

Proverbs: Principles For Facing The Pressures Of Life Wisdom About Life (III): Dealing With Your Circumstances - Ch. 30

We're going to conclude our series in Proverbs today by studying chapter 30. Verse 1 tells us that this chapter is the collected sayings of a man named Agur. It looks like he had two disciples, Ithiel and Ucal, but nobody really knows who any of the three was and it doesn't really matter. It is declared to be an oracle, a word from God delivered through men. At first reading, it seems like simply the gathering of some scattered advice but when you reread it a number of times, it becomes clear that, taken as a whole, Agur is giving us some wise principles for dealing with our circumstances in life. After all, it is our circumstances which demand so much of our attention, which squeeze us or please us, which so often send us plummeting to the depths of despair or soaring to the heights of joy. Dr. James Dobson tells about whitewater rafting down the Rogue River in Oregon: "Rather than floating on the raft in relative serenity and safety, I chose to paddle along behind in an eight-foot plastic canoe. And on the second afternoon, I insisted on rowing this flimsy craft into the most treacherous part of the river. It was a bad decision. Ahead lay a section of the river known as the 'Coffeepot,' so named because the narrowing of the rock walled banks creates an unpredictable, bubbling current that has been known to suck small boats and their passengers below the surface without warning. Several people had drowned at that precise spot, one of them only the summer before. But ignorance is bliss, and blissful I was. I seemed to be handling the task quite well for the first few minutes before everything came unraveled. Then I was caught in the current flowing around a large rock and was capsized in the turbulent water. It seemed like an eternity before I came to the surface, only to find breathing impossible. A bandana that had been around my neck was now plastered across my mouth and held there by my glasses, which were strapped to my head. Just as I clawed free and gasped for air, churning water hit me in the face and gurgled into my lungs. Again, I came up coughing and sputtering before taking another trip below the surface. By then I was desperate for air and keenly aware that the Coffeepot was only 100 yards downstream. A kind of panic gripped me that I had not experienced since childhood! I definitely considered the possibility that I was drowning. You see, I have a nagging little

habit of breathing every few minutes and don't cope well when prevented from doing so. I knew that getting sucked under again at that moment might be the end of the line. My family and friends watched helplessly from the raft as I bobbed through the rapids and into the narrowest section of the river. They were unable to reach me because the current had carried them farther downstream. Our skillful guide managed to maneuver the raft to an eddy at the side of the river. There it spun until I caught up and grabbed the rope that rims the top edge. I could not pull myself into the raft because of the rapids, my soaked clothing, and the distance of the rope above my head. That's why I expected the guide to help me aboard. Instead, I noticed that he was struggling with the oars and looking very concerned. I learned later what was worrying him. He feared that the large raft would be thrown against the vertical rock walls bordering the Coffeepot, and that I would be crushed by its massive force. Indeed, the raft was thrown against the wall, but I saw it coming. Using all of the strength left within me, I pulled my feet up and sprang off the rock, propelling myself high enough on the raft to scramble aboard. I then collapsed in the bottom of the craft and stayed there sucking air for about 30 minutes. Life is like the beautiful Rogue River in some ways. There are long stretches when the water is calm and serene. You can see your reflection as you lean out of the raft. The scenery is gorgeous, and the river carries you peacefully downstream. Then without warning you are propelled into the white water. Suddenly, you're gasping for air and struggling to keep your head above water. At the moment you think you might be drowning, you float right into the turmoil of the Coffeepot. This WILL happen to you sooner or later. No one travels down the river of life without encountering turbulence. You might as well brace yourself for it. There will be moments of serenity and beauty when you lean back and take in the wonder, but there will also be times of sheer terror when you'll be tossed out of the boat. It's all part of the ride." [James Dobson's monthly letter to Focus on the Family supporters, June 1995. Pages 2-3.] Unless we learn to live in such a way that we are not controlled by our circumstances, we will find ourselves like powerless children tossed back and forth by the waves between the rafts and the rocks of life. So, we start with some:

I. Wise Principles About God And Your Circumstances Now when it comes to circumstances, you and I are prone to this horrible flaw: we think we know best what they should be! All of us are prone in our vanity and self-confidence to believe the plastic canoe can make it in the Coffeepot or to think the guide ought to be pulling me out instead of maneuvering the raft. But Agur encourages a different principle:

1. learn to willingly admit your lack of knowledge (2-4) Agur is not just putting himself down; he's making a point. He's making it the same way that God made the identical point to Job who thought he knew best what God ought to do with his circumstances, *Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. - Job 38:4.* Were you there when I hung the stars in space and put the sun in the sky and formed the mountains? Do you think you know better than the One who created all this? Who's gone up to heaven and come down? Who gathers the wind in the hollow of His hand, the oceans in His pocket and established all the ends of the earth? I'll tell you who; His name is the Lord God and His Son's Name is Jesus! No, human being has His wisdom and knowledge. And as you look at your circumstances, the wisest thing to do is to admit it. So often we think that we could do things a better way, that what God has chosen to allow for us is not good, that it's a mistake, and yet *Is. 55:8-9* says, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* Thomas Aquinas, a medieval theologian, created one of the greatest intellectual achievements of Western civilization in his *Summa Theologica*. It's a massive work: 38 treatises, 3,000 articles, 10,000 objections. Thomas tried to gather into one coherent whole, all of truth. What an undertaking: anthropology, science, ethics, psychology, political theory, and theology, all under God. On December 6, 1273, Thomas abruptly stopped his work. While celebrating Mass, he caught a glimpse of eternity, and suddenly he knew that all his efforts to describe God fell so far short that he decided never to write again. When his secretary, Reginald, tried to encourage him to do more writing, he said, *"Reginald, I can do no more. Such things have been revealed to me that all I have written seems as so much straw."* Even the greatest human minds cannot fathom the greatness of God. [Leadership, Spring 1993. Page 48.] The wisest man is the one who knows how little he knows and instead of blaming God or trying to boss Him around in prayer, he follows this second principle:

2. learn to fully trust and obey the Word of God (5-6) Every word God speaks has been tested and proved true. Everything that God says, even that all things work together for good to those who love Him, even that is sure and true. When He says you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you, when He says that when you face temptation God is able and will always make a way of escape so you may be able to bear it, don't tell Him He doesn't know what He's talking about! When He says "forgive" instead of "retaliate"; when He says "give" instead of "hold it tight" or "stick it out" instead of "escape now", trust Him. Don't add to His words and try to tell Him you have the last word, that you know better, that your circumstance is different, that your situation falls outside the principles He's laid down; He'll rebuke you and prove you to be a liar, just like He did Job! You can either think you know best and do life your way and end up in misery, or you can trust in His Word, make Him your shield and refuge, and count on what He says in spite of all the appearances of the circumstances around you. At the same time, Agur encourages:

3. learn to humbly recognize your susceptibility to sin (7-9) Agur recognized the basic dichotomy of human existence. You either live in truth or in lies, light or darkness. Either you know, believe and act according to the truth or you don't know it, and believe and live according to lies about God, yourself and your circumstances. And the place where we so often believe lies is where it concerns ourselves. That's what makes us hop into the canoe so easily! We believe

that no matter what happens, no matter what the circumstances, that we'll always be faithful, that we won't sin. We look at a person with a lot of money who forgets God and say, "I'd never do that," but Christian after Christian has gotten wrapped up in materialism. Or we look at the person who steals and say, "I'd never do that!" Or we look at the person who commits immorality and say, "I'd never do that!" But given the right set of circumstances, the wise person knows that except for the grace of God, the best of us is capable of the worst of it all! Learn to humbly recognize that you are susceptible to sin and to lean on the grace of God to prevent you from it in your circumstances! The one who thinks he stands is the one who needs to take particular heed lest he fall! But here's a principle that goes right along with it:

4. learn to quickly repent when you fall into sin (32-33) If you recognize that you've been wrong, that you've sinned whether in word or deed, do this, clap your hand over your mouth! You know how a wrong word escapes your lips and you clasp your mouth physically as though to stop it! That's the point: stop now; stop right away. Stop before the damage is done. Because you know if you keep on churning the milk, eventually you're going to get butter. If you keep on twisting the nose long and hard enough, eventually it will bleed and if you pursue anger or any other sin long enough, you'll pay the price for it, whether it's strife and a war or whatever. Learn to stop right away; get in the habit of seeing your sin and repenting of it quickly! It's to your own advantage! Now Agur also give us some:

II. Wise Principles About Others And Your Circumstances Most of our circumstances involve other people: our family, the people we work with or go to school with, our neighbors. Our circumstances are not often purely material, like having a flat tire along a lonely road with no spare; they most often involve others at some level. So Agur urges us to:

1. learn to be careful about the circumstances you create (10) There are some circumstances you create yourself. You choose the canoe instead of the raft. Then when you fall in, you're angry with the guide because he didn't pull you out of the water first instead of steering the raft. So, you go to his boss to complain and say bad things about him. And instead of listening, his boss cusses at you and angrily tells you what a jerk you are. Sometimes we just want to fix people and make them change and force them to be the way we want them to be and, in the end, we pay for it. Even Paul warns us to be careful not to judge another man's servant; he has to answer to his own master, not to us. Learn to leave others to God and instead:

2. learn to carefully and truthfully examine yourself (11-14, 20) Pure in their own eyes means, "I've done nothing wrong." You've seen it in others. They're involved in horrible things, mistreating parents, deceiving and taking advantage of others, committing immorality, yet feeling fully justified in it all, without any sense that they've done anything wrong. Yet how many times do I fall into that same place. I sin and can't see it. I hurt others and can't see it. Instead of trying to fix others' servants I need to learn to truthfully look in the mirror, carefully examining what I do and say in my circumstances. And Agur also suggests that you:

3. learn the value of the gift of your parents (17, 11) This doesn't mean that birds are going to chase you and peck out your eyes as a punishment for being bad. Vultures eat carcasses. It means that if you refuse to listen, you're liable to end up dead! Parents are an incredible gift and to have godly parents and the guidance they provide early in life is a tremendous treasure. If you're too proud and obstinate to listen to them, you'll suffer and maybe even die for it. The prodigal son ran off to the far country, despite all the pleadings of the father, and he nearly died out there. If he hadn't come to his senses and remembered his father, he would have. How many sons and daughters are paying a horrible price in the circumstances of their lives because they ignored the pleadings of loving parents? Young people, learn to value that gift! Learn to trust and value their wisdom; it will save you so much heartache in the circumstances of your life.

And now Agur turns slightly again to give some:

III. Wise Principles About Your Circumstances Themselves Many of them you have to read between the lines to understand. His first piece of advice is:

1. learn to be satisfied where you are (15-16) A leech is never satisfied; it's two suckers never say "enough". The grave never seems to have enough victims, fire enough fuel, nor dry ground enough water. The childless woman in that culture continually yearned for a child. What's the point? We should learn not to be like that; to always desire other than what we have, to want more or different, to look for greener pastures. Paul said, *...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* - Phil. 4:11-12. We must learn to say, "Enough; what my Father has given me is enough for me, even if it's not what I'd like or not what I'd choose. I accept it from His hand." But also, Agur says:

2. learn to appreciate God's awesomeness in what you experience (18-19) When you look at the eagle in the sky, ponder how that can be and praise the greatness of the Creator who invented flight. When you watch the snake slither swiftly across a bare rock with no legs to propel it, ponder the greatness of the Creator who made such a variety of creatures great and small, each with exactly what they need to survive in their environment. When you see a huge iron ship cross the vast expanse of ocean without a landmark in sight and plowing through huge breakers, ponder the

greatness of the Creator who gave man such knowledge. And when you look at the marvels of your own body, even when you married folks enjoy the intimacy of the sexual union of husband and wife, ponder the Creator by whom you were so fearfully and wonderfully made. Learn to see Him in everything you experience in life. Look for Him there. Early last Saturday morning the Lord and I went fishing, wading in a creek all by ourselves. I saw Him in the play of the sunshine and the shadows. I thanked him as I caught each fish. In a flock of geese flying majestically overhead and swimming nearby and a deer snorting in the bushes on the bank, I saw His wonders. And in a mother duck sheltering her ducklings under her wings, I saw Him and praised Him for His care for me. It was a time of worship. If we can learn to appreciate how awesome He is in the everyday things of our circumstances it will change the way we view them. Then Agur advises:

3. learn to accept the limitations of your capabilities (21-23) Here are four things nobody can stand and why? Each one is a person in a situation which is unnatural to them and which they have no capabilities to handle. A person who's always been a servant won't function well if he's thrust into kingship nor will a woman who's been hated and is thrust into marriage. A fool who's given everything he wants won't know what to do with it. And you can read what happened to Hagar and how her whole attitude changed toward Sarah, her mistress, when she was elevated to her new status by bearing Abraham's child. She despised her. There are responsibilities and positions for which you and I are just not prepared and ready and that we would misuse if we had them. We always think we could run the shop better than the boss or that the bank would be more efficient and faster if I was in charge. But often when people are thrust into situations where they "get their wish", they find out the responsibilities that go with it are way more than anybody knew and they're not equipped to handle it. Learn to accept where you are and to grow to higher places through experience and maturity. It'll help your outlook on your circumstances! Then:

4. learn to value wisdom over power (24-28) You can learn that from nature. Ants aren't very big but they survive the harsh winter by preparing in summer. Coneys can't fight a bear but they keep safe by living in cracks in the rocks that he can't move. Locusts can't do much individually but because they swarm together in ranks, they can defoliate an entire region. Lizards could be easily held in one hand yet they survive in king's palaces because they know when to run and hide! Wisdom's where it's at; not power and strength. It's not the 300 lb. giant Goliath who has the advantage but the wise David who knows where the holes in the armor are. We always think, "If I had more money, more power, a higher position, more strength..." Our answer is always more and bigger. But wisdom, knowing how to deal with the situation God's way, is always better. Look for that. And finally:

5. learn to walk confidently in your protection (29-31) This one's tough. Who walks confidently and without fear? In the jungle it's a lion, from whose strength and claws all the other animals back away. In the barnyard it's the strutting rooster who will challenge anyone with full confidence in his spurs and his beak. Among domestic animals it's the billy goat who'll put his head down and charge anything with his strength and his horns. And among people it's a king who's got his army all around him and knows that he's protected. You walk confidently and without fear when you know that protection is around you. The Psalmist said, *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah - Psalm 46:1-3.* Walk confidently and without fear through your circumstances. *Deut. 33:27* says, *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*

The river of life has its smooth and beautiful places and it WILL have its rapids and rocks that overturn your boat. Some of it you won't like and parts will nearly kill you. But trust God. *Vance Havner says, "As a little boy I enjoyed watching my mother make bread or cake. When she assembled the ingredients, they did not look too appetizing. Who wants to eat flour or baking powder? But when she had mixed everything in proper proportions and put them in the oven, we awaited the outcome with joy. Sometimes the happenings in our lives are not enjoyable when they come separately one by one. But when God has completed the recipe and put it through the heat of the fire, we have 'Romans 8:28 cake,' and the taste is good, even though some of the ingredients at one time made us weep." [Playing Marbles with Diamonds by Vance Havner. Baker, 1985. Page 97].* Wait until the cake is done, will you? In the midst of your circumstances trust Him who has promised to make all things work together for good. You CAN endure all things through Christ who will strengthen you.

ECCLESIASTES

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HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE? Ecclesiastes 1 - The Futility of Knowledge

The Book of Ecclesiastes is perhaps one of the least read and appreciated books in the Scriptures. It has a negative tone, a hopeless attitude, which seems contrary to the rest of Scripture. It has been a favorite of atheists. Voltaire quoted it often. Then why is it in our Bible? Well, strange as it may seem, in this book we have the secret of how to live life, of what can bring true meaning and value to living. It is the record of a good man gone bad, of the wisest man that ever lived and how it was that when he was old he turned away from God. It is the record of:

I. Solomon's Great Experiment (1) Solomon, David's son reigned over Israel 40 years in Jerusalem. His father David had fought the battles that brought him 40 years of peace in which to reign. In his youth he loved God and sought only to be the best ruler he could be for the sake of his people and God granted him a measure of wisdom superior to that of any other man who ever lived. For many years he walked with God and wrote that wisdom down. We have it recorded in the book of Proverbs. But somewhere in the midst of that great career, Solomon's wisdom got the best of him.

1. what he did (12-13) He became enamored of the idea that, instead of simply listening to what God had said about life, that he with his great wisdom would set out to experience first-hand everything that could possibly be experienced in life and draw his own conclusions. The Hebrew word for *study* means to investigate the roots of a matter. He was going to make a thorough investigation of all the causes and effects in life. and he was going to do it by "exploring", by examining all sides, by first hand experiencing everything there was to experience. There was only one problem. Compare Deut. 18:16-20. In order to pursue his quest he had to break God's commands, and he did, every one. And, of course, what God said would happen, happened. In the end his heart was turned away from God.

2. where he looked (3b) Under The Sun... This phrase is found repeatedly and it relates to things that are merely human. It means he explored everything from a simply human viewpoint. And the book tells us he tried it all, science,

philosophy, amassing wealth, sex, you name it! He even tried idolatry! But in all these things, he searched from the viewpoint of man, not God. And here's:

3. what he found (2) *Meaningless...* Empty, futile, useless. Life apart from God has no meaning. It's like verse 14, chasing after the wind. Try it sometime. It's a wasted effort. Someone has used the illustration of a soap bubble. Apart from God, life is just like that bubble, glistening and gleaming with promise on the outside, appearing to float effortlessly to the heights. Yet inside it's completely hollow, empty, and in a moment's time it pops and is gone forever. Solomon began his quest for meaning in an obvious place. He looked at nature and so we have:

II. Solomon's Observations of Nature (3-11) Solomon was quite a nature buff. Compare 1 Kings 4:33. Many of his wise proverbs come from observing natural things like the ant and the spider. But as he strove to see through the surface level to the meaning of it all, the first thing he noticed was:

1. the cycles of nature (3-7) Check any elementary science book and you will find the same truths taught today. The sun repeats its motion over and over. The wind blows this way today and back the other tomorrow, passing by over and over. The rivers flow and flow to the sea but it's never full because evaporation removes huge quantities of water into the air where they form clouds and drop on the land only to flow to the sea again. Every day a new generation of people is born and another one dies. And so it goes on, over and over. Things continue as they have been from time immemorial. Any raindrop, any animal, even the sun itself is just a meaningless microscopic part of a cosmic machine that runs on and on and why, nobody really knows. Now do remember that this is human experimental logic, not God's opinion of things.

2. the cycles of man He saw the same kind of cyclical process going on in the human race. He observed that:
a. nothing is new (8-10) History repeats itself. Human beings do the same things over and over again. There are no new pleasures. There are no new sins, just more creative ways of doing the old ones. Sure, there is new technology but life continues the same. Man eats, sleeps, marries, works, rules, fights, sickens, and dies in a million variations, but all the same. Any thought you can think someone has thought before. Any action you do has been done many times over in a similar fashion. And what's worse is:

b. nothing is remembered (11) You can live and die and nobody notices, nobody cares. How many of us remember our great-grandfather, let alone our great-great-grandfather. Billions of people have lived out their existences, suffering and sacrificing, heroes and villains. But they're gone and they will never be known or remembered again. If you look at life on a purely human plane, that's just what you'll see. And so Solomon turned from nature to the accumulation of learning to see if meaning lay there.

III. Solomon's Observations of Learning (12-18) He sought to understand what made things wise and foolish and even crazy. He tried to learn everything that he could and analyze it and fit it together. He studied ideas and philosophies and everybody else's ideas of what life is all about and you know what he discovered?

1. it doesn't fix anything (15) It takes more than knowledge to straighten things out. If knowledge was it, the world should be a utopia by now but it isn't. Knowing that sharing and caring will make a better world and that untold thousands need not die of starvation if we could stop wars and political coups so crops could be grown, does not make it happen. Knowledge frustrates because you can know so many things and yet not be able to do anything about them. You can know why earthquakes occur but who can stop one? And even worse, the more you know, the more you realize how much is yet unknown; it can't be counted. So increased knowledge only brings increased awareness of its own limitations! And so:

2. it increases sorrow (18) The more you know, the more you hurt, the more you understand the messed up state the world is in. Intellectual people are often very sad people, very frustrated people unless they know the Lord. So Solomon looks at science and at philosophy and education and says it's all a big ZERO, empty, meaningless! Now let's make:

IV. Our Application of Solomon's Research There are some very important lessons that we must learn:

1. factual lessons Remember again that these are Solomon's human findings, not God's statements of how it is. We must look at some other Scripture to put it in perspective and when we do we find:

a. neither nature nor knowledge is bad In fact, God declares both to be very good; both are tools that He can use. Compare Ps. 19:1-6, Prov. 2:1-6. Nature has a God-given purpose. The same cycles which depressed Solomon can also point men to God, can cause them to marvel at His great power and wisdom in creating the universe. And if you really seek wisdom, you discover how foolish human systems of thought really are and you find God and His revealed truth to be the only sure anchor you have! So both are good but:

b. neither can provide meaning in life Apart from God, neither can provide the ultimate answers in life that men seek. In fact they can be misused. Compare Rom. 1:19-23. Man usually ends up worshipping the creation, putting it in the place of God, which is what much of science today has done with the theory of evolution. Compare 1 Cor.

1:18-21. Knowledge can keep men from God; it can cause them to be puffed up and refuse God's truth, so God saves men by what seems to the intellectual like foolishness, the preaching of the message that 2000 years ago the Son of God died for your sins! No, apart from God there is no meaning here!

2. practical lessons

a. you should not duplicate Solomon's research That desire to "try it all and figure it out for yourself" is not unique to Solomon. It lies in every one of us. We all wonder whether the grass is greener on the other side of some fence we haven't dared to cross. We all get those thoughts, "I wonder what it would be like to get rich and have money, to have a whole bunch of sexual encounters, to get drunk or try drugs, to step across all those boundaries and see for myself what's out there." Well, Solomon explored all that far more deeply than you ever could. He had more money, more time, more opportunity, and more women than you can even think about. And his conclusion was: it's all a big ZERO. Learn from that. Don't find it out the hard way. Friend, if you're looking to knowledge and education to provide you with meaning and purpose in life today, if you think the answer is another degree and more classes, listen. Meaning in life does not lie in how much you know or what you possess:

b. meaning lies in your relationship with God If there is only emptiness under the sun, then the answer must lie above the sun, with God. The thing which really matters in life, which gives meaning to all of life is your relationship to God through Christ. It gives meaning and sense and purpose to life. It gives hope for the future. It gives permanence and security in a world where change is the only certain thing. My friend, how much time do you spend cultivating the thing that really matters? How's your prayer life? Do you read the Word daily and study it and try to listen to God in it? Do you have a ministry? Are you trying to serve God in some way, to do something specific for Him? Or are you living like unsaved people do, just keeping on in the grind of life: work, home, eat, sleep, laugh over and over again. No purpose, no meaning, just existing. My friend, if that's all there is to your life, one day you're going to come to the end of it and if that's all there was, it's going vanish like a puff of smoke; the pretty soap bubble will pop and leave emptiness. When you stand before God, what will you have to show for 50-70-90 years on this earth? Cultivate the things that really matter and start now, won't you?

We've been told the line, "It's great to be alive". No it isn't. It might be better than being in hell. It might have a few pleasant moments and experiences. But just being alive is not great. In fact, it's the pits. The truth is, "It's great to be alive with God".

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE? Ecclesiastes 2 - The Futility of Things

In chapter 2 Solomon is continuing his Great Experiment. You remember from chapter 1 that he set out on his own, apart from God, using only his superior human wisdom, to discover the things that have true meaning and value in life. He set out to experience and learn firsthand for himself everything there was in life and really find out what had true value. First he tried knowledge. He studied nature and then philosophy and learning. And he found them to be empty and meaningless, futile, apart from God. So now in chapter 2 he turns to try what most of the world is seeking after today: things.

I. What Solomon Tried: Empty Pursuits (1) Note that he talked to himself. He didn't ask God, nor the advice of others who had tried these things. He made a deal with himself to set out to experience the things that man normally regards as bringing pleasure. And he tells you his conclusion right at the beginning: they're empty pursuits! Here's what he tried:

1. laughter: entertainment (2) He tried things to cheer him, to make him laugh. Perhaps he hired court jesters or listened to funny stories. If he had lived in our day he would have tried watching situation comedies on TV. Maybe he tried partying and laughing in the company of friends like we do. Maybe he would have gone to an amusement park and gotten really amused. What he did to have fun, we don't know, but we do know his conclusion: it is foolishness; it accomplishes nothing. And yet so many people live for it. They endure work and home but the highlight of their lives is fun, going out, going places, doing things, feeling happy. But then it's back to work Monday morning and the blahs hit!

2. wine: escape (3) Now Solomon didn't just drown his sorrows and become a drunk. He set out to try wine on purpose, to explore the effects it would have on him and what it was like to be under the influence and act crazy, to escape from reality for a little while. So many folks today have the same thought: meaning in life might be found in a needle or a bag or a bottle. Escape and forget the hurts of life for awhile; that makes it all truly bearable. But it doesn't. Ask someone who's tried it awhile. It becomes a new form of slavery! You'll not find meaning in life here.

3. projects: achievement (4-6) He built houses and vineyards and gardens and parks. He designed them; he supervised their construction. He spent endless hours throwing himself into work to achieve his goals. If he lived today, maybe he'd be the businessman, the executive type, climbing the corporate ladder, married to his job, going to work early and coming home late at night, making multi-million dollar deals, designing huge proposals, overseeing hundreds

of employees, reaching out with all the gusto he can muster. But his hand grabbed thin air. He found that the true meaning he was searching for wasn't there either!

4. wealth: accumulation (7-8a) He started collecting things, accumulating them. Money, servants, gems, business holdings. He became the richest king of his day. No one in all the world had more than he did for those few years. Most of us would never be so greedy but we struggle and slave to get that bigger house, that nicer car, that huge retirement nest egg to live in style. But Solomon couldn't find what he was looking for there and neither will you. So at last he turned to:

5. women: gratification (8b) He had the secret dream of every man, a harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines. All his. One at a time or 2 or 5 or 10, any hour of the night or day, young and inexperienced or mature and alluring. Blond, brunette, or redhead, any shape or height. Talk about a legalized orgy, he had it. A position thousands of men would kill for! But when he had done it all, here's:

II. What Solomon Found: Empty Pleasure (10-11) He says "I tried it all; I held back from nothing. And I enjoyed it, it was fun; it felt good while I was doing all of it. But that was my only reward: some good feeling. When I sat back and calculated the value of all of it, when I looked to see what it had really done for me, what I had gained, the answer was NOTHING! It was empty, meaningless, hollow. Fun but with no lasting satisfaction". You see, things (whether money, goods, power, or people) will never satisfy you, never bring meaning into your life and there are two very good reasons why:

1. the inevitability of death (12-16) He says "I woke up from it all and I realized that in the end I'm going to die." Let me tell you, all the money in the world, all the fame, fortune, wine and women won't prevent that. In fact they may make it happen faster! Have you considered that humbling fact? One day you, my friend, are going to die unless the Lord comes. One day the cold lifeless body in the box is not going to be someone else, but you. Your life on this earth will be over. And there's not a thing in the world you can do about it. There's no fountain of youth, no spring to keep you living forever. Many of us will not be here 20 years from now and none of us probably will 80 or 90 years from now. That's it; that's all the time you are allotted on this earth. Now Solomon did discover that:

a. living wisely appears superior It certainly is better to live using your brain and choose your moves in life carefully rather than living crazily, just doing whatever you feel like, when you feel like it. That's waiting for disaster to strike. But just the same, whether you live wisely or foolishly:

b. death comes to all alike Wise men and fools both die. Tyrants and peasants, kings and paupers, godly and ungodly, death plays no favorites. And that makes us aware of:

2. the impermanence of things (17-23) Nothing lasts forever. As they say, "You can't take it with you". All the things you work and strive for, your job, your accomplishments, your money, your women:

a. they must be left to another Somebody is going to inherit all you have. It may be your own children and then their children after them. It may be someone else who takes your job. But whoever it is:

b. the heir cannot be controlled You can leave a will but in the end you basically lose control. You have no say over whether those who come after you will be wise or foolish, whether they will squander all your money or use it wisely, whether a bulldozer will come along and level the house you built so lovingly to make a parking lot, whether everything you've achieved will be forgotten or frittered away and so:

c. the effort expended will vanish All the long hours and the sweat and tears, the sleepless nights dreaming over the next project will vanish. So in summing it all up Solomon comes to a very wise conclusion. He sees:

3. the impossibility of pleasure (24-26) Verse 24 is misleading. It sounds like, "Well, just make up your mind to endure the grind and be satisfied." But literally in the Hebrew it reads, "There is nothing-of-good in man to eat and to drink and to cause his soul to see good in his labor." Put simply:

a. man cannot enjoy without God (24-26a) It is not in him to do it. Man cannot make himself see lasting good in his labor. And God has made it that way on purpose. I like verse 25. Without Him all the things in the world will not bring true enjoyment. They're hollow, empty, meaningless. But with Him, even the simplest things in the world bring real satisfaction. Man does not know how to enjoy without God and also:

b. man cannot endure without God (26b) The unsaved person works all his life just to leave it all behind for somebody else to have and eventually for someone who knows the Lord to get the true enjoyment out of.

Now listen. I know you're a saved person but think honestly about your life. Down deep, what have you been living for? Have things, material things, pleasure as the world sees it, been at the top of your wish list. Friend, Solomon tried it all and satisfaction is not there. But I'll tell you what. You can be anything in life, a common laborer, a garbage collector. You can be poor. And yet you can find true satisfaction and meaning in it if you have Jesus Christ and you're living every day for Him. 1 Cor. 10:31 says, *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* When you

tighten those nuts and bolts, think how Jesus is using you to be a Christian influence at your job; when you do the wash think how those kids of yours are growing up to love God because of you, think of how the money you make wins people to Christ all around the world as you give sacrificially to our missions program. I sit at a desk and study and type on a computer and answer a phone many hours each week, but I watch God use it to help people and that makes what might otherwise seem boring, very rewarding. You can find satisfaction in everything you do in life, if you have the Lord and do it unto Him. But if you have the Lord and don't make Him a part of everything you do, if you just go through the motions of life without a thought about Him in the things you do, then the pleasure you find in life will be the kind Solomon found: empty. Things will never satisfy but Jesus does. Like the song says "Spring turns to summer and summer to fall, fall turns to winter and death comes to all. Only one life, how soon it will pass; only what's done for Christ will last. Only one chance to do his will. So live for Jesus all your days. It's the only life that pays. When you realize you have but one life."

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 - The Futility of Fate

Solomon's great quest for meaning in life continues. He's tried knowledge and found nothing of ultimate value there. He's tried material things, pleasures and achievements of every sort and found nothing there. All he has to reward him so far is a big zero, a handful of wind. So he turns to consider time and events and how they happen. And he observes this about life: "what will be will be". There's nothing you can do about it. Some call it Fate, that uncontrollable cosmic force that determines events. As Solomon tried to use only his human wisdom to figure out life, here's his conclusion:

I. The Uncontrollability of Life (1-10)

1. observed (1) He observed 2 facts about everything that happens in life:

a. everything has an appointed time to occur. The Hebrew means a fixed time, a point of occurrence. It does not happen at random but at a given, unchangeable time. Further:

b. everything has an appointed duration a season, an appointed time to last, to continue and then it is done.

These two facts are all-pervasive. You can see them in all of life. They happen when they happen. You can't stave them off. And they last until they're done and no longer. Then Solomon goes on to show us where he got his thinking from so we see the uncontrollability of life:

2. illustrated (2-8) In these verses are 14 pairs of opposites that cover nearly every realm of life. And please note that despite the pretty songs and poems about these verses, these are not God's statements about the beauty of life; they are Solomon's observations about how frustrating life is! First look at:

a. nature: birth and death, planting and harvest You can't choose when or where you come into the world. The fact that you were born here and not in Russia, to your parents and not mine, you can't do anything about it. And death is the same. You can't pick the moment, the place, and the manner. You can't change how long it lasts. Some die young; others live to a ripe old age. Then look at the world, the seasons come and go. They're fixed. You plant in the spring and harvest in the fall. Like it or not, you can't change it. You can plant in the winter and uproot the crop in June but it won't work. The growing season is fixed and lasts only as long as it does.

b. existence: killing and healing, destruction and building Sometimes you kill a man because you can't allow him to continue to exist or because you have to, for instance, a criminal execution or an enemy in war. Sometimes you give your best to heal him. Other times you give your utmost to heal perhaps the very same person. And whether you kill or heal is all determined by the time at which it happens. You can't change it. The same is true of material things. Sometimes you build a building, other times you knock it down. Which you do is determined by the time. Yet the same man may do both. Existence itself is an appointed thing, uncontrollable.

c. emotion: weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, tearing and mending These three fit together. Weeping - mourning - tearing (of garments). Laughing-dancing-mending (torn garments). Life has its emotional ups and downs. and you can't do anything about it. They come when they will and go when they will and last as long as they will. And there's not a thing you can do about it. You may plan to be happy next week and sadness comes. You may expect sadness and something brings joy. It's all fixed.

d. objects: scattering and gathering, keeping and discarding If you have stones in your field and it's planting time, you cast them out. But when you go to build the fence or your house, you gather them together. There are times to keep things and other times to throw them out. The same object may be a nuisance or a blessing depending on the time and circumstances and there's nothing you can do about it. It's value is fixed.

e. action: embracing and refraining, searching and giving up, speaking and silence Sometimes you act; sometimes you don't. Sometimes you embrace; sometimes you wouldn't dare. Sometimes you put everything you have into searching and sometimes you quit. Sometimes you speak right up and other times you seal your lips. And

those times are not your choice. They are determined. The kind of action you take is determined by the situation you're in. There's nothing you can do.

f. relationships: love and hate, war and peace Remember this is not God's statement of how things ought to be but Solomon's statement of the way it looks. Sometimes you love and sometimes you hate the same person or people. Sometimes you're at war and others at peace. It's uncontrollable, fixed. It happens. There's nothing you can do about it. So Solomon looks all about him and all he sees is that everything happens when it happens. It doesn't seem to make sense. It is uncontrollable and his conclusion is:

3. bemoaned (9-10) He groans about it. If everything is fixed and what will be will be, then what use is anything I do? What do I gain? What does all my effort change? What a heavy burden we have to bear, to know that beyond changing the light bulb or tonight's supper menu, I can't really change anything in life that matters. I'm a cog in a machine! But then something wonderful happens. God gives poor floundering Solomon a flash of insight. He sees:

II. God's Control Over Life (11-15) He remembers that the force controlling all these things is not an impersonal force called Fate. It is a real living being; it is God! There are three important facts that God has given to us about life and time here:

1. He has a perfect plan for all things (11) God makes everything beautiful or, as some translations put it, appropriate in His time. God decides what's necessary and appropriate to happen at any particular time and because of His great wisdom, it is beautiful. It is the right thing to happen. Things are not just happening around me. I am not a cosmic accident. God has a perfect plan and I am part of it. But moreover:

a. He has put a longing in man to know it Man is built with a longing to know the plan, the eternal outlook rather than the temporal. Somehow man knows instinctively that there is more to life than the here and now and the events of life. There is a God out there and He is in control but:

b. He has limited the ability of man to know it God has created man with the desire to know all but with only a limited ability to understand. So man is frustrated. He somehow knows there is a God out there and there is an order to the world but he cannot understand it. Why would God set up the human race that way?

2. He has a perfect purpose for all He does (14) God maintains that kind of firm control; He works out His eternal plan for a reason:

a. He does it so men will seek Him That frustration causes men to seek and search for and acknowledge their need of Him! God plans life to be a frustrating experience from the human standpoint so we will turn to Him to find what's missing. And further:

b. He repeats it until they learn (15) The NASB says, *God seeks what has passed by*. That is, God causes event after event to pass by, repeating itself just to keep on emphasizing our need for Him. This happens, that happens, something else happens. Event after event frustrates us because they happen and there's nothing we can do about it. And each time it's the Lord showing us how much we need Him! But the third important fact is:

3. He has a perfect gift for us (12-13) You see:

a. we cannot be satisfied with life on our own Here's the same phrase we ran into in 2:24. There is nothing good in man to go through the routine of eating and drinking and working and finding true enjoyment in life but:

b. He enables us to enjoy and be satisfied in life He gives us that gift. When we have Him, we can find meaning and worth in the daily things we do, in work, in our home life, in all the frustrating things we have no control over. They are His things; our loving Heavenly Father sends them our way for a plan and a purpose in His wisdom and love.

I guess what I'm saying is: Christians do not believe in fate but in Providence. Sure, many of the events of life are uncontrollable. But I have an omnipotent, omniscient Father who never makes a mistake running the whole operation. And that makes a difference. Let me illustrate it with a story. *Some biologists were once touring the Swiss alps when one of them spied a very rare flower growing on a ledge deep in a rock crevasse. They tried to think of a way to get down to it and finally asked the young village boy who was guiding them whether he would be willing to let them lower him down on a rope to pick the flower. He said "Wait here" and ran off down the path back to the village. In a little while he returned with an older gentleman and introduced him to the group in these words, "This is my father, HE will hold the rope!"* You see, when his life was in the balance, he wanted to know that the one holding the rope was someone who loved him, whom he could depend on not to let go, who was wise enough not to place him carelessly at risk of danger. My friend the events of your life are not put there by chance or by blind fate. They are guided by our loving Heavenly Father. He holds your rope. So when something comes your way, you can sit back and say, "This is from Him; He knows best". And you can sit at your table and eat and drink and say, "This is from God" or you can go to work and give it your best and know, "This is from God" and when you go to bed at night, you can rest because you know that today you did what God planned

for you to do! Fatalism is fatal; it leads to despair, to giving up on life. But when you know God is in control, then and only then can you really live.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:3 - The Futility Of Idealism

Down deep inside of each one of us is a picture of the way the world ought to be. Solomon had one. In chapter 3 he's been sitting back analyzing the whole idea of events in life and how and when they occur. In the first half he analyzed the concept of timing. Now he turned to think about right and wrong. He looked at those who did right and those who did wrong in the world. And what he saw was a frustrating thing: the real world didn't match his picture, hadn't ever matched it, and didn't look like it was going to match it. First let's get a look at:

I. Solomon's Expectations He was not naive. He knew there was both righteousness and wickedness in the world but he felt:

1. there ought to be justice for the wicked Don't you feel like that? The bad guys ought to really get it somewhere along the way. Crimes shouldn't go unpunished. Victims shouldn't go unvindicated. Right should prevail. We like it that way. How many TV shows do you know that end with the bad guy winning, where the injustice is never rebuked or turned about? Not many. It doesn't sell! Man somehow feels like the right should prevail and the wrong fail. Maybe that's part of the image of God in us still. Moreover Solomon felt:

2. there ought to be help for the oppressed Somebody ought to be there to stand up and champion the cause and help the oppressed, those who are mistreated and pushed around and hurt and taken advantage of. And here's how Solomon felt about God's role in all of it:

3. some day God will even the score (3:17) That looks pretty good at first sight but let's look closer. He thought "Well, since there is a time for every activity and deed, for killing and healing, and so on, and since God is the one who controls every event, then surely in the process of events God will even the score for both the bad guys and the good guys. Somewhere along the way God sees that the bad guys get it and the good guys get the help they need. Let's call it idealism: the idea that everything always works out right in the end. Lot's of people go through life feeling that way about it. They cling to it. They feel if we can just change this condition or that problem that people will instinctively create that kind of world where it works. But Solomon looked around him at the real world and here's what he saw:

II. Solomon's Observations He looked at places where judgment was supposed to be given, where justice was supposed to be done, where the elders and judges were supposed to meet out punishment to those in the wrong and you know what he found:

1. wickedness pervades the place of justice (3:16) Funny how things don't change! You can buy your way out of trouble, cop a plea bargain for a reduced charge to save the court trouble! You can get by with a heinous crime because of some technicality. One judge will totally ignore facts and another won't. The Supreme Court of our land which is supposed to uphold the right of all persons to life decides that a doctor and a mother can kill an unborn baby and do it legally. The ideal of justice doesn't exist. Then he looked at other positions of authority, masters of servants, overseers of workers and he saw that:

2. power lies with oppressors (4:1) There is often nobody to help the oppressed, the underdog, the victim. There is no comforter, no paraclete to come alongside and help him against the power of his adversary. Men take advantage of other men; they hurt other men but no one stops it. No champion comes forth. A million unborn babies die every year and nobody stands up and puts a stop to it! Despite laws and help groups of every kind, some husbands still beat their wives, parents abuse their children, pushers still addict kids to drugs. The bad guys win and they win alot! So somehow:

3. the score never seems to get evened (3:17) He felt like God should be the great Equalizer but it didn't look like He was on the job. Consequently, right and wrong didn't seem like they mattered much. Maybe the way to get ahead in life is to do like the rest, think of Number 1; be selfish; get all you can for yourself. And so Solomon came to three very dismal conclusions:

III. Solomon's Conclusions Now remember these are not God's truths about the way life is; they are Solomon's thoughts about life apart from God. He's using only human sight and thinking, not speaking for God. So he concludes first that:

1. man lives and dies like an animal (3:18-21) Animals live by the rule of the survival of the fittest; the biggest and the strongest gets the best and he takes it by force from the weaker. The human race is no better; they act the same way. Right doesn't matter; power and strength do. And in the end man dies like an animal. From a purely human standpoint, in the end both die and their bodies rot and return to dust. Who could prove that there is any difference, that man has an eternal soul if we didn't have God's Word on it? Man is just another animal, better evolved and able to

take power over the others! Folks, the evolutionists have been feeding us this line for years and most of our society buys it to some degree! So Solomon says:

2. man is better off dead or better unborn (4:2-3) It's better to be dead and get it over with; then at least you're out of the dog-eat-dog world. In fact, the best thing would be never to have existed in the first place so you wouldn't have to experience this mess. But since you can't undo that and you're already here, death is better. Whether you know it or not lots of people today are coming to that conclusion too. That's why the suicide rate is up and especially among young people. There's a book out called, "Let Me Die Before I Wake," filled with methods to take your own life! People feel "if life treats me like this, if there has to be injustice and mistreatment and pain, if I have to live like this, I'd rather die!" Now Solomon doesn't seem to have actually become suicidal, rather he says the best you can do is to:

3. enjoy the moment because the next one is unsure (3:22) This verse sounds pretty good and really it is not bad advice to enjoy each moment, but actually this is a complaint. The best man can do is to live each moment to its fullest, to enjoy it, because nobody ever knows what the next might bring, injustice, mistreatment, even death. What a sad way to end up, seeing that idealism is futile. The world will never be like it ought to be. There is no happy ending. You might as well accept it and find a way to get what joy you can out of it! My friend, if you examine life without God's Word, without listening to what God has to say about it, that's exactly where you'll wind up. Live for the moment; forget tomorrow. Do what you have to do to get ahead. As one bumper sticker put it, "Life stinks, and then you die!" But that's not what God says at all.

IV. God's Truth God has a much higher view of human life on this earth than that. God says:

1. man is the crown of God's creation - Ps. 8:4-7 Man is not just another animal. He is the crown of all God's creation. He is made in verse 5 literally, "a little lower than God". You usually think of the ranks of being as God first, then angels, then man, then animals. But it's not. It's God, then man, then angels... Man has a position before God better than that of angels. God redeemed fallen man; not the fallen angels. Angels are servants to aid men. Man is made in God's image. The dog-eat-dog world around us is the result of sin, of man lowering himself to act like animals.

2. justice will be done - Rev. 20:12 Solomon was right. God should bring justice on the wicked and He will one day. The unsaved dead, small and great, will stand before God at the Great White Throne. Then the books will be opened and all the wicked deeds that seem to us to have been passed over, they will be remembered and read aloud. And a lake of fire awaits. Yes, there is justice coming for the wicked unless they repent and have their sins covered by the blood of Christ. This is a moral universe!

3. righteousness will be rewarded - Rev. 19:7-8 Doing right does get you somewhere. Believers are going to be with Christ in heaven. They are going to stand at His bema seat to receive the rewards for the things done on earth. And then they'll celebrate a wedding with Christ, arrayed in white robes. What do the robes symbolize? Our righteousnesses! Reward for the good things we've done as believers. For obedience, trust, faith, ministry, helping others, caring, even a cup of cold water given in Jesus' Name.

You see, beloved, idealism is futile; it's empty. The kind that says, "The world will get better; men will wake up and realize how they're acting; someday soon right and wrong will really matter." No it won't; that's a dream, an empty dream. Paul said that as we approach the return of Christ, the times will get worse, that evil men and seducers will grow worse and worse. But you and I know that's not the whole story. The Judge of all the Earth shall do right. There will be justice for all one day when we stand before God. So the next time you're tempted to think, "What's the difference? What does it matter if I cheat on my taxes? What does it really matter if all those babies are aborted every year? What does it really matter if I stand up for right?", remember it does. Don't live for the moment; live for eternity. Don't sit back and think, "It doesn't matter what I do; it won't change the world so what use is it?" God just may use it to make a difference for now and it certainly counts for eternity. *In the 4th century in Asia Minor lived a humble monk named Telemachus. He lived a quiet contented life praying, studying, and raising vegetables. But he felt the Lord leading him to go to Rome. He was stunned by the people there, rude angry, violent. One day he was swept along in a crowd and wound up in the Coliseum where gladiators killed each other to entertain the crowds. He was shocked and jumped on a wall shouting, "In the name of Christ, forbear". Soon he jumped into the arena and ran to the gladiators shouting the same. They pushed him aside. Finally the crowd began to yell "Kill him!" so one huge gladiator took his sword and opened up poor Telemachus' stomach. As he died he gasped his message one last time. All at once the crowd grew silent; one by one they began to leave until the stadium emptied. One man, a simple man, obeyed God and God used him to make a difference. What you do for God counts now and it counts in eternity. Will you listen?*

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 4:4-16 - The Futility of Success

Call it what you will: the rat race, climbing the ladder, achieving, getting to the top. Success means different things to different people. For some, it's money; for some it's a position of power; for some it's winning over the competition. The

people all around us every day are caught up with the idea of success. We have people who make a handsome living doing seminars all over the land on "How to be Successful", "How to make a million dollars", "How to be your own boss", or "How to sell. Success is the American dream. But the strange thing about it is that the way we define it, not everyone can have it. If success is getting ahead, getting to the top, winning, being the boss, then the greater majority of people of necessity have to be mediocre or failures, otherwise there would be no one to get ahead of, no one to beat, no one to give orders to. The dream of success is not new. Solomon saw it in his day 3000 years ago. Solomon's been looking at life and trying to analyze it with his great wisdom, not from God's perspective but simply on the human level. He's searching for what it is that brings true meaning in life apart from God. And in our text today he analyzes this thing we call success and makes some overwhelming discoveries. In analyzing people that succeed and don't succeed, he sees:

I. Four Bad Things

1. success motivated by envy (4) Competition is at the root of much achievement. It's in our old natures to compete, to vie with each other. The animals do it to survive; in their world you compete or die! Somehow that's in us too. You can see it in babies and small children, withholding toys from others, wanting what the other kid has, wanting one just like so and so has. We may temper that a bit to be sociable but it's still there, that drive to be #1, to be the best. Even churches get caught up in it; they advertise that they are the biggest, the best, or the only! Solomon thought about that and put a value on it: ZERO! So what! He himself was the epitome of success; nobody could compare to him. And his testimony is that there is no meaning there. That kind of success is hollow; it's empty. It doesn't satisfy!

2. no motivation at all (5) Here's the opposite, the guy who doesn't care, who sits back and does nothing and lets life slide by. And eventually he has lost all and is ruined and is in dire straits. That isn't the answer either. There has to be labor and toil and effort put forth in life but there has to be a balance. Hold that thought for later.

3. success motivated by greed (7-8) Here's a man Solomon knew who wasn't married and didn't have any family at all. It was just himself. Yet he worked and worked because he was never content or satisfied with what he had. He wanted more, more, more. And as the NASB and KJV put it, he never even stops to ask himself, "Why?" He doesn't stop to enjoy what he has. He just keeps on working and striving blindly to get more. I call that greed. Compare 5:10. It's so true. Some people don't care about beating others, they just want to get and get and get. But let's ask what they don't. What for? What use is it? What difference does it make? Solomon has an evaluation of this too. He calls it a miserable business!

4. success motivated by power (13-16) Here's another case he observes. So many people want power, want to be top dog, want to be king or boss. So here's an old king who's been on top and a young upstart youth and after all the years the people follow the youth. But then after while, those who come later aren't pleased with him either. Power is transitory; it's always passed on to someone else. Top dogs are always replacing each other. Maybe he has Joseph in mind who came from prison to rule all Egypt but in the end another Pharaoh arose that knew not Joseph and all his good was forgotten. Maybe he's thinking of Saul, born a nobody of the tribe of Benjamin, elevated to kingship with all the people cheering him on, only shortly to see them switch their love and loyalty to David and dying a tormented man. Solomon's evaluation? Meaningless, empty. Power is an empty thing. Position, fame, honor, what do they really matter? They pass into oblivion. So Solomon says, "I see some things better than these". There's a kind of success that's entirely different, that holds different values:"

II. Three Better Things

1. contentment (6) If you have one handful and you have rest and tranquility with it, it's far better than pushing and shoving to get another handful. Compare Prov. 15:16-17, 16:8. There are things more important than having more, like the Lord, like love, like purity. Jesus spelled it out for us a little more clearly - Lk. 12:15. The NASB says, *Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.* Being rich in this world doesn't matter much. Then He told the story of the rich fool in verses 16-20 to point out this: you can't take it with you. Somebody else will get it. We all die and it does us no good. Verse 21 is the punchline: it's far better to be rich toward God, rich in love, in mercy, in good deeds, in service, in the things that bring an eternal reward, and be content with the material things you have.

2. companionship (9) Two are better than one. Companionship is far better than competition! The top is a lonely place to be. And so is the process of getting there if you do it by beating others. God didn't build you to be independent, to make it on your own, but to interact with others. In fact, for believers, Jesus put it this way, Jn. 13:34-35. We are to sacrifice and give ourselves for others, not to compete with them. Now Solomon tells us why companionship is so good. Three reasons. It provides:

a. assistance when weak (10) There are going to be times in life when you fall down. Maybe physically. Maybe financially. Maybe in your health. And you can't get up. You need somebody to be there to lift you, to step in. If you've built your life on you and not with others, who will help you up? This is exactly what we are to do as believers - 1 Jn. 3:16-18. Loving means helping, sacrificing, giving our all to help a brother who is weak.

b. support when vulnerable (11) Sometimes in life you'll be vulnerable, unable to quite get warm on your own, unable to quite shoulder the load you have to carry. You need somebody to be there so you can help one another and both get warm. Compare Gal. 6:2. At times when it's difficult, you need to have relationships built so there are others who can share your burden and support you as you go along and you them. That's what the church of Jesus Christ is all about.

c. protection when attacked (12) Sometimes in life you'll be attacked. It may not be a physical robbery or assault, but it may come in different ways, like getting fired at work or a lawsuit, slanderous accusations. And if you live for yourself, who will come to your aid? Who will shelter you? Rather, Jesus said this, Jn. 15:12-13. Go all the way. Lay down your life to save your friend if you must. That's the kind of relationship you need to have with others. No, life is not about you. It's about us together. The way to go through life is not getting ahead of others but with them, committed to them. That's what makes life bearable.

3. commonness (13) Remember the poor but wise youth and the old foolish king? The youth was better off staying a commoner, a nobody. I think maybe Solomon sees a little of himself in this verse. Once he was young and wise, now old and heading down a wrong path and set in his ways. What's wrong with being #20 or #200 or #2000 instead of #1? What's wrong with being common, just like everyone else? Nothing! In fact, Solomon says it's better. But Jesus told us there was something better still in Mt. 20:25-28, and that is Servanthood. Greatness is not in how many people serve you but in how many people you serve!

My friend, when have you really made it in life? When have you achieved success? When you're better than everybody else, when you have a lot of money, when you are the chairman of the board? You need to really ask yourself that. Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean these worldly motives are not yours too. What are your goals? What are you striving for? I'll tell you, if it's one of these things, if it's success the way the world pictures it, you won't like it if you ever get it. And if you don't, you'll either feel like a true failure or be frustrated all your life. No, real success is being content in your circumstances, having loving people in your life who care about you, and investing your life in serving others. No, it doesn't pay much down here. It won't get your story put on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous". But one day, when you leave it all behind, your priorities will change. When you stand before God it won't matter how much you've achieved. The money will be gone. The only thing that will matter in that day are to hear two words from His lips. Not simply "Done", but "Well done." When my children do something, they come to me to show it to me. And what matters most to them is to hear me say, not, "Oh well, I'm glad you got that over with!", but "Well done!" And one day we'll all be reduced to that same childish simplicity. The only thing that will matter to us is to hear our Father say, "Well done". That is true success.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 - The Futility of Religion

Solomon has been searching desperately with his own wisdom to find meaning in life. He's looked everywhere: at nature, at knowledge, at things, at fate, at idealism, at success. Now he turns to look at religion. Without a doubt, one of the greatest accomplishments of Solomon's life was the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was 7 years in construction and was a glorious structure to behold. Solomon himself was involved very much in the project and at its completion led a marvelous dedication ceremony and the Shekinah glory cloud came down and filled the Temple. But now many years have gone by. Solomon is an older man and has changed quite a bit. He has also observed some changes in the way the people worshipped in the Temple. Here's what he saw:

I. The Problems Solomon Observed Maybe if we looked carefully, we might see some of the same things:

1. motions without meaning (1) He sees people going into the Temple and offering sacrifices without any consciousness of sin. They were just going through the proper motions but it had no meaning in their lives. The sacrifice of an animal meant death, the giving up of life. Sacrifice was to be a constant reminder that our sin is serious, that we require someone to die for us in order to be forgiven. But that sense had been lost. The heart-felt worship had given way to ritual. Thousands of people sit in church buildings all across our land every week and do the same; they go through motions without meaning. And it's tough to admit, but some days you and I are among that number, aren't we? Sometimes church is just something you do, you follow the pattern, the meaning isn't there.

2. words without wisdom (2-3) The Temple was not only a place of sacrifice but also a place of teaching. Not only would the priests and Levites teach the people, but no doubt there would be discussions on spiritual issues and sometimes prophets would get up and claim to have a new revelation of something or a vision of something. And what Solomon saw was that a lot of people said and taught things without real knowledge and wisdom. He found that, just as when you're worried about something and fill your mind with it, you have dreams about it, so when there is much talking and many words about something, that produces speech on the part of those who don't really know! And how that is true in churches today. The things that are said and taught in the name of Christ boggle the mind. God forbid that we would ever have words without wisdom here! But I'm sure sometimes we do; sometimes they no doubt come out of my mouth! And yours!

3. vows without fulfillment (4-6) The Temple was also a place where vows were made to God. A man would make a promise to God to be a Nazirite for a period of time or to give God something special. Remember Hannah who came to the Tabernacle years earlier to pray for a son and vowed to give him to the Lord. And what Solomon saw was people hedging on their commitment, people making promises they didn't mean. Then when the temple messenger came to collect their promised gift, they'd change their minds and say, "I made a mistake". You may not think of it that way, but the church is also a place of commitments. You make promises here: to serve, to help, to do certain things. You make commitments silently to God after messages (I hope), as well as out loud to others. And sometimes now, as then, our vows go unfulfilled. They are forgotten or we change our minds and commitments become empty words. Now Solomon saw all this going on in the Temple and he analyzed it in his mind and perceived two key dangers in it:

II. The Dangers Solomon Perceived And these are the dangers inherent in religion itself.

1. ignorance: not knowing self It is so easy for a person to be blind when it comes to themselves. We see everybody else clearly, but when we look in a mirror somehow the reflection is not accurate. We have a tendency of:

a. not recognizing our sins (1b) How many times do you hear anybody pray, "Lord forgive me," yet we all sin regularly, if not daily. Of course, we don't like to share our sins so let me ask how many times do you pray privately, "Lord forgive me"? And if you're like me, it's not real often. And the reason is that we become callous to it. We so easily get to where we can sin in "small" ways and not feel it. Many times we pray, "Thank you Jesus for dying for me" but don't see that that rotten thing we just said to our neighbor was the very thing He died for! Then we have a tendency of:

b. not realizing our limits (2b) We forget that God is in heaven. He's infinite, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. We are on earth: limited, limited in understanding and in power. We so often assume that our word is the last word and because we open our mouths so quickly, without realizing our own limitations, great harm can be done. And we all do it. Religion can also lead to:

2. irreverence: not fearing God Not only is it easy to forget who we are, but it is also easy to forget who God is. When you go through the motions a lot and there's no heart in it, there is great danger of:

a. not feeling God knows what you do or say (4b) God has no pleasure in fools. But sometimes we think He doesn't notice what we say or what we do or worse is:

b. not feeling God cares what you do or say (6b), thinking God won't do anything about it, that He won't discipline you; He'll just let you go your merry way.

My friend, that's where religion goes. You can trace it in scripture; you can trace it in the history of the church. Faith gives way to religion; heart-felt worship and walk with God gives way to ritual and going through the motions. Israel loved God with all her heart for a moment here and there, but always ended up offering meaningless sacrifices. And Solomon puts a value on it in verse 7. That kind of empty religion is a big Zero. Fortunately, Solomon was wise enough to propose some remedies to keep it from happening:

III. The Remedies Solomon Proposed There are three things you can do to keep your faith from becoming empty religion:

1. listen with application (1) When you go to God's house, go with the intent of listening and learning, with the intent of applying what you hear there to your own life, rather than letting it go in one ear and out the other. Compare James 1:22-25. You don't look in a mirror and say, "Ah, perfect, I love you!" You look in it and notice what's out of place and what needs fixed and what you're just stuck with and can't do anything about, and then you act accordingly. So let it be with God's Word. As you hear in church, even as you read on your own, ask God for a hearing ear and do your utmost to apply what you hear.

2. speak with caution (2) Don't just say the first thing that comes into your mind or teach the first thought that is in your head. Compare James 3:1-2. A wise man knows he's sometimes wrong and speaks carefully. Speak with the consciousness that God is listening and for every word we will have to give account, particularly if we have a responsibility over others. Compare 4:13-15. Don't speak about things you have no certainty of. Leave room for God to have the last word.

3. promise with commitment (4) Do what you promise. Make your word count. Be a person who says what he means and means what he says. Compare James 5:12. You don't have to use adjectives and expletives. When you say, "yes" let it mean, "yes" and when you say, "no" let it mean, "no" by acting accordingly. When you make a promise, remember it is before God and be sure to keep it.

You know, some people think the way to get meaning into their lives is to become more religious. Solomon found that religion can be a dead end, that it can have very little value. It can be a bunch of meaningless motions and empty words. Religion is not the answer. The answer is a relationship, a vital, living, daily relationship, with Jesus Christ. And I know I'm

talking to saved people but be honest. Sometimes your relationship degenerates into religion, doesn't it? Sometimes you just go through the motions. And when your faith gets down to that, it gets mighty empty. Remember the first and greatest commandment. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. Ask yourself whether you're doing that each day. It'll keep your life in perspective.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 - The Futility of Riches

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be rich? Every so often somebody hits the lottery. Doesn't it make you think, "What if that were me? What would I do?" It's part of our culture, of our way of life, to want to be rich. But is it really all it's cracked up to be? What if you could get the richest man in the world and sit him down and talk to him and pick his brain? Wouldn't that be valuable? Well, I doubt whether any of the Rockefeller clan would be available today, but we do have in Ecclesiastes the testimony of the richest man in the world in his day. Solomon was so rich that it would be beyond our comprehension. Someone estimated his annual income just in gold was \$20 million, not to mention the profits from all his other import-export businesses. You're lucky to have a gold chain to wear. Solomon's drinking cups were of gold. His throne was carved ivory overlaid with gold. Silver was as common as stones in Jerusalem. And what we have here is the richest man in the world sharing what he has learned by having riches.

I. The Problem With Riches (8-17) You would expect him to be jumping up and down with joy but he isn't. In fact what he tells you is the down side of riches. Now please note: it is not a sin to be rich, to have money. If it was, we'd all be sinners because in many parts of the world you would have to work a year to get what you earn in a week! You are a person who has riches, at least to some degree. If God puts you in the place where you have lots of money, fine; make sure you use it as God would have you use it. But here are some facts we all have to face:

1. part of them will always be taken from you (8-9) Here's a blunt statement of how the world works. You make some money. Part of it will be taken from you by someone else, for example by taxes or by some creditor or provider of a service who makes a profit on you. In turn somebody will take part of it from him and someone from him and so on up to the king himself, if there is one. Solomon says not to be too shocked if you see it happening very harshly somewhere, because the same thing is happening to you. A portion of what you get will always be taken from you. You will never be able to keep all you get. You can never figure, "Well, I'll work like crazy to make X amount and then sit back and live on that the rest of my life." It won't work. Somebody will be at work finding ways to take it from you. It will dwindle away. It has to be added to all the time.

2. you will always want more (10) If you set money as your goal, no matter how much you get, it will not be enough; you'll always want more. You might think not, but you'll find it so and you can understand it if you think of it like this: if you love and value something you'll want more of it, whether it is playing golf or spending time with your family. So if money is what you love, what you care about, then having more will be your greatest desire and that's a miserably unsatisfied way to live.

3. as they increase so will their consumption (11) The more you have, the more you spend. Riches get you servants; servants cost money. Riches get you houses and lands but it costs money to take care of them. Riches will let you live a high lifestyle but living a high lifestyle will drain away a lot of them. And you'll find everyone will want a piece. Uncle Sam will want a bigger share and so will anyone and everyone who can find a way to get a hook in. So having more always means spending more.

4. they bring great worry (12) The simple man who works hard for a living and has very little rests easy. Nobody's after what he has. The rich man with the fortune has to worry because somebody's always out to take it from him. Everybody from regular thieves to companies who pad bills. So if the Lord isn't first in your life and you have a lot of money, get ready to toss and turn!

5. they are easily lost (13-14) In a moment of time they can vanish. Thousands of people found that out in 1929 when the stock market crashed. And it's still true. A bad investment, some unwise advice, and poof, up in smoke it goes. A storm or flood or earthquake, a disabling accident, and they're gone! And even if you manage to keep them all your life:

6. they are left behind at death (15-17) You come into the world naked and though they may clothe your body pretty in a metal box, even if they packed it full of 1000 dollar bills, you still couldn't take it with you. Everything you've earned, saved, or owned, all the riches you accumulate, one day you will go on and they will stay here.

So the point is: If riches are the center of your life, if you think that's where meaning in life is and that's what you live for, not only will you find it a miserable, meaningless existence, but when you come up to the end, you'll have nothing to show for it. Howard Hughes was one of the richest men in the world, yet he lived as a recluse, secretly fleeing from one resort hotel to another. He found no joy, no companionship. He let his beard grow to his waist and hair to the middle of his back

and his nails go untrimmed. He died lonely. Most of his employees who have now broken their silence report that he disgusted them. No, money's not it. It's not the thing to seek and search after. But Solomon goes on to tell us:

II. The Proper Riches to Seek (18-20) There are three of them and they are not something you generate yourself. They do not naturally occur. They are gifts. They must be given to you by God. So instead of seeking hard after riches, seek God in prayer and repeatedly ask Him to give you these:

1. the gift of satisfaction in what you do (18) Somehow for the toil of life to mean anything, you have to find satisfaction, not in what you accumulate, but in what you do as you do it. If you're a carpenter, the secret to a meaningful life is to find satisfaction in building things and hammering nails. If you're a secretary you find it in typing papers and answering telephones. You ask, how can I do that? Ask God to help you understand Col. 3:23-24. You're working for God. God's the boss. He set you at this task and you do it whole-heartedly because it is for Him. You see, the secret is not in doing what you like. Thousands of people work all their lives at jobs they don't like with little chance of changing. The secret is in liking what you do! And that is a gift of God. He can help you to see hour by hour that you're serving Him and help you to find satisfaction there! Many times we think the answer is to change jobs and sometimes that's necessary but often we think its the new job that will give meaning. It won't. There is no job in the world that does not become difficult or dissatisfying at points, even if you love it. The answer is to change ourselves or rather to have God change us.

2. the gift of enjoyment of what you have (19) So many people have alot and don't enjoy what they have. Yet some have so little and enjoy their few things to the hilt. There's the key. Not to ask God to give you more but to ask Him to help you to enjoy what you have. Compare 1 Tim.6:6-10. Sure there is always something better. There are always clothes that are nicer and homes that have more space and you get tired of eating chicken all the time. But God can help us to be content with the clothes and the home and the food we do have. A good way to cultivate this gift is by being deliberately thankful. Next time you drive your car, thank God for it, even if it isn't a Caddy. It runs. Next time you eat a meal, thank God (from the heart). Next time you listen to a radio or use anything you have, thank Him. Begin asking God to enjoy what He has given you.

3. the gift of contentment in your heart (20) If you learn to be satisfied in what you do and enjoy what you have then you'll have a glad or contented heart. Listen to Paul writing from prison after a life full of persecutions, shipwrecks, beatings, and stonings: Phil. 4:11-13. There's the secret. The gift of contentment comes in this package. I am content because I know that whatever comes, whatever my situation, I can endure it through Christ who gives me His power. Are you old and limited and maybe shut-in? You can endure it through Him, so be content. Don't long for youth or something else. Ask God to help you be satisfied in the things you do do and enjoy the things you do have. Are you frustrated and locked into a dead-end position in life? You can endure it; be content. Ask God for those gifts.

I want to leave you a visible reminder of this message. Turn to Prov. 23:4-5. Now take a dollar bill out of your pocket. Look on the back and what do you see? An eagle with the wings spread! Remember that and the tune "I'll fly Away". Riches will fly away. If you set your heart on them and live for them, they'll desert you. Set your heart instead on the things that will never leave you. Find satisfaction in what you do. Enjoy what you have. And be content in your heart with wherever the Lord puts you. These things will give your life meaning.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 6 - The Futility of Resistance

The next thing Solomon mentions in the depressing saga of his human observations about life is that many times it doesn't seem to work out the way you'd like. Have you noticed that? I knew a man who worked most of his life very hard in a brick plant and spent the rest of it confined to his bedroom with an oxygen mask from the dust he had inhaled. I knew a family whose teenage daughter graduated from high school and died in an auto accident on the way home from the graduation party. I know a godly young couple in the ministry whose little child was taken from them by illness. And have you ever noticed how some people seem to have problem after problem loaded upon them while others live relatively uneventful lives? Life is full of what seem to us to be inequities, things that don't seem fair or right, things we question. Solomon recorded in chapter 6 for us a few of what I call:

I. The Tragedies of Life (1-10) Solomon calls them at the end of verse 2, a *grievous evil*, literally, "an evil sickness, a malignant disease". The entrance of sin and evil into the world way back in the garden has given human life, and indeed the whole world, a terminal cancer that won't be cured until Jesus returns and changes it. There are tragedies, things that shouldn't have to be, but they are. For instance, sometimes:

1. life goes unenjoyed (1-6) Some people's lives are spent basically in misery, with very little satisfaction or enjoyment of the things they have. For example, there is:

a. prosperity without enjoyment (1-2) A man gets blessed materially so that he has alot. But God doesn't let him enjoy it. Something comes along and robs him of the enjoyment that should have been his. It might be an actual

theft. It might be a seemingly premature death. It might be an illness or an accident. It might be a war or the death of a loved one. But somehow the person is prevented from the enjoyment of what they have. And nothing makes up for it. They can have:

b. posterity without enjoyment (3) Solomon knew what he was talking about (who else ever had 100 children!) It doesn't matter how many children you have. They're great but they don't make up for being able to enjoy your life if it is filled with misery. And you can have:

c. longevity without enjoyment (3, 6) You can live a long time and literally, "have no burial"; that means keep on living, a thousand years twice over. It doesn't matter if you live on and on if it is a life where you're miserable and can't enjoy it day by day. Solomon says a stillborn child is better off because at least it has not seen any sorrow. So for some people life goes by unenjoyed, without real satisfaction and meaning. A second tragedy of life is that:

2. appetite goes unsatisfied (7) Man has to work so hard just to make sure he has the food to put into his mouth. This was especially true back then in their agricultural type society. But it's still true. For example, I got left with the kids and house for a few days while LuAnn went to be with her mother. Do you realize how much time you spend washing dishes just so you can make them dirty again in 3 hours! And the clothes hamper is full within 20 hours after you wash! And you work 40 or 50 hours a week to earn the money to pay this month's bills and you have to go out next week and do it again. So much of our life and effort is tied up in the things we do to survive and for many people there is little opportunity to have real enjoyment of their circumstances and the things they have. Another tragedy is that sometimes:

3. conduct goes unrewarded (8) Sometimes when you do the right thing, it really doesn't seem to matter. You act wisely, scripturally, out of the right motives, and it gets you nowhere. You have a problem with someone and you go and try to make it right, but the other party won't receive it and now dislikes you worse than before. You try to help somebody and they take advantage of you. You go out of your way to help somebody and there is no gratitude. You work your tail off for your company for years and they dump you before you can collect retirement. So many times conduct goes unrewarded. It's tragic and so is the fact that:

4. desires go unfulfilled (9) Solomon says you might as well be satisfied with what you have because literally, "what the eyes see is better than what the soul desires". Dreams and longings go unfulfilled. My parents bought a farm in northern PA with the dream of moving there, but ended up never using it. So many people never really get to have the things out of life they really want. Now if you dwell on some of these tragedies of life, you can get mighty angry and resentful about it all. And some people do. They shake their fist toward heaven and say, "How can God let all this happen; how can there be a God?" And even believers, if we're honest, want to cry out when the tragedies of life strike, "It isn't fair! Why me!" Some have even turned away from the Lord. But it is the tragedies of life that bring us face to face with:

II. The Facts of Life (10-12) Most of us think the facts of life have something to do with reproduction or with a TV show, but the real facts of life are these which Solomon gives us:

1. God is sovereign (10) He's in charge of this universe, in total control. So:

a. He determines what will be He calls everything by name before it ever exists. In a few minutes we'll look in the 45th chapter of Isaiah which was written before 700 BC and in it, twice, God says he will raise up a man named Cyrus who will let his captives go. 200 years later Cyrus the Persian decreed the captive Jews could go home from Babylon. God shows He had determined that Cyrus would be born, would be a king, conquer Babylon and release the Jews, all 200 years before his birth. And the same is true of us. There are no accidents. God is in charge. In fact Solomon says:

b. He knows all about us, inside and out, where we go, what we do, how we think, what our limits are, and that, all before we're born! Compare Ps. 103:19, 13-14. God is sovereign and therefore we must realize we are not. The things that God has set, we are not big enough to change. Many of the things in life we will not be able to fix, to make turn out the way we'd like. One of the hardest things in life to admit is, "there's nothing I can do". Now don't get me wrong. Fortunately, there are many things in life you can do something about and God wants you to do something about. There are changes you can make that make life better many times. But some things happen and there's not a thing in the world you or anyone can do about it. Joni Eareckson dove off a diving board at 15 and became a quadriplegic. She had to accept that she couldn't change that. We must learn to accept the fact that God is in control and we are not.

2. arguing with God is fruitless (11) You can dispute with God if you like, but it won't get you anywhere. Compare Is. 45:9-12. Think about it. Picture yourself at a carpenter's bench building a bird house and the wood yells at you and says, "You're really messed up. It's not fair. I wanted to be a doghouse!" What would you reply? You see, God has the sovereign right to control His creation. It is His. And He exercises that right, so we must accept His will. We must say, "OK Lord, if this is your will, so be it; help me". Now I know that's tough. It's not easy when what we see as a tragedy

strikes. I know a family where the daughter was abducted from her car and murdered and she left behind a little boy. You try explaining to that little boy why God let that happen! I can't! All I know is that God's in control and it won't do me a bit of good to argue with Him. Rather I need to pray for His help and strength. That's all we can do because of the third fact:

3. our knowledge is limited (12) We don't like to admit it but it's true.

a. we do not know what is best for us Solomon asks, "Who knows?" Nobody but God. We think we do. But those things in my life that I would never have chosen to have happen, those things that were very painful, the tragedies of life, are the very things that turned out for my good. The times when my heart was broken and it seemed my world had fallen in are the times that shaped and molded me the most. God knew it but I didn't. And:

b. we do not know what the future holds We don't know what tomorrow will bring or what will be when we're gone but God does. Compare Rom. 11:33-34. How can we tell God how to run His world? We can't even understand it; it's too high, too wonderful for us, so we must trust His judgment. It's all we can do. Simply trust Him. He's in control and He loves us and has promised to work all things together for good. He never promised us we would understand it. He never promised us we would like it. He never promised us it would be easy or pleasant. But He did promise He would be with us always, even to the end of the age, that He would never leave us nor forsake us, and that we can endure all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Job saw it in the midst of his despair. Tragedy after tragedy racked his life. It took everything he valued and even his own health. Yet from the ash-heap, in a flash of insight amid misery, he said literally, "though He kills me, yet will I trust in Him!" And let me add that if He does, it will only be to take me to glory.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 - The Wisdom of Adversity

Chapter 7 is a turning point in the book of Ecclesiastes. The key word in the first half has been futility. Solomon set out to experience and observe life first hand and he found that everything is futile in itself apart from God. Everything, money, success, power, even religion! And to top it off, God has engineered life to be that way and it's futile to try to resist it! But at chapter 7 it appears that Solomon's God-given wisdom begins to take over a bit. Though his mood is hardly any more cheery, he begins to see the real wisdom in the way God has set the world up to be. He still doesn't like it but he can begin to see the positive side the way God runs things. And the first subject he applies himself to is adversity and he finds that there is real wisdom to the fact that God allows difficulties and problems in life. In fact, he begins by making a list of:

I. The More Valuable Things In Life and you may be surprised by what they are. Most of them are things we count as negatives in life. But when we look at them from God's perspective, they are more valuable than other things that we place a high value on.

1. reputation rather than appearance (1a) We think it's so important how we look and how we smell, how we appear to people, the impression we make. But the reputation we have with others is much more valuable than the impression we leave. Appearance can come out of a bottle, a little perfume, make-up, some nice clothes. And all those are fine. But a good name takes some effort. It takes being careful and responsible and keeping promises. It takes a long time and a lot of inconvenience. It means doing right and maintaining integrity when you really don't feel like it or think you can. But building a reputation also builds you, your character, and in the end it's much more valuable to have others know they can count on us than to have them be impressed by our appearance. And our wise God has made things that way so that what you are counts much more than what you look like.

2. death rather than birth (1b) We have a set of values that says birth is the ultimate blessing and death the ultimate loss. We celebrate birth and mourn death. It's natural. But Solomon says we've got it reversed. Being born means coming into a world full of misery and pain. Dying, for the believer, means leaving a world full of misery and pain for the glories of heaven. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ; to die is gain"! It's profit; it's getting ahead. It's a release from all the unpleasantries and problems and suffering of this life. Now I recognize that it's tough letting go of a loved one; it's difficult. And I'll admit that I've stood by coffins and wondered why there has to be such a thing as death. But how else would we get to glory? God was wise enough to make a way for us.

3. sorrow rather than joy (2-4) C.S. Lewis wrote that, "We want not so much a Father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven...whose plan for the universe was simply that it might truly be said at the end of each day 'a good time was had by all'." Isn't that true? We would love to have a life that had no sadness, no sorrow, no mourning, only fun and happiness and laughter. Yet in the end, sorrow often benefits us much more than joy does. When sorrow comes it clarifies our thinking; it helps us to see the things that are really important in life and how much we really need God. When things go well, it's so easy to get caught up in it and forget the things that really matter. I once spoke to a godly lady whose friend was on her deathbed and she said, "I've learned from this not to procrastinate but when I feel led to

do something to do it now; tomorrow may be too late." God uses sorrow to mold our characters and shape our lives. He's a wise God.

4. rebuke rather than flattery (5-7) Rebukes are tough things for us to face. We don't like to hear that we're wrong. We'd rather have everybody tell us we're right, even if we're wrong, because it feels better! But false praise is like burning thorn bushes. They crackle and pop and make a lot of noise but they produce no coals and their heat is released all at once. Flattery is just like unjust gain or bribery; it turns a wise man into a fool and corrupts his heart. It encourages and pressures him to do things that are foolish and wrong. But a rebuke from someone who really knows and cares, even though it's painful, changes us for the better, makes us better persons, better servants of God, if we let it. Rebuke is another tough thing that our wise God has put into life for our good.

5. completion rather than beginning (8a) Beginnings are so joyous to us and so important. But they are so easy. You can begin almost anything. You can begin a job, a building, undertake a responsibility, start a project. But what matters really is whether or not you carry it through and finish it. Starting is nice; but completion, even though it's tougher, is better. God didn't build a world where you can just snap your fingers and everything is done, like Mary Poppins in the nursery! You only get to completion by struggle and hard work and sweat and tears. But that process builds more than the project; it builds you. God knew what He was doing when He made life so that we would have to really work to accomplish things.

6. patience rather than pushiness (8-9) Oh, but it's so difficult. We want so much to get things out of our way and get on with it. We sit in the traffic and fume and rant, don't we? We grit our teeth and mutter under our breath about the red tape and paperwork when we're in a hurry. We sort of envy the person who knows how to bull his way ahead or get things done without having to wait. But patience is better; waiting and enduring are good for the soul. God didn't build a world where you can have everything you want instantly. Most things in life must be waited for whether it is recovery from an illness or finding a life partner or winning a medal in the Olympics. But waiting, like working, accomplishes more than just the goal. It changes you. To quote Paul, *suffering produces perseverance (or patience) and patience produces character*. Waiting is usually not pleasant but God was very wise to make it necessary. Almost every man in the Bible that God really used had to wait, including Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, even Jesus! If waiting produces men like those, I'm ready to wait!

7. today rather than yesterday (10) Now you've learned that the concept of "the good old days" is at least as old as Solomon! Something in us always longs for the past, for the simplicity of childhood or the spryness of youth or the happiness of having the children and on it goes. Sometimes we wonder why we couldn't have lived in another time that was better. But the truth is that there are no "good old days". Today may not be the most enjoyable day in history but it is the most valuable day there is. God built life so that it is filled with change, not so that it would stay static, always the same. And change is rough and the older you get, the rougher it is. And we wonder sometimes why there has to be so much of it in our lives. But it's just another thing that God uses in His wisdom to build and shape us. And life is such that your entire history has prepared you for one thing, to face today and live it right. Today may seem tough, but today is the day the Lord has made! Now, wouldn't we be better off if we could change the way we look at things in life? Wisdom on our part is to see God's wisdom in allowing adversity in our lives. Foolishness is to miss that and so Solomon shares:

II. The Benefits of Wisdom (11) To have wisdom while going through life, to see God's hand at work in the difficult things we face, is a tremendous benefit in two ways:

1. it helps us to preserve our lives (12) Money can protect you from a lot of things in life, at least often. But wisdom can preserve your life itself, first:

a. in the ordinary sense If you live wisely according to God's standards, you'll save yourself a lot of headache and sorrow and probably even live longer in some cases. But more importantly it preserves our lives:

b. in the ultimate sense It keeps life from being wasted. It keeps us from going through years of meaningless motions and feeling it's all wasted. If you understand what God is doing, you can live today with a purpose and a reason and make it count for eternity.

2. it helps us to profit from adversity (13-14) You can't know your future and you can't change much of what happens to you that is unpleasant. But with wisdom you can consider it and learn from it and profit by it. When adversity comes, think, "God allowed this; now what does He want to do in my life?" and profit from it. Turn it into what it is meant to be, an opportunity for growth.

Sure we wonder why there has to be adversity in life, why the things of greatest value have to be difficult and hurt. But it's part of the wisdom of God. Paul expressed it so clearly in 2 Corinthians. Start at 3:18. God is transforming us step by step into the image of Jesus. How? Look at 4:7-11. Suffering is what really makes it happen! Now 4:16-18. There's the key, to fix your eyes not on the temporary thing you can see and feel but on the eternal benefit it brings. That is wisdom.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 - The Wisdom of Wisdom

As I told you last week, at chapter 7 there is a definite change in the book from stressing the futility of life without God to stressing the wisdom of living life God's way. In the first half of chapter 7 we saw God's wisdom in allowing adversity in our lives and that if we are wise we profit by it. But wisdom can do more for us than simply helping us profit from our troubles. Before we see how much more, though, I want to take a moment to think about:

I. The Definition of Wisdom

As I see it, wisdom has two components as it is used in the Bible:

1. perception: seeing as God sees Wisdom has to do with understanding things. So to have perfect wisdom in life would be to view everything with perfect knowledge and understanding as God does. How wise we are, then, is simply the measure of how much we have been able to see the people and events of our lives as God sees them. But perception in itself is not enough. Wisdom also involves:

2. action: doing as God says The understanding we have has to be translated into our behavior. Perfect wisdom, then, would be to always act according to how God says to act out of our perfect perception of things. So how wise we are is simply the measure of how often we behave according to God's standards once we understand the situation in front of us.

So to reiterate once more, wisdom is the ability to look at the situation in front of us and analyze it and see it the way God sees it and then to act accordingly. Now that ability is essential to living a proper life. Verse 11 tells us it is a great benefit to us. As I said, it helps us to learn and grow from our troubles. But there are three more:

II. The Benefits of Wisdom

First, wisdom gives us:

1. a proper perspective on life (15-18) Now I have to tell you that this section of Ecclesiastes contains some real tough to understand verses and verses which are easily misunderstood by surface reading. So let's first see:

a. what he does not mean At first glance you would think Solomon is saying, "Walk the middle of the road; live on the fence; don't be a "religious fanatic" but don't be criminal." He seems to be implying in verse 16:

(1) that you can be too righteous, too good but he can't mean that. Compare verse 20. Nobody is too righteous, too perfect. All are sinners. Then in verse 17 he seems to imply:

(2) that a little wickedness is OK You can sin a little but don't go in for it in a big way. But he can't mean that either. Compare 10:1. He knows that even a little folly, a little sin, can ruin a life.

b. what he does mean The key to understanding lies (as it so often does in Scripture) in the context. Look at verse 15. He has seen righteous men perish and suffer, like Job, so:

(1) righteousness does not guarantee blessing So when he says literally, "do not multiply your righteousness lest you be (and the next word should not be translated *destroy*, but as it is everywhere else) *apalled* or *confused* or *shaken*." In other words don't multiply your righteousness depending on the fact that God will have to bless you. You're headed for a crushing fall if something happens. And I've seen it happen! Righteousness does not guarantee blessing! On the other hand:

(2) wickedness does not ultimately succeed Verse 15. He has seen wicked men prosper and live long and it looks like they have beat the odds. But he warns "Don't multiply your wickedness thinking you'll get away with it, thinking all will be well. You'll be headed for an untimely death!" Don't do evil thinking God will not judge you. Wickedness does not ultimately succeed even though it looks that way at the moment. The wise person, the one who sees like God does, is the one who keeps hold of both of these facts. He does not expect to be exempt from trouble because he's good, nor does he think he can get away with sin because God won't notice. And thus he won't be disillusioned and he also won't be disciplined!

2. a proper perception of power (19) We are so impressed and intimidated by physical power, whether physical might or financial or earthly authority. But Solomon says that it's more important to be wise than powerful. He's seen it work. Compare 9:13-16. Remember in 2 Sam. 20 when Sheba rebelled against David and took refuge in a walled city, Abel Beth Maacah? Joab and the army were going to lay siege to the town. But the record says there was a wise woman there who talked to Joab and found out the problem and then talked to the people and they followed her wise advice and killed Sheba, so Joab left. Her wisdom saved the whole city and accomplished more than an army of thousands. True power in life comes from seeing like God sees and doing what He says. When you do that, you never fail; you always win. Maybe not in the eyes of the world, or in the way you expected. Think of the cross. It looked like Satan and the powers of darkness were winning. But by doing the Father's will and dying, Jesus was defeating Satan once and for all, though nobody knew it just then. Wisdom helps you to see that it doesn't matter so much who wins; God always wins. Real power comes from seeing like He does.

3. a proper expectation of people (20-22) Most of the time as human beings, when we look at other people we expect them to be flawless. We expect them to always act right and they don't. They disappoint us by making promises they don't keep. They offend us by not caring when we have done nice things for them. This is especially true of those closest to us. Here's a man with a trusted servant that he's been kind to, yet he overhears the servant cursing him. How many times has somebody said something that really burnt your hide? But if we really see like God sees, we recognize that:

a. none of us is without sin No man alive. Not one. Verse 22 tells us just to look inward for proof. How many times have we been the same way? How many times have we cursed others without reason, have we sinned in our speaking against others? How then can we expect that others will not do the same toward us? So for the wise person he has some advice:

b. don't take to heart all that is spoken Literally, "don't give your heart to it". Recognize that people say things they don't mean or things that aren't true. Don't let yourself get so hurt by people who say things you don't like or who do things that bother you. In fact, expect that to happen so that when it does, you can just breeze on and not be torn up by it. The wise person, the one who sees like God sees, knows he can't always count on people. Every one of them will fail you sooner or later. But he knows he can count on the Lord! So let me say it again. Wisdom will benefit you because:

(1) it will help you profit from your troubles

(2) it will help you see the way life really is

(3) it will help you understand what power is

(4) it will help you not to expect too much from people

But we also have to realize that even wisdom, as good as it is, is limited:

III. The Limitations of Wisdom Wisdom from the human side of it is limited because we are limited. Solomon says:

1. perfect perception is unattainable (23-24) The NIV adds the word *wisdom* to verse 24 but the Hebrew means "what has happened" or "what exists". He said "I've tried and tried to be wise, but whatever has happened lies down deeper than man can grasp." All our lives we grow in wisdom (hopefully). We learn more and more to see the world and the things that happen in it like God does. But we'll never make it all the way. We'll never fully understand. To do that we'd have to have a mind as big and omniscient as God's. So the first part of wisdom is to admit that you don't have all wisdom. And the second limitation is that:

2. perfect behavior is unattainable (25-29) If wisdom is acting like God wants, then nobody does it! Solomon says in the process of his searching and searching for meaning in life he can't find anybody who always pleases God. Note in the NIV the word *upright* is supplied in verse 28; it is not in the text. So one what? Supply the missing thought from verse 26. By the way, I don't think Solomon is taking a stab at women here. He doesn't mean that he's actually counted and only 1 out of 1000 men is righteous, but zero women out of 1000. The Hebrew word *man* here is the generic term *adam* or *mankind*, which could easily be translated *person*. These phrases are a kind of Hebrew parallelism or poetry which is common, where the author states the case and then reiterates it more severely in the next phrase. Compare Prov. 30:15, 18. His point is: there isn't one, man or woman, who is totally upright and pleasing to God. So as we go through life we grow in our wise behavior (hopefully), but we never make it all the way; we never attain perfectly wise behavior. So the second part of wisdom is to admit that you don't always act perfectly.

You see, wisdom is not only seeing the world around you like God sees it and acting accordingly, but it's seeing yourself like God sees you, flawed, limited, often dull and blind and acting accordingly. I'll close with a story. *A smart fellow claimed if he were God he could have done things better. Walking under an oak tree one day, he looked up and said, "If I were God, I would not have the fruit of such a tremendous tree to be a little acorn." Then, seeing the slender vine of a large gourd, he said, "How ridiculous for such a small plant to grow so large a fruit". I would have put the small fruit on the small plant, and I would have placed the large gourd on this great oak. Wearied with the heat of the day, he laid down beneath the oak and fell asleep. He was awakened by the falling of an acorn on his face. The thought came to him that, "Had that been that heavy gourd, I probably would be dead now." Immediately, he asked forgiveness of God. He then realized God knew what He was doing. Real wisdom is to realize that what God does could not be improved upon, but what we do can always be improved upon.*

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 8 - The Wisdom of Authority

Here's a truth you've all observed: All men may be created equal but not all men are situated equal! In this world there are positions of power and authority. There are rulers and governments. About the only kind of government in Solomon's day was a monarchy where a king held supreme authority. Today we've changed that but there are still many people in positions of authority over us from government officials to police, teachers, and even parents! Now you would think that good people ought to run the world, but more often than not, they don't. Authorities run roughshod over people's human rights for their own purpose or they sit back and do nothing and even encourage criminals. How can you live in a world

like that where truth seems forever on the scaffold and wrong seems forever on the throne? We could easily be continually depressed. But verse 1 tells us that wisdom is what will help us make it. Remember last week we defined wisdom as seeing like God sees and acting as He wants. Now when you learn to see the world around you like God sees it, you know the score; you see reality and that brightens your face and lifts you up to keep going. Now here's what the wise person knows:

I. We Must Obey Human Authority (1-6) We must be subject to authority. There is no getting around it. Compare 1 Pet. 2:13-17. As long as it lies within the limits of not being forced to disobey God (Acts 5:29), we are to obey all laws and heed all authorities. God didn't make a chaotic world where everyone is out for himself. He made a world where there is order and government and men hold other men's behavior in check. That's the only thing that keeps the human race from destroying itself. And we have to cooperate in that process by obeying and here's:

1. how we must obey Here are three common reactions to authority:

a. without avoidance (3a) My kids are good at this one, finding ways to avoid obeying. You say, "Come here" in that certain tone and they run the other way. Or they get absorbed in what they're doing and pretend not to hear when you call so they can get out of doing what you want. And we adults do some of that also. We try to avoid the authorities over us too, our boss or the teacher in the class.

b. without rebellion (3b) Don't join in a coup attempt; it might fail! Don't tell the authority over you, "No, I won't". Now where have I heard that before? Don't refuse to pay your taxes; don't refuse to do your homework; don't refuse to serve if the government says you must.

c. without complaint (4) You don't go back to the king and say, "King, old boy, that's really stupid; I don't like it". It's not so much that you can't work in a positive way to help authorities improve themselves, but that when it comes down to the wire, we are to obey without complaint, to do the job without throwing our briefcase down on the floor in anger, to pick up our clothes without stomping and slamming the door first. Now I know you're wondering by now:

2. why we must obey Why should we give that kind of obedience to the earthly authorities over us? Solomon gives us two reasons:

a. it is our duty before God (2) In those days everybody swore an oath of loyalty to the King. We do the same thing; we pledge allegiance to the flag which represents our country, the civil authority over us. But whether or not we have ever taken an oath to obey an authority (my kids never took one of those to obey me!), the point is that it is still our duty before God. Compare Rom. 13:1-2. God put you in the family you're in, put those parents over you. God put you in the school you're in and in that class; He put those teachers over you. God put you in that job you're in; He put that boss over you. God put you in the country in; He put those governors and representatives over you! God put them in power. He could have chosen others but He didn't. And God put you under their power. So when you rebel and don't obey, you are rebelling, not simply against earthly authority, but against God, unless you're being commanded to disobey God in the first place. So let me take this a step further. How you obey them is how you're obeying God. It's not your boss you're grumbling against, but God. It's not your parents you're complaining about, but God. He put you there. And when you obey authority on earth, you are obeying God. 13:5 It is not just a matter of being safer; it is a matter of conscience. However, this verse does tell us there is a secondary reason:

b. it is the wise course of action (5-6) The wise person sees that even though it brings you misery, the course of obeying authority is the wise course. He knows there is a proper time and procedure for everything and it is not wise to try and alter that to suit yourself by rebelling. You see, the person who sees from God's perspective realizes our second major fact:

II. It Is God's Job To Govern Human Authority (7-14) Listen to what Asaph said in Ps. 75:5-6. Nobody can exalt you to a position of authority or take you down from it. That is a right God has reserved for Himself. Solomon himself wrote Prov. 21:1, *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases!* The wise person recognizes that setting up and putting down and overruling authority is God's responsibility. But sometimes it doesn't look like God is on the job:

1. here's what we may see: Solomon did.

a. authority may be misused (9) Not "his own" but "their". He's seen authorities misuse that authority and lord it over others and hurt them. We've all seen that. A parent uses their authority to damage a child; a boss runs his company into the ground; a teacher demands impossible things of students; a government oppresses its people.

b. wickedness may be concealed (10) Here's a man who's been wicked but he's whitewashed it over and he's gone to the Temple and put on a nice front. And now he's dead and everybody is praising him. He's misused his authority and seems to have gotten by with it; no one is the wiser!

c. justice may be withheld (11) Here's a piece of advice I wish our criminal justice system would read. When you don't swiftly carry out the penalty for a crime it promotes crime. When you can kill a man and stall off a trial for

years and then manage to get off with a light penalty, it's much more tempting to kill a man than in some countries where they try you quickly and stand you up against a wall and shoot you. But the point is that it may appear there is no justice. The wicked are multiplying their crimes and getting away with it.

d. circumstances may be reversed (14) And then to top it off, sometimes you see righteous people suffer and have problems and even die while wicked people prosper and live on. And you think it's not fair and circumstances ought to be reversed!

2. but the wise person knows a few things He sees like God sees. He knows there is a God in heaven on the throne and that:

a. there is a future for the wicked (7-8) It looks like they're winning today but there's always a tomorrow and nobody knows what will be tomorrow but God. However, one thing is certain and verse 8 puts it like this: "You can't control the wind; you can't control the day of your death; you can't get yourself loose from the army during a war and you can't get loose from the consequences of wickedness." It won't let go. It holds on. There's nothing you can do about it. If you misuse authority, there is a future and your deeds will follow you. Because:

b. ultimately there is justice (12-13) Let appearances be what they will. Ultimately, it will go better with God-fearing people than with the wicked, even if it isn't in this life. I think it was R. G. Lee who preached the famous sermon, "Payday Someday". There's always a payday. Someday wrong comes off the throne and goes on the scaffold.

In 1815 Napoleon was at the height of his power and bent on conquering the world. He set out to engage General Wellington's troops in battle at a place called Waterloo. His plan was to move in the large artillery and start shelling at the break of dawn before reinforcements could arrive. But that night it rained heavily and turned the roads to mud. It was noon before the heavy guns could get in position. The delay enabled Wellington to hold out until massive Prussian reinforcements arrived and Napoleon was defeated. A writer made the comment, "A cloud traversing the sky out of season sufficed to make a world crumble." Victor Hugo, the novelist, wrote, "Why was Napoleon defeated? Because of Wellington's superior forces? No! Because of God!" There is judgment in this world, but if not, there is a judgment to come. But I guess the real question is:

III. How We Can Live With Human Authority (15-17) Things now aren't the way they ought to be. We suffer under the misuse of authority and are miserable many times in life. How can we live with it? Well, let's look at Solomon's last thought first:

1. trying to understand will not help (16-17) You can try as hard as you want to figure it all out. You can try to fathom why God lets Castro continue to rule Cuba. You can try to figure out just why God let the Supreme Court of this land rule that abortion on demand is legal. You can try to figure out how long your boss is going to act like he does before he gets fired. But it won't work, Solomon says. He tried! Your mind is not the mind of God. It's not big enough to figure out exactly what God's up to. Figuring out "why" is not the answer to making it through life. Rather:

2. we must learn to find joy in current life (15) This is not, "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die". This is "Recognize that the place you are in life is from God. Learn to enjoy whatever pleasure, whatever good things each hour brings you, whether it's food, or drink, or a good time with the kids or the completion of a project or a warm ray of sunshine." If you concentrate on all the problems and misery and injustice in your life and the world, you live depressed or go insane. Learn to live each hour of each day with God and let the rest to Him!

There is a member of this congregation who lives in a nursing home. She was always a jolly, happy soul. But her mind and her memory have been affected. And she has very little short term memory. She may enjoy visiting with you right now but an hour from now she may not know you were there. She has to live literally for the moment. And when I pray for her, I always pray, "Lord, let her see your presence in each moment of the day and treasure it before it's gone". And that is my prayer for you too.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 9 - The Wisdom of Living Currently

When are you living? We have all known folks that live in the past. They dwell on the past; they long for it. They talk about it. They do just enough in life to get by, but they never enjoy it because their hearts are back there somewhere, back when... Then there are others who live in the future. Their mind is always on the next step, always on that dream out there, that goal. Today is never good enough. Whether it is a better home or a position at work or retirement. It's always something out there... Then there are others who live in eternity, not in the sense that the Bible speaks of it, but in the sense of being so heavenly minded that they're no earthly good. They've kind of given up on this life and are sitting on their laurels waiting to die so they can get to something better... Then there are those people who are what I call living currently. It's not that they forget the past nor that they ignore the joy of looking forward to the future nor that they aren't excited about heaven. But they live in the NOW; they put their energy into living each moment and each hour to the best

of their ability. Paul wrote in Eph. 5:15-16, *Be very careful then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.* The NASB says "making the most of your time", the KJV "redeeming the time". If you live 70 years you will live 25,567 days, including leap years. Each day represents a precious parcel of great value which will be gone tomorrow no matter how it is spent. It is as though you are given 25,000 bags of gold and one is taken away each day. You can either use it and do something with it or invest it or give it away or just let it sit there and be taken away. Living currently is spending each day wisely, living to the utmost each hour. Solomon came to the same conclusion, that this is the way to live. But before we look at how to do it, let's see:

I. The Necessity of Living Currently (1-6) There are four things that make Today important:

1. you do not know what the future holds (1) Your future is in God's hands but He has not chosen to reveal it to you. You don't know what will happen tomorrow, whether you will be loved or hated by others, whether you will have joy or sorrow, even whether you will be alive or dead. In fact:

-- **trouble often comes unexpectedly (12)** You know, that fish swims along all his life in the pond picking up worms and other juicy morsels and then one day he gets up in the morning and swims about looking for breakfast and bites a worm and there's a hook in it and he's caught. Just that quick. And that's how trouble comes to us. Things may be fine today, but tomorrow there's an accident, a health problem, a death in the family, you name it. Tomorrow may be greatly different than today. All of today's joy and all of today's opportunity may be gone tomorrow. You don't know. And what makes it worse is:

2. you cannot control the future (2-3a) He's not saying it doesn't matter how you act and everybody goes to heaven. He's saying that trouble and problems and disaster are the lot of man and no matter what you do, you can't control what will happen tomorrow; you can't avert tomorrow's trouble. It is your destiny so:

-- **you will not be exempt from trouble (11)** Here's another verse that we hear pieces of quoted in a positive way. But it means this: Just because you're swift doesn't mean you'll win tomorrow's race. Remember the speed skater in the Olympics who fell. Just because you're strong doesn't mean you'll win the battle. Remember Goliath. Just because you're wise or brilliant doesn't mean you'll have prosperity. Time and what he calls, and what we often see as, chance happen to everyone. You will not be exempt from trouble. You can't keep it away no matter what you do so today is very important.

3. you are part of a sinful, mad race (3b) Not just sinful. You knew that! But mad, crazy! They don't act rationally. Tomorrow you may be driving on the expressway and get stuck in traffic and somebody shoots you. You may walk into work tomorrow and find you've been promoted. People don't operate on logic. You never know how they will treat you tomorrow, unless they are saved and then it's tough to tell! Do one thing they don't agree with and you may have an enemy. It has amazed me, and I have experienced it many times, that you can invest hours and hours of love and caring into a person and it is forgotten in a moment. Solomon saw that; he says your past will not be remembered (13-18). He told the story of a poor wise man who saved the lives of an entire community but soon nobody remembered. Wisdom is better than strength, better than weapons of war. But human beings are crazy and one of them can undo a lot of the wisdom you've used! Your past is no guarantee for your present or future! Today is what counts.

4. you will ultimately die (3c-6) Try as you might to avoid it or ignore it, it will come. The bags of gold will be all poured out. I read that the origin of the kid's rhyme, "Ring Around the Rosie," comes from the Bubonic plague in Europe. It was felt that bad air was the carrier of the disease so doctors would carry pockets full of flower petals and folks would stand in flower gardens to breathe clean-scented air. Patients would sniff ashes to sneeze and clear their lungs. But the end result is, "we all fall down"; we all die. Nothing helps.

a. the misunderstanding These verses are not talking about what the state of the dead IS, but about what it IS NOT. They are not meant to teach annihilation after death.

b. the point: you will not affect this world (6b) Once you are dead, heaven will be nice, but that's it for this world. You have no part in anything that happens again. You can't change it. You can't enjoy it. You can't help anyone; you can't fix your mistakes; you can't go back and spend more time with your kids; you can't go back and make up with your enemy. You can't accomplish anything or make something of your life anymore. So folks, as the Bible puts it, "Now is the time, Today is the day!" The past is gone; the future is uncertain. If you don't live currently, one morning you'll wake up in heaven with it all over with and wonder where it went. You must live currently.

II. How to Live Currently Solomon has two pieces of advice for us:

1. enjoy your life now (7-9) Don't sit and think about the past and how much you used to enjoy it. Don't tell yourself that tomorrow life will get better and you'll enjoy it then. Enjoy whatever there is to enjoy in your life right now. And Solomon gives us some examples:

a. your daily experiences like eating and drinking. Try savoring your food and tasting it while it goes down. Try relaxing and enjoying the beauty of a sunset without thinking of the hundred other pressing things you have to do. God has built each life so that even in times of suffering there are enjoyable moments in each day if you look for

them. It may be the encouraging phone call of a friend, it may be the letter in the mail or the relaxed feeling of soaking in a hot tub. Life is made up of millions of moments and we must learn to enjoy the moments.

b. your blessings Solomon says *be clothed in white* which is the opposite of the black worn in mourning. Wear your nice things, your joyous things. Put the oil on your head, that is, wear your perfume and cologne. Look nice and feel good while you can. Learn to enjoy the nice things in life that God has given you while you have them.

c. your family That loving wife or husband, just love them to pieces while you have them. Enjoy them. Those children. They grow up so fast. Treasure the moments as they pass by. Listen! Enjoy life today. You say, "There's nothing to enjoy!" Oh yes there is! Find it. Ask God to show it to you. It's there. And then:

2. do what you can do now (10) Don't sit around thinking about what you used to be able to do or feel you're just treading water until you really get to do what you like. Today is your day and it has value and what you do today may be the last thing you'll ever do. So do whatever it is that you have to do today, whatever you are able to do today and here's how:

a. do it with great effort Put your heart into it, whatever it is. If it's being a housewife and a mom and getting the kids off and cleaning, do it with effort. Make today count. If it's working on an assembly line or driving a truck, do it with effort. Make it count. If it's sitting in a classroom, learn something. Make it count! And then:

b. do it with careful planning I'm not saying you should just do whatever you do with gusto and no thought. Plan your day. Plan your projects. Use your wisdom to try and accomplish as much as you can in life and then:

c. do it with all your skill Do it the best you can. If it's typing, put out a nice looking product. If it's welding, make firm welds. If it's working with numbers, do it carefully and without mistakes.

Folks, today is all we've got. The Gaithers put it so well in the chorus of their song, *We have this moment to hold in our hands and to touch as it slips through our fingers like sand. Yesterday's gone and tomorrow may never come, but we have this moment today.* You can find enjoyment in it or let it pass in misery or numbness. You can accomplish something in it or let it pass meaninglessly into oblivion. In short, you can live or you can exist. The choice is up to you.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 10 - Wisdom About Life's Foolish Traps

Chapters 10 and 11 of Ecclesiastes read much like the book of Proverbs and indeed they are a series of proverbs, short pieces of wisdom put down in sequence. Now if you read chapter 10, you notice that the words *fool* and *folly* occur eight times and you begin to see that what Solomon is doing for us is listing a number of the foolish things he has observed in life. These are the pitfalls, the traps, that lay before every one of us in life and if we see like God sees, we'll recognize them for what they are and avoid them.

I. Including A Little Folly (1-3) Now in those days perfume didn't come in nice little sealed bottles and it wasn't made with an alcohol base that evaporated. It was an ointment of fragrant scents and it was made and kept in a pot or jar. Now flies love sweet gooey things and a few get into the uncovered jar and get stuck and die. What happens? If you leave them there, the whole jar begins to stink. Now, the jar is huge compared to the volume of a few flies, but that little is all it takes to ruin it. And it only takes a little bit of foolish, sinful behavior in your life to have a tremendous effect. What does it do?

1. it ruins a good reputation You may have accumulated years worth of wisdom and honor, be revered and loved by many. But one wrong act can outweigh it all. You see, folly:

2. it is clear to everyone Everyone sees and recognizes it. People are so quick to pick up on it, even unsaved people. So thinking you can include a little bit of folly in your life, harbor a little bit of sin, is a very dangerous trap. Avoid it!

II. Panicking Under Stress (4) The boss gets angry at you so you quit; you walk off the job. Maybe it's your parents or your teacher. Maybe it is not even anger but some other kind of pressure or stress that comes in. The fool panics. He says and does all kinds of things that are irrational or that he doesn't mean or would never do. The wise person remains calm and faces the stress head on. Calm reactions can defuse a lot of anger and will certainly minimize a lot of the bad effects of the stressful situation.

III. Giving Authority To The Unprepared (5-7, 16-17) Now at first glance this section seems to be in direct opposition to the American dream, that a nobody can be a somebody, that a common old Abe Lincoln can one day be president. Solomon seems to be saying the somebodies should stay somebodies and the nobodies stay nobodies. But that's not his point at all. Solomon simply observed the normal course of things that happened when a person who was unprepared and unqualified and untrained was suddenly put into a position of authority and power. And it was disastrous. Authority should

never be given to those who are not prepared for it and of the proper character to use it. That's true in government, in business and in the church. And here's why:

1. they abuse their privileges So often power goes to their heads. They use it for the wrong purposes and in the wrong ways and often:

2. they damage the lives of others Woe to the whole land. It suffers as a consequence. Others are affected by it. Never give authority to a person who has not been properly prepared to use it. It's foolish.

IV. Ignoring The Element Of Danger (8-9) Everything we do, even the most common things of life have an element of danger in them. So many times we forget that. Splitting logs was something done as a daily chore. Yet it became routine and the danger is forgotten. I once cut a limb off a willow tree while standing on a ladder, but instead of falling straight down, it kicked backward and hit me on the chest, nearly knocking me off. So many things we do we take for granted, like getting in the car and driving, and we so easily get cocky and careless. How much wiser to always recognize the element of danger involved and be prepared for it.

V. Using Strength Rather Than Skill (10) There are two ways to do most things, the strong way and the smart way. When it doesn't quite fit together, you can either push harder and force it or stop and look why it won't go together. Sure, a skilled axman can cut wood with a dull ax, but it's a whole lot more work. A wise axman sharpens the ax! Skill works a whole lot better than strength and that's not just true in physical things like sports or labor, it's true in many areas of life. So many times in our relationships we want to push the other person and make things happen our way by main strength, rather than using skill and stopping to see what's wrong in the relationship and fixing it first!

VI. Doing Things At The Wrong Time (11) Snake charming has always been common in the eastern world and something that has been done for money from the sort of folks that are always glad to pay to see someone else take life-threatening risks. But if the charmer messes with the snake and gets bit before he charms it, his profit is all gone. Depending on the snake, so is his life! Charming the snake at the right time is crucial. Doing things at the right time is crucial. One day or one hour or sometimes one moment later or sooner can change a life. We need to be careful to pray and walk close to God and make sure that the things we do, we're doing at the right time.

VII. Speaking Without Knowledge (12-14) Talk about an easy trap to fall into! By far and away the easiest way for us to act foolishly is with our lips. All we have to do is to speak without the knowledge to back up our speaking. It comes in several varieties:

a. speaking ungraciously The wise man speaks graciously but the fool speaks sarcastically and rudely and selfishly and hurtfully and ends up hurting himself in the process, damaging his relationships with other people without even realizing it. Then there's:

b. speaking too much Talking on and on like you know what you're talking about, multiplying your words, covering your tracks. And then if you want to really get creative, there's:

c. speaking about the future Talking about things nobody really knows. Pretending to have knowledge you can't possibly have, talking about tomorrow and next year and when you get older. James said the tongue is a mighty little thing but like a little match it can sure start a huge forest fire. If you want to really live a valuable life in God's eyes, you'll really have to guard your speaking carefully!

VIII. Working Improperly Most of us spend most of our waking hours in life working. That's just the way life is. And God planned it that way for us. But there are two things you want to avoid in your working:

1. ignorance makes work wearying (15) Now the problem with this verse is whether to make the second phrase the cause of the first, that is, to connect them with "because" (KJV) or "so that" (NASB), making the second the effect of the first. That's why the NIV just uses a semicolon! But I think you'll get the point if you understand the second phrase. In those days most people engaged in agricultural pursuits, but the modern concept of a farm wasn't there. Everybody lived in town and they walked out to the fields to work and walked back at night. To not know the way back to town is an expression of ignorance. It's like saying, "He doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain" or "He's dumb as a brick." Now it either says, "work makes a fool so tired that he gets ignorant" or it means, "the reason work is so wearying to a fool is because he is ignorant; he doesn't know how to do it, doesn't know the first thing about it, doesn't take the time to investigate and find out and learn from others." Folks, ignorance about your work will make it the worst drudgery in the world. On the other hand:

2. laziness brings ruin (18) You can see the effects of it. You go into the house and the rafters sag and the roof leaks. And pretty soon it's unlivable and maybe it falls down, as our neighbors' house did when I was young because they never fixed part of the roof. Folks, the truth is that we have to work; we have to put forth effort in life; we need to work with wisdom and skill and not let ignorance cause us to be wearied.

IX. Ignoring Reality (19) Solomon is not saying that this is the way things are. He's already spent chapters telling us that they are not that way. He tried laughter and called it meaningless; he tried riches and called them empty. This is the way the fool thinks. He thinks if he can just absorb himself in good times or entertainment or drink enough to feel high or get enough money to buy his way out, that all his troubles will just roll away. He ignores reality. Sometimes believers will try to ignore their troubles the same way. They may use different means but with the same effect. But reality has to be faced and dealt with.

X. Criticizing Authority (20) Please don't take this verse to literally mean that birds talk! It's probably just the origin of our expression, "a little birdie told me!" What he means is, "Be careful criticizing those in authority even in private because somehow it always seems to get out!" Sometime your thought will slip out in a deed or an errant word. Sometime your word will find its way back to impact you. Don't be two-faced. It'll catch up to you sooner or later.

Now there's a proverb that says, *Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird*. It means that if the bird is sitting in the tree and sees you set the trap and knows where the net is, he's not going to land there! Solomon has told us where some of the traps are in life. Now that we've seen them, let's not step in!

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 11 - Wisdom About Maximizing Life

Maximizing is a thought that is common to all of us. Businesses take steps to maximize their profits; since it's just after Apr. 15, remember that taxpayers want to take steps to maximize their deductions; golfers want to learn to maximize their golf game; husbands and wives want to do the things that will maximize their marriages. We are naturally concerned that in whatever we are involved with, that we get as much out of it as we can or that we accomplish as much by doing it as we can. Well, Solomon the thinker tends to look at the bigger picture. What about life itself? How can we maximize it? How can we get the most out of it and accomplish the most in the years that we are allotted? Of course, the answer to that question would fill volumes, but in chapter 11 Solomon briefly lays down for us four steps that we can take that will help us to maximize our lives. First, he says:

I. Be Generous (1-2) Now here is a proverb that you hear so often quoted but have probably never thought much about. Have you ever thrown bread into the waters, ever fed the ducks at the pond or gone fishing with bread for bait? What happens to it? Does it calmly float off to some distant point and could the wind turn around and blow it back to you later and if it did would you like to have it? No, when you throw bread into water, one of two things happens. It is either eaten quickly by a duck or a fish or it gets soggy and sinks to the bottom. In either case, once it touches water, it is a total loss to you! Now, verses 1 and 2 are a parallel; each has a command and then a reason attached and the commands are the same. Casting the bread is explained by the first clause of verse 2; it means giving. So what Solomon is trying to teach us in verse 1 is to:

1. give without evidence of reward (1) Nobody would be foolish enough to throw their lunch into the water, knowing there is no human hope of its return. But that's exactly what giving is. When you give to somebody expecting a return of some sort, it is a sale, a trade, a bribe, or a loan, but it is not a gift. A gift is free. A gift expects nothing back. Solomon says if you want to maximize life, give to others out of the things that mean something to you. Share your food with someone; share your limited paycheck to help somebody else. Give your time, your attention, your love, your help. And do it without expecting anything back. Now the fact is that:

a. you will often be rewarded later Literally speaking, it would be impossible to find bread again once it is in the waters, especially after many days. God would have to supply you with something to make up for it. And that is exactly what He so very often does. You give and God gives to you. Sometimes a long time later. You meet someone else's need today and God meets your need six months later. I've seen that happen in my life many times, however:

b. this should not be the motive of your giving It should not be the reason why you give. Compare Lk. 6:34. That's how unsaved people work most of the time. You should be better than that. Now verse 2 adds a second admonition:

2. give repeatedly (2) I am reminded of the disciples' question about forgiving, how often should I do it? Is 7 times enough? No, 70 times 7 and then some. That's the same thought in verse 2. How often should I give? Is giving to one or two enough? How about 7, the number of completeness? No, go one beyond that. Do it over and over again. Take your substance and give a portion to others over and over. Do it as often as you find opportunity. Why? Because you do not know what calamity may come upon the land and so:

a. you never know when you will need help The shoe may be on the other foot someday. You may need the help of others. And would you like to be the 2nd or 5th or 8th in line and hear, "Sorry, I already gave once or 4 times or 6 times or 7 times!" You would not want others to refuse you in time of need. But again, be careful:

b. this should not be the motive of your giving We don't give just because we want others to give to us someday when we have a need. If you want a motive for giving, compare Lk. 16:9. Use money to make friends for yourselves. Not so that when hard times come they will take you into their homes (like the unfaithful steward did in the parable above), but so that one day when all money fails, when this world is no more, they will be waiting in the eternal habitations, in heaven, to welcome you. Give so that others will be drawn to you so that you might win them to the Savior!

Now you realize that this is not how the world tells you to maximize life. They say, "Keep it, hoard it up, store it, maximize the interest on it, you might need it tomorrow." God says if you want to maximize your input in this life, give generously and repeatedly.

II. Be Bold (3-4) Have you known anyone that was overcautious? They're usually people that worry alot. And they're always saying, "Well, what if..." or "Yeah, but it might..." Solomon tells us that:

1. many things in life are beyond our control (3) When the moisture capacity of the clouds in the atmosphere is full and a little cold air comes by, it's going to rain. There isn't a thing in the world you can do stop it or change it or control it. If the wind blows a tree over to the south or to the north, that's where it's going to fall and lie and you can't control that. It rains when God wants it to and trees blow over when God wants them to and that's how it is in life. Many, many things are simply up to Him. Now certainly:

2. we must be aware of potential difficulties (4) You don't want to plant the crops if there's no chance of rain and the ground is hard and dry. And you don't want to harvest a crop that gets wet in the process. Prov. 25:23 tells us that in Palestine a wind from the north, usually brings rain. And you already know that you can predict rain by cloud patterns. So there's nothing wrong with not cutting hay when you see a thunderstorm approaching. There's nothing wrong with being aware of problems and hazards but:

3. we must not let them keep us from necessities You can be so much of a wind-watcher that you wait and wait for just the right time to plant and miss the proper time of planting and so don't get to harvest later. Or you can be so much of a cloud-watcher that you miss getting the harvest in before it is overripe and ruined. We need a measure of boldness in life. There are times when we need to let the things we can't control in God's hands and get to doing what we need to do! Otherwise you miss out on so much. You never get to do this thing or that thing in life because you were always afraid it would cut you too short financially or if you tried it, somebody else might think you were extravagant. To maximize life, you've got to have some boldness, to trust God with the "maybe's" and the "might be's" and do the things that need done.

III. Be Diligent (5-6) Now not only are there many things in life that we can't control, but:

1. there are many things in life we cannot know (5) For instance:

a. the direction of the wind Not even the weather bureau can be sure which way the wind will blow tomorrow or exactly how hard it will blow. You just have to wait to see. And nobody has yet totally figured out:

b. the mystery of human life Oh we understand alot more now than Solomon did about how the baby forms and develops in the womb. But the bottom line is that we still don't know just what force it is that makes the little traits encoded on those genes cause the body to develop like it does. And more clearly we can't know:

c. the plan of God Oh, we might know the general plan we see in Scripture or the next step of His plan for us. But we can't see very far and understand fully what God is going to do or allow to happen in our lives. We have to wait and see and look back on it to understand. So in order to maximize life:

2. we must be diligent in our labor (6) The dictionary says *diligent* means, "characterized by steady, earnest, and energetic application and effort." Solomon put it like this, "You need to get up in the evening and get busy planting the seed and you ought to keep at it so that when it's evening you're still planting. You never know which portion of it will grow, the early or the later or both." You never know what will work or what response will come. So when you have a job to do, a goal to accomplish, you have to get up and get at it and try whatever you can think of to make it happen. Sometimes people try to get ahold of me and I ask how often they tried and they say, "once". If you want somebody bad enough, you call at different times and keep it up until you get them. The same is true in life. To maximize it, you've got to put your all into it, steady, earnest, energetic, working toward the goal, whatever it may be. And then:

IV. Be Current (7-8) I don't think I need to dwell on this; I devoted a whole sermon to it earlier. But:

1. we must enjoy life as we live it We must learn to enjoy the process and not just the end product; the going as well as the arriving, the making as well as the hanging on the wall. And what helps is that:

2. we must remember the brevity of it Eternity is coming and once you cross that divide there's no coming back and as far as this world is concerned, your future is meaningless. Once you cross, you can't accomplish anything more here or enjoy anything more here. There will be new joys and accomplishments, sure, but right now you have a life that

needs to be maximized, that needs your full attention, your full input. So live in the now and enjoy in each moment what you can find to enjoy.

There you have it, how to maximize your life. Be generous, be bold, be diligent, and be current. Jesus said in John 10:10 that He came to give us a particular quality of life. *I am come that they might have life, and have it to the full*, abundantly. But the realizing of that fullness of life is up to you. Are you maximizing life or scraping by on bare minimum?

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Ecclesiastes 12 - Wisdom About Growing Old

Birthdays are a funny thing. When you're a child, you can't wait to celebrate them; you can't wait until you attain an older age. We're always looking ahead. But somewhere along the way in the 20's or 30's or maybe the 40's an amazing thing happens. All of a sudden we play down birthdays; we begin to wish they wouldn't come so fast. We start looking back. What is it that makes the difference? I guess it is that we realize we are in the process of growing old. And that realization is a tough one. It sometimes makes people do all sorts of crazy things from dying their hair to divorcing their wives, all in an attempt to prove that the process of growing old just isn't happening to them. But it is! It is happening to you. Whether you're 5 or 20 or 40 or 60, you are growing old. Solomon discovered that too and as we begin chapter 12 we find him reminding us about:

I. The Unpleasant Part of Growing Old (12:1-7) Now let me say that there is a pleasant side to old age. There are joys that go with it; there is a wealth of accumulated wisdom; there is the honor and reputation of a life well-lived. But whether we want to talk about it or not, old age brings to us in varying degrees a lot of unpleasant things. Solomon tries to describe them with tongue in cheek, in a poetic way, but they are very real. He describes old age as a time when you experience:

-- **weakness of limbs (3)** *Keepers* are the hands; *strong men* are the legs. It's a time when your hands tremble and your legs bend. Your body grows weak and you can't do the things you used to do.

-- **loss of teeth** The *grinders* are few. Here we are 3000 years later and many of us still end up with a mouth full of teeth that are not our own. How bad it must have been before modern dentistry came!

-- **dimness of sight** The eyes looking out the windows of your head don't see so well anymore. The reading you once enjoyed is now difficult and large print becomes a must.

-- **fading of hearing (4)** The old ear-gates don't work so well and you have to ask people to repeat things and you miss out on many of the sounds that used to be so clear to you. And yet, surprisingly, you sleep worse. The smallest sound can awaken you from sleep sometimes, where before you slept like a log. Along with it comes:

-- **change of voice** I have bad news for you singers with beautiful voices. Nobody sings like that at 80! Our voices get soft and weak. Our songs fade.

-- **unwarranted fears (5)** New fears and cautions begin to set in. Even standing on a chair is a dangerous exercise. We begin to get afraid of things that we never gave a second thought. I've known shut-ins who were afraid to push buttons on a tape player to listen to a worship service because they are afraid to try anything new or different.

-- **gray hair** The almond tree covers itself with silver-gray blossoms on top. Oh, you dear women who spend half your lives fretting and fussing and fixing your beautiful hair. It's all going to go gray and even if you dye it black at 70, everybody will know it's gray underneath anyway.

-- **loss of mobility** You know how a grasshopper moves! Ever try to catch one? As a teen I tried acting like an amateur naturalist and collecting bugs. There may be hundreds in a field but catch one! Isn't that how it is when we're young? We can run and jump. We're full of energy. But now the grasshopper drags himself along, barely able to walk and get around, so limited as to where he can go and what he can do.

-- **loss of drive** Drive and motivation of all kinds can diminish and fail. The sex drive. The drive to work and do that sustained you all your life is replaced by contentment to sit. The drive to learn and grow can give way to a rocking chair and a blank stare. Folks, the picture is not rosy. I believe you can live a glorious and a grand old age. But you're going to have to contend with these problems more and more. And in the end it is a losing battle that you cannot win. But that's not the important thing. What's important is:

II. Living In Light of Growing Old Solomon has two major things to suggest:

1. remember God now Almost none of you this morning are shut-ins who have been overcome completely by old age. Youth is a relative thing. All of you still have some measure of it left. So the thing to do is to remember God right now while you still have some of it. Now "remember Him" doesn't just mean think about Him. To paraphrase it in modern

English it means "Make Him the center, the focus of your life." Make Christ the Lord and Master and put Him on the throne of your daily existence and do it now. Solomon says "Do it now..."

a. before life's joy is diminished (1) There is so much you can enjoy with the Lord right now, so many experiences that you can taste and savor and be moved to tears of joy by now, with Christ at the center of your life. One day many of those joys will be unavailable. The sights and sounds and feelings won't be there for you to enjoy anymore because this old body won't be able to sense them. Enjoy life now! Then remember Him:

b. before life's ability is lessened (2) The sun and the moon are supposed to brighten the sky and drive away the darkness. After the storm the clouds are supposed to give way to sunshine. And that's how it works when we are young. We get through trouble and problems and the sun shines. But when we get older the problems don't go away. The aches and pains don't heal; the sight and hearing don't improve; the mobility doesn't increase. The clouds and the darkness stay. So put Christ at the center of your life now, while your abilities are still there, while you can still do things and the sun still shines between problems. And above all, do it now:

c. before life's end is imminent (6-7) Like it or not, one day the silver cord holding up the golden bowl with the lamp in it is going to break and the bowl will shatter and the light go out. The old pitcher will break and the well will give its last water. We're going to die! Deathbed repentance is certainly taught in the Bible but it shouldn't be planned on in advance! Don't wait until you're on the verge of death to realize that Christ needs to be the center of your life, until its all over like it was for the thief on the cross, and there is no time left for it to make a visible difference. Instead, focus your life around your relationship with Christ right now, no matter how old you are and then:

2. take advantage of your "youth" (11:9-10) Take advantage of whatever part of it you have left. These are not things you should do only if you're under 30. These are things you should do as much as you can before old age takes them away from you:

a. enjoy the blessings of youth Be happy right now. Find what there is to enjoy in your life where it is and enjoy it now while you can. If it's the satisfaction of building a house, enjoy and savor it now while you can still lift a hammer. If it is the beauty of nature, enjoy it now while you can still get out in it. If it is the taste of good food, appreciate it now while your tastebuds still work. Yes, they weaken too!

b. take the opportunities of youth With Christ at the center of your life, do the things He puts in you the desire to do while you can still do them. If He's calling you to Christian service, do it now. Don't wait until the vigor wears thin and the years are shortened. If there are things you feel He wants you to accomplish, take the opportunities that come your way now. And:

c. cast off the fears of youth Don't be kept from it by anxiety and hesitation or a little pain and sacrifice. Youth and vigor are fleeting; they don't last long. If you hold back and miss out on the opportunities God has for you now, they probably won't return later. But always:

d. live responsibly in your youth Remember to keep Christ at the center of your living. Remember that you have to give account to Him and He will judge all these things. You will have to stand at the judgment seat of Christ to give account for the things done in this body. You don't want to abuse youth by using it as an opportunity to sin. But you don't want to waste it either.

And I want to say this to those of you who are now elderly and experiencing a lot of the woes of old age. Solomon is not saying you should live to the full until these things show up and then quit. I think he would intend just the opposite; as long as you have any measure of health and strength, any ability at all, use it to the utmost before it is taken away by infirmity. Robert George wrote this:

"Stages of Life"

The 20's are the molding years when the young person forms those habits that will direct his career. Then he finishes his school work, stands before the altar, establishes a home, and looks the world in the face.

The 30's are the years of discouragement. It is a hard and trying time. It is a time of battle without the poetry and dreams of youth.

The 40's are the years of vision, when a man finds himself, finishes his castles in the air, and knows the value of his dreams.

The 50's, life comes to its ripening. These should be the years of jubilee, and a man should do his best work then.

At 60, a man has committed enough mistakes to make him wise beyond his years. He should live better and do better work than in any other decade of his life. No man has a right to retire in the sixties; the world has a need for his wisdom.

And in the 70's some of the best work in the world has been done. It is the time when talent, experience, and insight combine to make a worthy and memorable life.

Psalms 90:10 says, *The days of our years are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is there strength, labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.* Now I want to close out our study of Ecclesiastes like Solomon does by reminding you one more time of:

III. The Key Things in All of Life (12:8-14) Solomon's summary of his search for meaning in life is this, everything, absolutely everything, in life is meaningless apart from God. There are only two things in all of life that can help us to get through and make the most of it. One is:

1. understanding the Word of God (8-12) Solomon tells us that he knows what he is writing is from God and you can look in all the other books you want but that's meaningless too. To have a meaningful life we must understand God's Word. We don't have to go out and experience every possible experience in life like Solomon tried to do. We must simply understand what God's Word says. Now sometimes:

a. it is a sharp goad to prick us When we're like the ox and plodding in the wrong direction, God will use His Word to get through our thick skin and cause us to change. Other times:

b. it is a firm nail to secure us The Hebrews didn't have iron nails; he's talking about a tent peg firmly driven in the ground that holds the tent fast. When we're floundering through the difficult experiences of life, God will use His Word to give us the security of knowing He still cares and is in control.

But even more important than understanding the Word of God is:

2. obedience to the Word of God (13-14) This is our whole duty and as the NASB puts it, it applies to every person. Ours is to obey, not to have all the answers, not to right all the wrongs, but to understand God's Word and do it, so that when we stand before Him and all the secrets of our hearts are laid bare, He will say "Well done".

Let's close Ecclesiastes with the prayer that Moses uttered in Ps. 90:12, *So teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

Song Of Solomon

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Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

Our Longing For Him 1:1-8

The Song of Solomon, also titled *Song of Songs* or *Canticles* in some versions, is one of the most neglected books of the Bible, at least in Protestant churches. I assume this is largely because we are embarrassed by its rather bold descriptions of romantic intimacy and don't know what to make of it. The ancient Jews, though, loved this little book and read it publicly every year on the eighth day of Passover. They saw it as an allegory depicting the passionate love between God and His people Israel. During the first 15 centuries of the Church, virtually every major Christian writer gave attention to this book; for centuries the Church had its own love affair with it, seeing it as an allegory of the passionate love between Christ and His church. Personally, it's been more than 30 years since I last taught on this book, so I think it's high time that we turn our attention to it. Let me give you a short:

I. Introduction To The Song Of Solomon (1) It is a *song*, in fact, the only one of the 1005 Songs that Solomon wrote that we still have. But as with so many of the songs in the Bible, that does not mean a song that you sing; rather:

1. it is a lyric poem, actually a series of shorter poems stitched together into a book, and it is **written in a three part dialogue** between a woman, a man and a chorus of voices. In an attempt to delineate who is actually speaking, translators have inserted their own labels for the characters and they use various labels. Some versions use the terms *Bride, Solomon, and Daughters of Jerusalem*. The ESV uses the simple terms, *She, He, and Others* while the NIV uses *Beloved, Lover, and Friends*. And it is not always so clear in the text which one of the three is speaking; in several places that is a matter of judgment. But what is clear is this:

2. it extolls the intimacy of love between a man and woman in marriage Sadly, somewhere early in the history of the church, a negative attitude toward marriage and sexuality developed, perhaps from the words of Paul commending singleness. Ultimately it became assumed that the most spiritual people were those who did not marry and engage in romantic love; thus, the idea of clergy taking a vow of celibacy. The Jews had no such notions; their Levites and priests, even the High Priest, were *expected* to be married and to enjoy intimacy with their wives. And the very fact that this book is in our Bible is, at its simplest level, a strong affirmation that God created man and woman to enjoy passionate romantic intimacy in the bond of marriage. It is not wrong to want that; it is not wrong to enjoy that - IN the bond of marriage! It is a God-given joy. In the very beginning He created mankind to be male and female and ordained that the two should become one flesh, that two human beings could have a relationship so intimate with each other that they actually become one. If that is a part of our lives, we should thank Him for it regularly! But:

3. for us as believers in Christ, this book goes much deeper than that. **It pictures the intimate loving relationship we have with Jesus** using images we can understand. God gives us the relationships that we have in our physical family so that we can better understand relationships we have in the spiritual realm. For instance, He tells us He is our Father and we are His children. Because we have earthly fathers, their love and care for us is supposed to be a poor picture that helps us understand the depth of His care. He tells us that fellow believers are our brothers and sisters so

that from our experience of the bond of brother and sisterhood in our family we can better see how we ought to relate to one another in HIS family. In His teaching:

a. Jesus often pictured Himself as the Bridegroom, saying things like, *...Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.* - **Mk. 2:19-20** and John the Baptist likewise described Him, saying, *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.* - **Jn. 3:29**. Jesus is the Heavenly Bridegroom of His church, of us! And:

b. the church (believers) are repeatedly pictured as the Bride of Christ For instance, Paul said that:

(1) we are betrothed to Jesus as a pure virgin in **2 Cor. 11:2**. We are engaged and waiting for our marriage to Him. And in Eph. 5 he taught clearly that:

(2) the one flesh union of husband and wife is a picture of our union with Christ, if you'll look there with me for a moment - **Eph. 5:25-32**. The intimate one flesh union of a man and woman in the sexual relationship in marriage is a vivid portrait of the depth of the intimate relationship that we have in our union with Christ. We are literally part of one another, made one together with Him! And in the end of the book:

(3) our ultimate union with Him after His second coming is pictured as a marriage *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.* - **Rev. 19:7-8**. That's US! We will celebrate complete and full union with Christ in heaven in the same way that the Jews would hold a marriage feast to celebrate the couple being fully united together for the first time.

Therefore, as we study this book, we want to see in it Jesus, our Loving Bridegroom and ourselves as His Beloved Bride and look for what it can teach us about the emotions and feelings and the intimate enjoyment that should be part of that relationship! We are not just Lord and Servant or even Father and Child. Our relationship involves so much more than believing and obeying; we are lovers! He is deeply passionate about His relationship with us and we should be passionate in our relationship with Him! *Dr. A. B. Simpson said that he once saw a reproduction of the Constitution of the United States which had been skillfully engraved on a copper plate. At first glance it seemed to be just words, but when he looked at it from the proper angle, he could discern the portrait of America's beloved first President, George Washington, artistically etched in minute detail. He said, "His face was revealed in the shading of the letters and I saw his person, not just a flow of words or lofty principles. Then I thought: that's the way we should look at the Bible if we are to understand its deeper meaning. We must see in it a 'Face of love shining through,' not merely ideas, not just doctrines, but Jesus himself..."* Song of Solomon is like that; as we read it we must see His Face of love shining through and love Him back! But even though it is a poem, there does seem to be a real:

4. the story underlying the book - 8:11 As a young King, Solomon owned a vineyard at Baal-Hamon, far north of Jerusalem in Lebanon, a place he evidently would go to get away. The vineyard was worked by tenants who were responsible to give him the majority of its fruits and one of the tenant families was made up of some brothers and a sister (no parents are mentioned) and there:

a. Solomon loved this country girl and won her heart as a shepherd before marrying her as King According to 1:6 this girl had grown up working out in the vineyard and had a difficult life. Solomon met her, dressed not as a king but as a shepherd and there he fell in love with her and won her affections, but did not tell her he was King until much later. Then at last one day he came in all his royal glory in 3:6 and following and took her to become the bride of the King. He came to take her to His palace at Jerusalem where the wedding and the consummation of their love would take place. Does any of that sound familiar? It's a picture of us!

b. we come to love Jesus now as our Shepherd He said, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* - **Jn. 10:11, 14, 27**. We learn to know Him and to recognize His voice as our loving Shepherd, **but will one day we'll be joined to rule with Him as King**, *... when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.* - **1 Pet. 5:4**. We have come to know and love Jesus as our Good Shepherd, who came to us in His earthly clothes of humanity and won our hearts. But one day He will come for us as King, take us to His mansions and celebrate the marriage feast where we will know the delights of the most full and intimate closeness to Him! That's the real story in which we are involved!

So, as we begin at the beginning of the book in this first section the time is before the wedding. They are not yet married and Solomon does not seem to be present. It is a soliloquy of the bride expressing how:

II. The Bride Longs For The Groom (2-3) Those of you who are married, think back to those days when you were engaged; remember that intense longing that you had for your beloved when you could not be with them. That longing is a picture to remind us that:

1. we long for the very presence of Jesus This girl loved it when he kissed her. It was better than wine, more delightful than anything she could think of. Do you remember your first real genuine kiss, what a delight it was? Would you have traded it for a fine dinner or an expensive gift? No, once you had a taste of your lover, all you wanted was for him or her to kiss you again and keep on kissing you. You wanted to be held, to be touched and you couldn't stand being apart. Likewise:

a. we delight in personal contact with Him Once we have the experience of sensing Jesus' presence close to us as we pray or of feeling His comfort as we pour out our hearts to Him or of hearing Him speak to our minds as we meditate on His words in Scripture, we want more. It thrills us and we can't get enough; we want more. We long to sense His presence with us. In fact:

b. we are thrilled by anything that reminds us of Him, just as this girl was thrilled by the smell of Solomon's anointing oils. Smell is like that. Do you recognize the smell of the one you love? Can you smell them on their pillow or on their clothes or instantly recognize the scent of their perfume or cologne? Anything that reminds us of the one we love thrills our hearts, so anything that reminds us of Jesus should thrill us, any little reminder of His presence. And like this girl:

c. we find joy in the very sound of His name I'm sure she would repeat it to herself just to hear herself say it, "Solomon... oh Solomon... Solomon loves me!". It was music to her ears. For centuries, songwriters have been crafting worship around the Name of Jesus so that we sing it with delight and think about Him. Like Chris Tomlin most recently, *Jesus, He loves me, He loves me, He is for me. Jesus, how can it be, He loves me. He is for me!* We long for the very presence of Jesus the way a bride longs for her groom and, like her:

2. we have a deep longing for the final union at the wedding Translators are divided over whether to translate verse (4a) as a past tense or as expressing a desire for future action. Let me read it to you from the NET: *Draw me after you; let us hurry! May the king bring me into his bedroom chambers!* I can't wait to be with you; Solomon, come get me NOW, hurry please! I want to be yours forever!" David had this longing and wrote about it like this, *As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God! I thirst for God, for the living God. I say, "When will I be able to go and appear in God's presence?"* - Ps. 42:1-2 NET. Doesn't the New Testament talk about us loving His appearing? Didn't Paul say he was torn by his strong desire to depart and be with Christ? If our love for Jesus is fervent as it should be, we are longing for His coming to get us and take us to that special place He has prepared for us so that we can be with Him where He is! Here on earth we miss Him! We long for that day to come! Now notice the switch to *WE* in the middle of the verse. It's a literary device used in the poem:

3. this passionate love for him is affirmed by the "chorus" (4b) The friends of the Bride, the Daughters of Jerusalem, chime in to say, "Yes, Amen, Solomon, she is right to love you in this way. You should be loved! For to be loved by you is better than all else and it should be returned!" So, let's ask Jesus to build that passionate love and longing for Him into us and to deepen it.

Now the second section of the Song points out another truth:

III. The Bride Knows She Is Unworthy Of The Groom Was there ever a point when you were excitedly in love and you stopped to ponder why the other person loved you? I know there have been times in our marriage that I thought, "Isn't it amazing that she loves me?" That's how the bride feels here. It seems she is at this point in Jerusalem waiting for the wedding. She is with her friends, other ladies who have just affirmed her love, yet she is noticing how different she is from them. She is not a cultured, refined lady of the court with delicate hands and fair skin like they are. I think the last phrase of verse 4 is actually her speaking about her friends, *...rightly do they love you!* Just as Solomon is everything a woman could want:

1. we can see that Jesus is worthy to be loved There are a thousand reasons to love Him, even ten thousand reasons, as we sing. He is altogether lovely. Anybody would love Him given half a chance. But like the bride:

2. we are conscious of our own undesirable flaws (5-6) She is not the same bright image of what every man would want in the way he is. She has a complexion darkened by the sun and explains her appearance saying that her brothers have made her work endlessly in the vineyards so she did not have the luxury of sitting home and caring for her own vineyard, her own beauty. She's thinking, "How could one so very lovely, so very perfect, love me?" Likewise, when I think of Jesus, I am not the perfect complement to such a groom. My complexion is darkened by sin and failure, by all the flaws that come with being human. When I look honestly at myself, I say with Paul, *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh...* - Rom. 7:18. I could easily imagine everybody else looking at me and saying "Why would God love you?" But oh, He does! Why? Here's the truth: LOVE HAS NO REASON! He loves us because He loves us, not because something in us causes it! Isn't that amazing? If His love depends on my beauty or my behavior, then it might stop, but if He loves me because He loves me then it doesn't depend on me but on Him and He never changes! Hallelujah!

Now finally, I need to explain that the sections of this book are not all in chronological order. The next section, vs. 7-8 seems be set back to the early days of Solomon's courtship of this country girl at the vineyard in Lebanon. Remember that

Solomon did not come to her at first in his royal attire but in the common dress of a shepherd and since he did not identify himself at first, she regarded him as one of the local shepherds. So, at this point they are already in love but what we see here is that:

IV. The Bride Longs To Fully Know The Groom (7) This shepherd has been strangely quiet about himself. Indeed, he would come and go but never take her with. So she wants to know more, where he pastures his flock and where he rests them at midday. She knows about all the other shepherds of the area and where they pasture their flocks, but he's never told her much about himself and she's a bit upset and hurt. She doesn't want to be immodest, like some veiled woman, like some prostitute who runs all over among the flocks, checking out the shepherds looking for a man. But she does long to fully know him and likewise:

1. we should desire to fully know Christ Right now He is still the mysterious Shepherd who loved us, who shows up for beautiful interludes now and again, but we do not yet know Him fully as the King in all His beauty. We're catching glimpses of it as we walk with Him and there should be in us a desire to know more! Paul had it; he said, *...everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead....* - **Phil. 3:8-10** NLT. That's the most important thing in the world, to know Him more and more deeply, to experience more and more of Him, until we arrive at the marriage and know Him fully. But how does that happen? Well, most scholars think the words of verse 8 are the answer that the Bride's friends, the daughters of Jerusalem, give to her question **(8)**. Their advice is "If you, yourself don't know where to find him, follow the tracks of his flock and pasture your own goats near the tents of the other shepherds who are His companions and ask them about him." If we want to know Christ more deeply and fully:

2. we must follow the paths of others who've known Him Fortunately for us there are those among us who have known Him much longer and much more deeply and we can go to them and ask questions. We can learn about Him from their experience and their lives. We can learn to be like them, as Paul said in **1 Cor. 11:1**, *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*. We can know Him better through them and as we let them pour their lives into us. Find someone who really knows Him deeply and as you get to know them, you'll find yourself drawn closer to Him in the process.

A woman in love, a fiancé, longs for her groom, longs for His touch, longs to be with him in the fullness of marriage and, until that day, longs to know him more and more deeply. Such should be our love for Jesus. *Frederick Faber was the author of the hymn "Faith of our Fathers". A.W. Tozer said about him that, "His love for the Person of Christ was so intense that it threatened to consume him; it burned within him as a sweet and holy madness and flowed from his lips like molten gold. In one of his sermons he says, 'Wherever we turn in the church of God, there is Jesus. He is the beginning, middle and end of everything to us. ... There is nothing good, nothing holy, nothing beautiful, nothing joyous which He is not to His servants. No one need be poor, because, if he chooses, he can have Jesus for his own property and possession. No one need be downcast, for Jesus is the joy of heaven, and it is His joy to enter into sorrowful hearts. We can exaggerate about many things; but we can never exaggerate our obligation to Jesus, or the compassionate abundance of the love of Jesus to us. All our lives long we might talk of Jesus, and yet we should never come to an end of the sweet things that might be said of Him. Eternity will not be long enough to learn all He is, or to praise Him for all He has done, but then, that matters not; for we shall be always with Him, and we desire nothing more.'*" May God give each of us such a longing for Him!

Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

Our Mutual Delight 1:9 - 2:7

I want to be honest and confess that Song of Solomon is proving to be one of the most difficult studies I've done in many years for several reasons. For instance, so many of the expressions that are used mean something very different than they seem to in English and there has been an extremely wide range of interpretations of them through the years. Also, there are no clues in the text as to whether the Bride or Solomon are speaking, so different scholars have differing opinions as to what words are spoken by whom and on top of that, there are no divisions to even indicate the timing of the various portions of the poem. So, with all of that said, let me give you my best guess as to:

I. The Setting Of This Portion Of The Song that we're studying today. From some of the language:

1. the couple seems to be at the wedding banquet in Jerusalem For instance **1:12** says, *While the king was on his couch...* Most translations say, *...at his table* or *...banqueting table*. And **2:4** says, *He brought me into the banqueting house [or hall]* ... So even though Solomon does not seem to have been present in the first section of the book, beginning at 1:9 he and his beloved bride seem to be actually be reclining together on dining couches at their marriage feast and declaring their love for one another. But in the midst of it all:

2. the bride's imagery looks back on their rural courtship She's a country girl who has spent her life in a vineyard in Lebanon. That's where she fell in love with Solomon as he courted her. So even now that she's in the palace, in **(1:16-17)** she says *...our couch is green* [like the lush grass they used to lie on]; *the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine* [as though the cedar paneling and the beams of Solomon's palace reminded her of the cedar and pine

trees of Lebanon under which they used to meet in the countryside]. Her expressions of love are filled with flowers and trees and animals of the field. But the chief thing to understand is that this section is the exchange of terms of endearment between these two lovers and because it pictures for us the relationship between Christ and His church, it's main lesson for us is that:

II. There Is A Mutual Delight In Our Relationship With Jesus We never stop to think about this, but in the same sense that Solomon, the bridegroom, is absolutely delighted in the bride that he is marrying:

1. Jesus is absolutely delighted in us Listen to the words of Solomon and picture Jesus speaking them to you **(1:9)**. "Wait", you say. Isn't comparing your fiancé to a horse likely to get you in trouble? Today, probably, but not then. You see, the chariots of Pharaoh were never pulled by a mare; they were pulled by the royal stallions, the most graceful and handsome stallions in all the world. A mare going among them would create quite a stir; every stallion would take after her! It's his way of saying, "You are so beautiful that all the royalty of the world would immediately desire you and want you, but I am so thrilled that you are mine!" And that's how delighted Jesus is in us:

a. we are His ultimate desire - Eph. 5:25 says that husbands are to love their wives *...as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. He desired having us as His own so much that He put aside all thought of His own well-being and sacrificed His own life on the cross so that He could have us and we could belong to Him! He desired having us more than anything else in the whole universe! Yet why should that be? We can't find anything in ourselves that is that desirable, but:

b. He sees us as we'll be at the Marriage This bride is not reclining by the table in her simple country attire **(10)**. She is bedecked in royal jewels and the chorus [her friends, the daughters of Jerusalem] add **(11)**. We'll give you more! Jesus can look ahead; He can see us for what we really are, for what we'll be on that wonderful wedding day after He comes for us. And what will we look like? **Eph. 5:27** says that He will *...present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*. In John's vision he saw you and I at the wedding and he said, *...the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure*— *for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints*. - **Rev. 19:7-8**. Oh, on that day we'll be a fitting sight for the King, made pure and holy, without any spots or blemishes, clothed in the perfect white of absolute holiness to be joined to Him! He can see us like that and so He tells us that:

c. to Him we are extremely beautiful Look ahead to **(15)**. Solomon says it twice; he repeats Himself for emphasis, "You are SOOOO beautiful!" In ancient mid-Eastern cultures, there was an unusual emphasis on the beauty of a woman's eyes, likely because of the practice of wearing veils and covering the body so that the eyes became the only real indication of a woman's beauty that a man was permitted to see. And, let me tell you, I looked at a whole bunch of pictures of doves on the internet to see what he was talking about, and you know what? The dove species that live in that region all look similar to the mourning doves we have here [don't picture white doves like magicians have], but when you look at all of them their eyes seem to stand out as their central feature. Then when you look even closer you notice that they all have a small ring of some sort around their eye, either of white or something else, so that their eye just seems to pop out at you and attract you. But their necks are long and slender and they have beautiful configurations of patterned feathers. Of course, doves have always been a symbol of innocence and purity, birds that God accepted as pure and perfectly fit for sacrifice. As this song goes on Solomon calls his bride *my dove* three more times and in the last two of those he adds, *my dove, my perfect one!* She is ultimately beautiful and perfect in his eyes and so we are to Jesus. We are His dove, His perfect one, pure, spotless, holy, without blemish and He is so delighted in us that one day, according to Romans 8, He will unveil us and reveal us to the entire creation as His perfect bride, the ultimate trophy of His grace, and the entire creation is waiting for that very moment with bated breath, as it were, to see us in all of our God-given splendor!

That's how delighted Jesus is in us and so in return:

2. we should be absolutely delighted in Jesus At this wedding banquet, the bride not only had jewels, but she was wearing perfume **(12)**. Nard was an aromatic oil, a very expensive perfume imported all the way from the Himalayas in northern India, the same costly ointment that Mary poured on the feet of Jesus and so shocked the disciples. The bride was wearing it to be attractive to the King; as he reclined beside her at the table, she realized that her alluring scent was constantly going out to him, drawing him to her. And like her:

a. we should want to be attractive to Jesus We should want to anoint our lives with the things that He delights in so that He will be delighted in us. Our nard is not a bodily perfume, but the fragrant aroma of a life lived in devotion to Jesus, full of holiness, obedience, love and all the things which please Him most. The point is that we should *want* Him to be attracted to us; our strongest desire should be to please Him. And the way that happens is that:

b. our lives should be filled with a continual aroma of Him as the bride is saying in **(13)**. Myrrh is an expensive aromatic gum that comes from Arabia and India. In solid form it was worn in a small cloth pouch or sachet hung around the neck against the body where the warmth slowly melted it and it would give off a very strong aroma that lasted a long period of time. In fact, women often wore it to bed to perfume themselves for the next day [NET

Notes]. The bride says that Solomon was like a sachet of myrrh around her neck that continually filled her nostrils with an exquisite aroma night and day. No matter where she was or what she was doing, the sweet scent of him was always with her and made her think of him. Likewise, our lives should continually be filled with the sweet aroma of Jesus. Night, morning or noon, no matter where we are or what we are doing, the thought of His presence and His person should permeate our consciousness. In fact:

c. He should stand out above everything else in life to us (14) En-Gedi is a lush green oasis in the midst of the desert wilderness on the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea. The surrounding countryside is hot and barren with dry sands that extend for miles. The henna plant has upward pointing blossoms, that have sweet smelling whitish flowers which grow in thick clusters. Henna was also used to make sweet smelling perfume and from its flowers comes the famous orange dye that women have used down through history [*NET Notes*]. So, Solomon was to her like this beautiful sweet-smelling cluster of flowers projecting upward in this island of green beauty in the midst of this utter wasteland. He stood out to her above and was more precious to her than anything else in her life. And so should Jesus stand out above and be more precious to us than anything else in our lives.

A century ago, C. H. Spurgeon wrote this about Jesus: "Not one feature in His glorious person attracts attention at the expense of others; but He is perfectly and altogether lovely." Spurgeon went on to exclaim, "Oh, Jesus! Thy power, Thy grace, Thy justice, Thy tenderness, Thy truth, Thy majesty, and Thine immutability make up such a man, or rather such a God-man, as neither heaven nor earth hath seen elsewhere... Thou art music without discord: Thou art many, and yet not divided; Thou art all things, and yet not diverse. As all the colors blend in one resplendent rainbow, so all the glories of heaven and earth meet in Thee and unite so wondrously, that there is none like Thee in all things; nay, if all the virtues of the most excellent were bound in one bundle, they could not rival Thee." Listen, that's how delighted we should be in Him! Now as we enter chapter 2 the emphasis shifts slightly to point out that:

3. there is a wonderful uniqueness in our relationship The bride starts to talk about herself again (**1:16a** finishes its thought in **2:1**). Sharon is a low coastal plain in the northwest of Israel which in that day had an abundance of vegetation, especially wildflowers. But they were not roses! That came from early English translators who had no idea what flower the Hebrew word meant back then. They were crocuses, common ordinary meadow flowers. She is saying, "Solomon, YOU are uniquely beautiful, but I am just an ordinary flower that grows everywhere. Why would you ever take notice of me?" Likewise, Jesus is uniquely beautiful, but:

a. to ourselves we seem to be merely ordinary people There are 7 billion of us growing everywhere on the planet and I'm sure that a huge bunch of them are a whole lot more desirable than I am! But Solomon comes back right away with (**2**). "No, it's more like everyone else is an ugly brier or thorn and you stand out among them like a beautiful flower!"

b. to Him we are as uniquely wonderful as a flower among thorns I've told you before that in the pasture behind my childhood home was a pasture, one huge section of which was just filled with thorn trees. Those things were nasty; nothing grew under them and the only thing that grew around them was weeds and thickets of wild raspberry bushes with thorns on them. Let me tell you, we stayed out of that patch, but imagine, if you lived in that nasty thorny place, your delight in finding a beautifully colored flower in the midst of it. To Jesus we are uniquely wonderful, a beautiful flower among the grove of thorns that is humanity. And vice versa:

c. to us He is as uniquely wonderful as an apple tree in a wild forest says the Bride (**3a**). The apple tree wasn't native to Israel; they had to be imported and cultivated at great trouble. Suppose you were out hunting all day in the mountains among the endless trees of the forest and you came upon a cultivated apple tree. It would be a very unusual but also an extremely welcome sight. What would you do? You would sit down under its spreading branches to rest in its shade and you would refresh yourself with the delightful sweet taste of a fresh apple. So the bride says (**3b**). That's an expression for protection. As a tree shades us and protects us from the heat of the sun, so the bride rested in her groom's protection and:

(1) we delight in the rest of Jesus' protection I think of **Phil. 4:7** which tells us that as we trust or rest in Him, that *...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard [our] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*. How wonderful it is in the midst of all the stressful, painful, awful circumstances that befall us as we wander through the forest of life, to rest in the beautiful shade of the knowledge that Jesus has it all under control. Nobody else can give us that! Then she says (**3c**). It is not only that He has it under control, but just as the Bride delighted in Solomon's presence with her, so:

(2) we delight in the taste of Jesus' fellowship with us here. He is with us always, as He promised, even *...Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. - 1 Pet. 1:8*. We delight as we meet with Him in prayer; we're thrilled as He speaks to us in His Word and His Spirit plants His thoughts in our minds and as we see Him at work in our lives. The taste of His presence is sweet and refreshing to us in the midst of the difficulties of life!

And then the bride just becomes completely overwhelmed that Solomon had actually brought her all the way to Jerusalem and was marrying her (**4-6**). She can't believe she is sitting in the palace, that he is declaring his love for her in this

public way. She feels literally about to faint from it all. Raisin cakes were a delicacy served on special occasions. She says, "Quick, give me some of the raisin cakes and apples to eat before I faint! Oh, he is embracing me! What ecstasy!" Oh listen, dear Bride of Christ, when we finally get there to the marriage:

4. His love for us will be completely overwhelming! There will be no words to describe the ecstasy of it! When John, the apostle who was close to Jesus and was always impressed that Jesus loved him, actually saw the Lord in all His glory in heaven in his vision, he says, *I fell at His feet as though I was dead* - Rev. 1:17. He was so overwhelmed that he passed out and Jesus had to touch him and revive him! O what a day that will be when we see Jesus, our Bridegroom who has loved us and brought us to His banqueting table to be joined to us forever!

But then in verse 7 comes a refrain in the poem, one that is repeated three times, and it's difficult to tell exactly who is speaking and what it means, but here is the lesson I get out of it:

III. We Must Let Nothing Disturb Our Relationship With Him (7) It is an oath administered to the chorus, the friends of the Bride, making them swear, with the animals of the forest as witnesses, that they will not do something. Some take it as the Bride saying that they should not arouse or awaken this kind of love in a person before its time, before the person is ready and wants it. Others take it to mean the Bride is warning them not to arouse or awaken her out of stupor of being overwhelmed with love until she pleases. The NASB says the Groom is speaking and saying that they should not arouse this kind of love in her until SHE pleases; it is her choice to "wake up to it". No matter how you take it, the Bride has a will and a choice to let herself experience this depth of love and nothing external should try to make it happen or should disturb it from happening. If you want to be overwhelmingly in love with Jesus and be delighted in Him above all things, you can choose that! And if you do choose that, let NOTHING disturb you from it! Be careful not to let the cares and issues of this world distract you from it! Do not lose your first love!

Anne Ortlund tells the story of a schoolteacher whose wife died suddenly, and he was left to be both father and mother to their one child, a 12-year-old girl. Of course, he was always bothered by the problem of not having enough time to give her, with teaching school, and he could hardly wait for Christmas vacation to come when they could be together every day for two weeks. But the first day of vacation she was holed up in her room with the door closed, and only came out for meals. The next day was the same, and every day until Christmas. And the father could hardly get through the long, lonely days. Finally came Christmas morning, and under the tree was his Christmas present: a pair of hand-knit socks. "Daddy," she said with her eyes shining, "I was so afraid I couldn't get them done in time! That's what I've been doing in my room--knitting you socks. Do you like them?"

"Darling," he replied, gathering her up in a big hug so she couldn't see his tears. "Of course, I do. They're beautiful. Thank you very much." But in his heart he was saying, "Oh, little girl, I could buy socks anywhere. I really didn't want the socks. I just wanted you! I wanted your time and your attention and your love. I wanted to talk to you about things and do things together with you!" When we all get to heaven, do you think God will say, "Thank you for all the ways you served Me"--but that with tears He will add, "But I really didn't want you to do it at the expense of not having time just with Me. Most of all I just wanted you! I wanted to talk to you about things and do things together with you?" [Love Me with Tough Love by Anne Ortlund. Word, 1979. Page 181.] O Dear Ones, we must let nothing, not even busyness in serving Him, get in the way of our delighting in Him and loving Him for who He is!

Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

Our Times With Each Other 2:8 - 3:5

Let me remind you that Song of Solomon is a celebration of the joy of romantic love and marriage, but the New Testament clearly says that human marriage is given to us as picture to help us understand the intimacy of the love and union between Christ and His church. And His church is US, but not merely all of us together; it is each one of us individually. He is deeply in love with us personally and the purpose of our studying this book is to encourage each of us personally to grow more deeply in love with Him. Now if you've ever been deeply in love with someone, you remember how important private time alone is, how you longed for those times when it would be just the two of you and you could just be with each other. In the previous section of the poem the Bride and Solomon seem to have been at their wedding banquet in Jerusalem, but in 2:8-17 the scene has changed. We've now gone backwards in time to their courtship in the mountains of Lebanon where:

I. The Bride Remembers A Wonderful Visit With Her Lover as he comes to her home in Baal-Hamon. She hears his call and looks out the window and watches him come across the hills and up to the wall of her house. He beckons her to arise and come outside and spend time with him in the beauty of the springtime. She comes out and they share a special time together. Then he again departs over the hills and she watches him go, longing for the day when they can be together forever. So, if this is really meant to be a picture of our relationship with Jesus, then what we are going to read should be a description of our personal alone-time visits with Him! Like the bride, we're still in Baal-Hamon, we're still down here on earth, we're betrothed but not yet married to the King. So for now, we have to content ourselves with visits, hopefully daily visits, with the One we love. From that perspective, let's read verses **(8-9)**. Look how delighted this girl is! She is thrilled by the sound of his voice; her joy grows as she gazes out the window and admires him gracefully bounding over

the hill, running toward her house, until at last he's standing at the window and his face is looking through the lattice. Her example is illustrating for us that:

1. we should anticipate our time with Jesus with delight Yet so many times we don't. So often we see having a quiet time with Him alone as just another responsibility we have to fulfill or another task God expects us to fit into our already busy schedules. Too many times we leave our Heavenly Lover standing at our window, sadly watching us go about our daily routine while ignoring His call and His approach! Our time with Him should be a highlight of our day, something that we look forward to with anticipation! We'll get to be alone with the One we love and share our hearts with Him! Maybe it will help us to realize that:

2. Jesus greatly desires us to come apart and be with Him (10-13) Listen to Solomon, the passionate lover, call to his bride to be to come outside and be with Him, and in that call, hear the call of Jesus to each one of us as:

a. He beckons us to join Him in endearing terms In verse 10 and again in 13 He cries, *Arise, my love, my beautiful one!* You know what's amazing to me? Jesus loves all of us with the same love; He doesn't love you more than me or me more than you. But it's not generic; it's individual and personal. We sing, *Jesus loves ME, this I know*. To each one of us, He calls, *My love*, and means it just as deeply as if we were the only one He ever loved! And no matter how we look or what state we may be in, in His eyes we are beautiful! You know the old saying, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." What is beautiful to me might not seem beautiful to you, because my sense of beauty is colored by who I am and the experiences I've had. But what is beautiful to Him is me! Me, with all of my warts and my blemishes, me with all of my failures and shortcomings, me with my bad breath and my grouchiness, as well as all of the good and wonderful things about me. Each of us is truly beautiful to Him and so He is excited to be with us:

b. He likens time with us to the joy of the coming of spring to the land Surely we can relate to this one! *Winter is past, the rain is over, the flowers appear, the birds have come back, the trees are in bloom....* For Him, being with us is a season of life and vibrancy that He looks forward to the way that we look forward to the coming of spring and so it should be for us. Time with Him is energizing and empowering and refreshing and rejuvenating and we should look forward to it with joy. Then notice that twice Solomon says, *Come away! Come away with me!* "I don't want to come in and hang out with your family and make small talk. Come out here; I want to be alone with you!" Likewise, Jesus':

c. His desire is to have private time alone with us Not that it's a bad thing to pray together with others, but just as lovers crave privacy to share their hearts and their love, so Jesus longs for us to come away from the stuff of our lives to be with Him, even for a few minutes, or an hour, so that He can share His love with us. Didn't He Himself instruct us, *But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private...* - Mt. 6:6. In fact:

d. He has a passionate desire to interact with us Look at verse (14). Doves often roost or nest in the nooks and crannies of the rocks on the mountains and Solomon says, "You are MY dove, let's go up to the hills, to the hiding place, literally, to the secret places in the rocks where we can be alone and undisturbed. I want to see your face because it's lovely. I want to hear your voice because it's sweet! I just want to BE with you." Jesus just wants to BE with us. He wants to hear our voice as we talk to Him, because to Him it is sweet. He wants to see our face as we commune with Him, because to Him it is lovely. He is passionate; He cares deeply about having time with us and that's why:

3. we must be careful to let nothing spoil our times with Him Solomon cautions his bride in verse (15). The imagery is that they are walking together through the vineyards in bloom but somehow some little foxes have gotten into the vineyard and they will tear up the vines trying to get at the grapes if nothing is done about them. But when he says *our vineyards are in bloom*, he's really talking about their sweet communion together and urging her to not to let any "little foxes" spoil it. You know:

a. the things that spoil our time with Jesus are often little We always have work that is demanding to be done, some chore that we need to complete. Or maybe our body is simply so tired that we have trouble staying awake. Maybe something else has our attention at the moment and we are loathe to pull away from it, like maybe a favorite TV show. It is not usually huge sins and failures that disrupt daily fellowship with Jesus; it's the little things, the daily things of life that Satan constantly seeks to use to spoil our times with Jesus. And through Solomon, He's cautioning us that:

b. we must deliberately catch those things and remove their influence from the blooming vineyard of our communion with Him. Let's be honest: how many of us struggle with letting other things get in the way of our time with Him? All of us, I'm pretty sure! He's urging us to deliberately choose to set those things aside and choose time with Him over them so that we have a consistent habit of spending precious time with Him.

Then the Bride speaks in verses **(16-17)**. She speaks of the joy of knowing that they belong to one another as they spend this precious time together and then as the day wanes, she wistfully watches him depart over the hills longing for him to turn and come back again. Likewise:

4. we should treasure the communion of belonging to each other until the day when Jesus returns It is in those times of prayer and meditation that we most deeply feel the truth: I am His and He is mine. I have no doubt that this verse inspired George Robinson in 1876, one year before he died at the age of 39 from prolonged illness, to write the words that became a beloved hymn, describing his communion with the Lord:

*Loved with everlasting love, led by grace that love to know;
Gracious Spirit from above, Thou hast taught me it is so!
O this full and perfect peace! O this transport all divine!
In a love which cannot cease, I am His, and He is mine.*

*Things that once were wild alarms cannot now disturb my rest;
Closed in everlasting arms, pillowed on the loving breast.
O to lie forever here, doubt and care and self resign,
While He whispers in my ear, I am His, and He is mine.*

*His forever, only His; Who the Lord and me shall part?
Ah, with what a rest of bliss Christ can fill the loving heart!
Heav'n and earth may fade and flee, firstborn light in gloom decline;
But while God and I shall be, I am His, and He is mine.*

Oh, what a precious treasure that sweet communion is. And as we experience it, each time makes us look forward to the next time when He comes to meet with us. This communion sustains us during our long stay here and it makes us long for that day when we see Him coming for us at last! Now in this next section, **(3:1-5)**, the scene changes again. The bride is asleep in her bed at home and this time:

II. The Bride Recounts A Bad Dream About Her Lover We'd call it a nightmare actually. Normally we wouldn't put a lot of stock in dreams. Crazy, unreal things happen in dreams, things that have no rhyme or reason. Most of them, we don't even remember after we wake up, but this one she remembers vividly because she dreamed about her worst fear, that Solomon would somehow leave her. Look at:

1. the content of the dream In verse 1:

a. she "wakes up" and cannot find him (1) In her dream she "awakens" and looks for him to be there by her side, but he's gone; he's disappeared from the room. So, in her dream:

b. she goes out and searches the city and cannot find him (2) She looks everywhere, running up one street and down the next, but he's nowhere to be seen. Eventually:

c. she meets the city watchmen and they haven't seen him (3) "Oh, please tell me you've seen him, tell me you know where he is!" Yet even they can't. But:

d. at last she finds him (4) When she finds him at last, she **clings to him, refusing to let go until she has brought him home and into her room**. And then the dream ends. Now what does all this have to do with us? Well, a dream is an illusion; it is not real. And like the Bride:

2. we may sometimes have the illusion that Jesus is gone from us Did you notice the phrase that she uses four times in those verses, *Him whom my soul loves*. That's the source of her fear; she loves Him deeply, from the depths of her very being. How horrible it would be if he would leave and not come back! It would destroy her! And just so:

a. we love Jesus intensely and long for His presence It is HE whom our very souls love above all other things and we long to experience His presence with us in every situation that we face in life. But sometimes we don't seem to see Him; He doesn't seem to be there. A tragedy happens, a loved one dies, persecution strikes, something awful comes into our lives and we look around for Him but He just doesn't seem to be there. Or maybe nothing happens but one day we simply "wake up" and suddenly He seems to be gone, the familiar closeness of His presence is missing. So we do what the Bride did:

b. we seek Him diligently through all the means we know We grab our Bible and turn to all the familiar verses that usually comfort and reassure us, but they seem to be just words on paper. We pray and it seems as though our words bounce off the ceiling. We go to church and sing and try to worship but the words just won't come. We even ask others to pray for us and they try to encourage us but it doesn't help. In spite of all our attempts:

c. sometimes we can't seem to experience His presence It's like He's gone, like He's left us. R. C. Sproul says, *The dark night of the soul. This phenomenon describes a malady that the greatest of Christians have suffered from time to time. It was the malady that provoked David to soak his pillow with tears. It was the malady that earned for*

Jeremiah the sobriquet, "The Weeping Prophet." It was the malady that so afflicted Martin Luther that his melancholy threatened to destroy him. This is no ordinary fit of depression, but it is a depression that is linked to a crisis of faith, a crisis that comes when one senses the absence of God or gives rise to a feeling of abandonment by Him. [http://www.ligonier.org/blog/the-dark-night-of-the-soul/] St. John of the Cross coined the term as the title of the poem that he wrote describing his experience in the 1500's. The great preacher Spurgeon suffered debilitating spiritual depression over much of his ministry in London and even Mother Theresa had bouts of it which lasted many years. So don't be surprised if some day something happens and for whatever reason you go through and experience like that, where no matter how much you love Him and how hard you try, you just can't seem to sense His presence with you and it feels like He is gone. And if it happens, what do you do?

3. in these times, like the Bride, we must cling to what we know of Him and never let go. The Bible clearly says that:

a. Jesus will never leave us or forsake us ...for he has said, *"I will never leave you and I will never abandon you."* - **Heb. 13:5 NET**. He can't leave us; He can't abandon us. Our very spirits are joined together as one! He is with us ALWAYS, even to the end of the age! Our doubts about His presence are illusions just as unreal as the Bride's dream. Cling to what you know! That is the word of a God who cannot lie. That is the promise of a Savior who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Grab hold of that and never let it go! And the consistent testimony of believers who go through this kind of a dark experience and hang on is that:

b. if we keep on seeking His Presence we will eventually find it, just as the Bride's seeking and seeking in her dream was rewarded at last. *Draw near to God and he will draw near to you*, says **Jas. 4:8**. Or as R.C. Sproul puts it: *The presence of faith gives no guarantee of the absence of spiritual depression; however, the dark night of the soul always gives way to the brightness of the noonday light of the presence of God.*

I love how Charles Wesley Naylor uses a different analogy to illustrate this: A mother sat quietly in her easy chair. Up on the floor near her was her little one playing -- piling his blocks one upon another, then throwing them down and laughing in childish glee. He was all absorbed in his play. The mother gazed upon him with her eyes beaming. Presently she began to call him, "Baby, come to Mama! Baby, Baby, come to Mama!" but he played on unheeding. Again she called, but he paid no attention; his mind was occupied with his own affairs. Presently the mother quietly slipped from her chair and went into an adjoining room, out of the baby's sight. He did not notice her go. He supposed that she was right there and that he could go to her at any time; but happening to glance up from his play, he saw that the chair was empty. The laughter ceased at once, and a cloud came over his features; he turned and looked all around the room, but his mama was not in sight. He saw only a stranger sitting in an easy chair. A pang of startled fear passed through him, and he began to cry and call very earnestly, in his baby way, for his mama. It brought a quick response. The mother, leaving her concealment, rushed to him quickly, picked him up, and hugged him tightly to her bosom. His chubby baby arms were clasped about her neck as though he would never let her go. Soon the tears were gone and the baby's face lay against that of the mother, while the joy of the mother-heart caused the eyes to shine like stars....

Like that little one, we sometimes become so absorbed in our own pleasures, our work, or some little personal interest, that God cannot attract our attention. His father-heart yearns for a season of communion with us. He wants to show his love to us and receive, in turn, our love and communion. But we do not heed him; we are too busy with other things; and so, he quietly withdraws himself, and we become aware that we are alone. With that presence gone, how lonely we feel! How dark the world suddenly grows! How quickly we lose interest in the things that held our attention before! How we yearn for his presence again! How our hearts reach out for him! How our tears start! We think, "What have we done that caused him to leave us? ...But ah! he is not gone far; he is just beyond our vision. He is watching; he is waiting for our hearts to be drawn back to himself. [http://biblehub.com/library/naylor/heart_talks/talk_twenty-six_when_god_withdraws.htm] Or to go back to the Bride and Groom analogy: sometimes our Bridegroom allows us to suffer the illusion that He is gone simply so that we will desire Him more and seek Him more, so that our desire to be with Him will match His desire to be with us, and when it does, we will soon experience Him. In fact, that might be what the Groom is saying in verse (5). We saw this same refrain in 2:7 last time and we'll see it again. He is saying, "Don't wake her up from this until SHE desires..." In other words:

4. our experience of Him is dependent upon our desire for Him To experience His presence in a close intimate way, we must want it! If we desire it enough, we will have it.

Again, don't let anything get in the way of your times with Him.

Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

His Coming For Us 3:6-11

On July 29, 1981 the whole world was fascinated by a royal wedding. An estimated 750 million people watched their television sets a Prince Charles and Princess Diana processed through the streets of London amid waving crowds to St. Paul's Cathedral where 3500 guests, including heads of royal families from around the world, heads of state and members of their families, awaited their arrival. She arrived in an elegant glass coach, escorted by six mounted metropolitan police

officers and alighted upon a red carpet. As she walked for 3 1/2 minutes into the cathedral with the 25 ft. long train of her gown flowing behind, the whole world stood transfixed. This is a moment exactly like the one that 3:6-11 is picturing for us. Ultimately, the Song of Solomon is about a royal marriage. Solomon falls in love with a young peasant girl in a village in Lebanon in the clothes of a shepherd and pledges to marry her. Then, at last, one day he comes for her as the King and he takes her up to Jerusalem in a royal procession to her new home in his palace where they are finally joined together in marriage. Now it will probably help us if we spend a few moments trying to understand the:

I. Three Parts Of A Jewish Wedding The modern western concept of a ceremony presided over by an official probably only began during the Middle Ages. In Israel it began with an agreement made between two families known as:

1. the betrothal The father of the groom and the father of the bride would enter an agreement that their son and daughter were to be wed. It involved the paying of a price or a dowry and was a legally binding agreement. Unlike the modern concept of engagement which is simply a "promise to marry" and can be broken, betrothal was actual marriage but without the couple living together or having sexual union. It was permanent and irrevocable and could not be broken without an actual divorce, as we see in the example of Joseph considering divorcing Mary, his betrothed, quietly when he learned she was pregnant with Jesus. The New Testament everywhere uses the analogy of marriage as a picture to try and explain our relationship with Christ. In **2 Cor. 11:2** Paul used the image of betrothal to teach that **we are permanently pledged to Christ** at the time we come to faith and give ourselves to Him. He said, *...I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.* It is the duty of the betrothed bride to keep herself a pure virgin for her husband, devoted only to him, and Paul was concerned that some of the Corinthians were going after "other lovers". His point is that we are in a permanent bond already to Jesus, that we belong to Him and we are His. He has paid a great price for us to belong to Him and we should be devoted and steadfast! Now during the year or so of betrothal, as the bride was preparing herself for marriage, the groom was busy building a place for them to live. Normally this would not be a new house all by itself, but the addition of a new room onto his father's house where the bride would live with him as part of the extended family. Then, when all was in readiness, on the day appointed by the groom's father:

2. the procession would occur. The groom would go to the bride's house to get her and together with friends would escort her back to his home in a grand bridal parade. As they arrived there would be the blowing of a shofar, a ram's horn trumpet, and a loud shout, "The Bridegroom is coming!" **Christ** Himself was using this analogy in those familiar words in **Jn. 14:2-3**, *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.* When our Groom has prepared a place for us and His Father says it is time, He **will come to take us to His home** to live with Him forever. There will be the blowing of the trumpet and the shout of the archangel to herald our arrival. And as we enter into heaven with Him, there will be:

3. the marriage feast This sounds pretty awkward to 20th century ears, but in the groom's home a bridal chamber had been prepared and upon their arrival the bride and groom would enter the privacy of the chamber and consummate their marriage for the first time. Then there would be a great celebration, a feast with many guests, lasting 7 days. However, in that ancient custom is the picture that **we will be ultimately united with Christ**, joined together in perfect oneness forever, complete with a grand celebration recorded in **Rev. 19:7-9**, *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."*

So, what we have in our text in Song of Solomon is the arrival of Solomon's royal wedding procession as it nears and enters the gates of Jerusalem and the scene is being described by the chorus, the Daughters of Jerusalem, addressed in verse 5. The women of the city are expressing their joy and their awe at the arrival of the royal procession, and if you'll permit me to continue the spiritual comparison, I'd like to propose that it pictures for us:

II. The Arrival Of Our Royal Wedding Procession In Heaven As I said, right now, we are betrothed to Jesus, our King; we belong to Him, just as surely and just as permanently as if we were already living in His house, but He hasn't come for us yet, and like any betrothed bride:

1. we should anticipate the day of our King's coming Every bride looks forward expectantly to the day of her wedding. The believers in the early church really looked for and expected Jesus' coming for them. Paul described for us the way that Christians should live in **Titus 2:13**, *...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* The writer of Hebrews urged suffering believers to endure their hardships and persevere, saying, *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay - Heb. 10:36-37.* Jesus Himself urged us to be looking for the day of His coming. Yet in our modern 20th century world that is almost the farthest thing from our minds. Too much time has gone by and our science-oriented mindset has great trouble even imagining that God could break into the natural order of our world in a supernatural way. But one day He will! As we sing, *One day the trumpet will sound for His coming, one day the skies with His glory will shine. Wonderful day, my Beloved One*

bringing, My Savior, Jesus, is mine! O Glorious Day! One day our Heavenly Bridegroom will come for us! Look for His coming! And when He comes, we'll be caught up to be with Him in the air in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and together we'll arrive at the gates of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. That's our wedding procession but in our text we have:

2. the approach of Solomon's royal procession to the city (6-8) The waiting daughters of Jerusalem are filled with awe at its appearance as it comes into view. *Who is this coming! Behold! Look!* What a glorious sight, and for us, it can be a picture of our arrival in heaven with Jesus. Notice three things about it. First of all:

a. it comes up from the wilderness Jerusalem is the high point in the land. No matter what direction you come from, you always go UP to Jerusalem. But in this case the wilderness is where the Bride lived. Solomon went all the way to the forest of Lebanon to get her and bring her up to his glorious city. And one day our Bridegroom is going to come down into the wilderness, the desert of this world where we live, to get us. He's going to leave the ivory palaces of heaven and come down to this dry and weary world where we first met, where we live, and catch us up. *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord...* - **1 Thes. 4:16-18**. We're going up from this wilderness to a glorious heavenly city! Then notice that this arriving procession:

b. it is perfumed with rising columns of incense wafting upward like smoke. The sweet aroma of incense is filling the air and rising up to God as it pulls up to the gates. Now we are told very specifically what incense is a picture of. **Rev. 5:8** says, *...the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.* And **8:3-4** says, *...another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.* Our prayers are like fragrant incense; they rise up before God like a sweet aroma. He gathers them keeps them before Him; He never forgets them. They rise before Him continually. And the one prayer that has probably been prayed more than any other for the last 2000 years is, *Come Lord Jesus! Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus, Come! Come and get us!* And as we arrive at the gates of heaven all those centuries of gathered prayers for His coming will be answered at last! Then notice that Solomon's litter:

c. it is securely protected by the King's guards, 60 of them. They were his personal bodyguard, his mighty men, the mightiest soldiers in the land so that his bride would be securely protected as he brought her up to the city. Well, our Groom, our King, has a bodyguard too that surrounds His throne. John says, *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* - **Rev. 5:11-12**. On the night of His arrest Jesus told Peter, *Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?* All the armies of heaven surround Him, all His mighty warriors at His beckon call, ready to do His bidding and protect His Beloved!

Now moving on to verses 9-10, the Song moves on to focus on:

3. the royal means of transport to the city (9-10) It's not a wheeled carriage drawn by horses. Verse 7 calls it a *litter*. It's a palanquin, an enclosed canopy on poles carried on the shoulders of a set of bearers. And inside is a royal bed or a couch on which the Bride and the Groom are reclining in comfort as they are borne along on their journey up to Jerusalem. It's the way kings travel - at least the way they did in royal processions back then. But this royal traveling couch is impressive, even more than the interior of a Rolls Royce. Solomon is bringing his Bride home on a palanquin made of gorgeous cedar wood from the forests of Lebanon and we can let the wood remind us that:

a. Jesus is bringing us up to heaven through the cross In the NLT, **Heb. 12:2** says, *...Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.* The joy awaiting Him was being married to US, the thrill of bringing us to His home to be His Bride forever. And the only way He could bring us with Him to that place of honor was to let Himself be nailed to the rough wooden beams of an old rugged cross. We are borne to heaven on the carriage of a wooden cross where Jesus died to pay the price for our salvation. But the posts of Solomon's carriage are overlaid with silver and its back is overlaid with gold. It glitters and shines gloriously in the sun as it approaches and that's a reminder that:

b. Jesus is bringing us up to heaven in splendor - **Eph. 5:27** says that on that day He will *...present [the Church - that is, US] to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.* On the way up as He calls us to Himself, we will be transformed, changed, given brand new glorious resurrection bodies like His own so that we will arrive in the awesome splendor of absolute perfection! Now the cushions on which the Bride and Groom are reclining are of luxurious cloth colored purple, the color of royalty, and they remind us that:

c. Jesus is bringing us up to heaven as royalty The bride is no longer a peasant, a simple country girl. In being married to him she has been made royalty; she is his Queen! And **Rev. 5:10** says Jesus has *...made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth*. When we arrive, we will no longer be lowly citizens of earth; He has made us royalty! We will share His throne and reign as His vice-regents over His millennial Kingdom! And finally, the interior of Solomon's couch is inlaid, probably with leather, but notice the special description. It was inlaid with love by the women of the city. And that reminds us that:

d. Jesus is bringing us up to heaven because of His great love - Eph. 2:4 says that God made us alive with Christ and predestined us to become His own eternal inheritance *...because of His great love with which He loved us*. Nothing was more apparent as the procession arrived than the fact that Solomon did all of this out of the great love that he had for his bride and nothing will be more apparent when we arrive in heaven in royal splendor with Jesus than the fact that He did all of this out of the great love that He has for us, His Bride! We are loved with a supernatural eternal love!

Now finally we come in verse 11 to:

4. the ultimate focus of the royal procession (11) It is the person of Solomon, the King, that all eyes are fixed on as he comes through the gate, not the bride. And that's exactly how it will be as we come through heaven's gate with Jesus; all eyes will be fixed on Him, not us! All of this is really for Him; His redeeming us and being joined to us forever is all to the praise of His glorious grace! As the daughters of Zion gaze at Solomon, they are awed by:

a. the marvelous appearance of the King He is arrayed in splendor with his royal robe and a special crown for his wedding day. That reminds us of the glorious appearance that our Bridegroom has in heaven. John described Him like this, *...standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. ...his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.* - **Rev. 1:13-16 NLT**. Oh, when we arrive there, we will be thrilled with the marvelous appearance of our King and Bridegroom as we see Him in all His glory! And the feature they notice most is:

b. the glorious crown of the King It was the custom at weddings for both the groom and the bride to wear a special crown, a celebratory lei or wreath of flowers. Solomon's father David is no longer alive, but his mother, Bathsheba, has made him a special crown to wear on his wedding day and she herself has placed it on his head and crowned him for the celebration. I am reminded of the words of **Heb. 2:9** which says, *...we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone*. Because He was willing to come to earth and be made a human being and suffer death on a cross to redeem all of us for Himself and make us His Bride, when He returned to heaven His Father crowned Him with all glory and honor. He *...highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name* and decreed that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow! On that day we'll see Jesus, no longer humble and lowly, but crowned with glory in all of His majesty as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But look at that last phrase where you see:

c. the superlative gladness of the King, the thing that brings the most joy to His heart above everything else: **His wedding day**, the day that he gets to marry his bride! Paul said, *I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.* - **Eph. 1:18 NLT**. WE, His Bride, are His rich and glorious inheritance, His precious treasure above all things. We are the greatest joy of His heart and the day that gladdens His heart above all days is the Day that He gets to bring us home to be with Him, His Wedding Day!

Oh, let's look forward to it like the waiting bride we are! Let's dream of it! Let's plan for it and let the thought of His coming for us color every day of our lives with joy and keep us from the deadly illusion that this world is our home and this life is our ultimate reality. Our Bridegroom is coming for us!

Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

Our Ultimate Union 4:1 - 5:1

As we enter chapter 4, the wedding procession of chapter 3 is over. Solomon and his bride have come into His palace and have actually entered the privacy of their bridal chamber together. In modern language we would call this their "wedding night", the first time that they are to fully reveal themselves to each other and consummate their marriage. Now before we actually look at the text, let me share a few:

Introductory Thoughts About This Passage: First of all, as we read this:

1. there is an eastern cultural directness of speech that makes us uncomfortable. In eastern cultures, honorable and respectable people will openly and freely talk about things which make us blush, for example, the groom's description of the beauty of the body of his new bride in this chapter. Ancient love songs in many cultures were often written with this kind of directness and to appreciate it, we must put aside the embarrassment it may create in us. Yet at the same time its directness is **tempered by the language of poetic modesty**. There is no vulgarity here; this is not some piece of ancient pornography. The bride's beauty is poetically compared to things in the natural world of her day that she would appreciate as the highest of compliments (even if they don't relate well to us) and their coming together is described in terms of the enjoying a garden. There is modesty everywhere you look and even in the chamber the bride is still wearing her face veil in verses 1 and 3 as a sign of her modesty. But don't miss the overall point; in this passage which is part of His Word:

2. God is affirming the enjoyment of sexual union within marriage He created human beings male and female and instituted marriage with the very purpose that a husband and wife would know the joy of this intimate union together. Some thirty years ago Ed Wheat, a Christian doctor, wrote the classic book on this subject for believers and he titled it, "Intended For Pleasure". God MADE us to greatly enjoy this high and holy privilege within the context of marriage and Paul commanded very clearly that husbands and wives should never refrain from enjoying it in 1 Cor. 7. But at the same time, in this very passage:

3. God is also clearly affirming chastity apart from marriage as we'll see in verse 12. He never intended sex to be something pursued on every hand for its own sake as you see in our culture or in the ancient Greek and Roman culture of Paul's day. It is a pleasure that God intended to occur within marriage, as a component of the life-long permanent commitment of a husband and wife and outside of that bond, He clearly commands that people maintain chastity, completely refraining from sexual union.

So now let's turn to our text. In that bridal chamber in 4:1-7:

I. The Groom Praises The Beauty Of His Bride He exclaims twice **(1a)**. Now I'm not a woman, but it seems to me that there may be a sort of natural fear in any woman's mind on her wedding night, especially in a case like this where the bride is dark-complected and not like the other fair women of the court according to chapter 1. She may be thinking "Will he really think I'm beautiful when he sees me without any adornments, only the real me?" She doesn't have to wait for an answer; Solomon is simply awestruck by her beauty, "Look how beautiful you are!!!" In fact, absolutely:

1. everything about her is strikingly beautiful to him and he says so in **(1b-5)**. Her eyes are alluring to him like the eyes of a dove. Her hair is long and flowing gracefully down over her body like a flock of goats leaping down a mountain. Her teeth are pure white like a flock of newly shorn and washed sheep and set perfectly in a row. Her lips are thin and red like a scarlet thread and her mouth is lovely. Her cheeks are rosy and rounded like two halves of a delicious pomegranate. Her neck is tall and slender like the Tower of David in the city and it is ringed by row after row of royal jewels like the shields hanging on David's tower. Her breasts are youthful and symmetrical like a pair of young gazelle fawns. Absolutely everything he sees about her is a pure delight to him, so much so that he says:

2. he wants to be together with her all night long (6) Poetically, he says he wants to enjoy love with her all the night until morning comes, and in fact, he assures her that:

3. her beauty is completely flawless to him (7) Any worry that she has is needless. She need not be hesitant or concerned that he will see something about her that is not attractive to him. In his eyes she is absolutely perfect, with no flaws whatsoever! Now in the human realm that may not be completely true. We all have physical flaws, a few extra pounds here, a scar there, a bit of acne or a misaligned tooth or a birthmark or a mole or something! But I will tell you this, ladies, in the eyes of your husband, when he looks at you, if he really loves you, you are altogether beautiful to him. You are flawless in his eyes. And since the bride is serving for us as a picture of the church, that is, US, this moment in the bridal chamber pictures for us that moment:

4. when we are finally and fully united with Jesus in heaven at last! It reminds us that in that moment:

a. we will be made perfect Our beauty will not be merely "in the eyes of" our Lord." It will be real and true, the actual beauty of complete perfection. The writer of Hebrews says that we are *...come to [or become part of] the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect* - **Heb. 12:23**. As I mentioned last time, when He comes for us, we will shed these earthly bodies and be given glorious new resurrection bodies that are perfect. All evil will be purged from our thoughts and our feelings, as it already is from our spirits and as we enter there, we will have been made completely perfect, brought to the final state of completion that God has intended for us! And just as Solomon wanted to be with his bride the whole night long, we get something even better:

b. we will always be with our Lord Once we are caught up to be with Him, **1 Thes. 4:17** says, *...so we will always be with the Lord*. It will be a permanent union. Nothing will ever separate us or take us apart from one another, not

for all eternity. Why? Because that is HIS desire! That is what HE wants; He loves us so much that He wants to always be with us, forever! And then, even as Solomon sees his bride as being flawless, we are reminded that:

c. we will be completely without flaws In that day when He presents us to Himself, when we enter the bridal chamber of heaven itself to be united with Him, **Eph. 5:27** says that we will be *...without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that [we] might be holy and without blemish*. I know that there are at least some of us who worry about that down here. "My life is so full of spots and wrinkles and blemishes. My thoughts are not pure. I don't always act right. I have this or that bad habit. I'm not zealous enough, etc. etc. I will be ashamed to stand before Him; I'll be embarrassed by all my shortcomings when He is so perfect and so holy!" Oh no, you won't! The group MercyMe has a popular song out you're hearing on KLOVE right now, the chorus of which says:

No matter the bumps, No matter the bruises, No matter the scars, Still the truth is: The cross has made, the cross has made you flawless!

No matter the hurt or how deep the wound is, No matter the pain, Still the truth is: The cross has made, the cross has made you flawless!

And in that day when you stand uncovered in His presence, with no earthly trappings to hide behind, you'll see just how true that is! You will indeed be flawless, in body, mind and spirit, your whole being made flawless before Him! Hallelujah!

Now in the second section of our text, verses 8-15:

II. The Groom Expresses His Love To His Bride Again, I've never been a bride, but I've been around enough of them to know that one of the things that new brides deal with is homesickness. At the last moment it can really kick in, "Oh my, I'm really leaving home. I'll never live there again. There's no going back. Oh, how I'm going to miss my home and my parents and the life that I had there!" Surely this country girl from Lebanon who was raised out in the vineyard and the fields and the woods, must have some of that now that she's here in the wholly other world of the King's palace in Jerusalem, maybe wondering how she'll fit in. But Solomon seems to know that and:

1. he invites her to forsake any thoughts of home to focus on him (8) Of course, physically she DID come with him. He already went to her house and brought her up to Jerusalem. He seems to be inviting her to join him mentally and emotionally in the moment. He says, "Leave the mountains of Lebanon where you grew up (and he names some of them which must be dear to her); depart from them; let go of the thoughts of them. I don't want you to be there in that dangerous world where there are lions and leopards (as there actually were in that day); be here with me, right now in the moment. Focus on me; think about ME!" It's almost like the words of the Psalmist, *Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to heart what I say. Forget your people and your family far away. For your royal husband delights in your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord.* - **Ps. 45:10-11** NLT. And then even as He invites her to focus on him and be in the moment with him:

2. he tells her how delighted he is with her expressions of love (9-11) Twice he says, *You've captivated my heart!* "And you've done it with one glance! Even the glint of one beautiful jewel hung on your neck does it!" In fact, that phrase could also mean something like, "One glance of your eyes makes my heart beat faster; you make my heart beat out of my chest!" He adds, "I love the smell of your perfume; I love even the fragrance of your clothing! Your kisses taste better than the sweetest of foods!" And he sums it up by saying, "Your love for me is beautiful!" In other words, "I am so pleased that YOU love me and every expression of that, a glance, a smell, a kiss, just thrills my heart and delights me to no end!" As much as she has been awed by his love for her, a simple country girl, HE is completely delighted and thrilled and excited by HER love for him! And now that he sees her completely in all her beauty:

3. he praises her that all her delights have been reserved for him (12-15) He says, "You are like a garden full of all the choicest fruits that anyone could ever enjoy; you're like well with a refreshing spring bubbling up in it; you're like a flowing fountain, a veritable mountain stream that would quench anyone's thirst. But you have kept your garden locked! You haven't given out its fruits to anyone! You have kept your well-spring sealed with a lid and your flowing fountain fenced away from everyone else. You have saved it all for me and I am so thankful that now it is mine!" He is praising her chastity, the fact that she has not given herself to any other man, but her love is now his alone to enjoy and that thrills him. Listen young people, here is a piece of advice from this bride and from God: despite everything that your culture tells you, when and if you get to a wedding night of your own someday, you will be glad beyond measure that you have saved yourself for your spouse and they have saved themselves for you! Keep your garden locked! Save yourself for the one you will marry, whom you will be with the rest of your life, and don't give in to the cultural pressure to be sexually active before marriage! Now allow me to make a spiritual application of what we've just looked at. As His bride:

4. when we are finally with Jesus in heaven, these same three things will be true. You might be thinking, "Gee, what if I miss all the things I love about my life here! There is so much here on earth that I enjoy, my family, all the things I love to do, and so on." Or maybe the opposite, "Won't I remember all the difficult and painful things I've experienced here; how can I forget them all?" Listen, when we are with Him at last:

a. He will remove all the vestiges of our former life *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."...* - **Rev. 21:4-5a**. It will all be new. All the pain of the past will be gone; all the joy of the past will be but a dim shadow when we find ourselves in the Presence of the One we love. Our focus will be on Him alone and as we see Him in all His glory, "the things of earth will grow strangely dim." But here's something you might never have thought of before. All these years, we have delighted in and sung about and relished the fact of His great love for us, but Solomon's great delight in his bride pictures for us the fact that Jesus:

b. He will delight in our loving Him with our whole being Why did God make us in the first place? What did He want of us? Well, my thought is that the first and foremost thing God wants of us, He would express in the first and greatest commandment He gave us? And what is that? Jesus Himself told us, *... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.* - **Mt. 26:37-38**. The thing that God wants above everything else, more than all of our service and all of our good behavior, the thing that delights the heart of Jesus the most is when we love Him with our whole being! Here on earth, we're a bit limited in fulfilling that, but on that day, it will be true of us at last. We WILL love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; every fiber of us will love Him completely and fully - and THAT will be the delight of His heart! He will be delighted with OUR love forever, just as we will revel in His! And just as Solomon was so glad that his bride had not given herself to anyone else, in that day Jesus:

c. He will value our sincere and pure devotion to Him You know, Paul was concerned about this for the believers at Corinth. He told them, *For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* - **2 Cor. 11:2-3**. He was worried that they would be led astray by the false teachers that had come to them to believe wrong things and devote themselves to following false representations of Jesus and of the Gospel (compare it to joining the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons). He urged them to remain sincerely and purely devoted to the true Jesus, the One he had "betrothed" them to, the way that a betrothed virgin devotes herself only to her husband-to-be. And he uses the phrase *divine jealousy*, literally a jealousy like God has, to describe his feelings. God is a jealous God; Jesus is a jealous Bridegroom, and rightly so. He will not have his betrothed bride giving her attentions and devotion to another husband! So, when we are at last in heaven with Him, HE will be so glad, so joyful, that from the time we first believed we have remained true and faithful to Him, that we have kept our hearts and lives locked and sealed for Him alone and not given them to serve any other master. Even though we OWE Him our devotion, He will appreciate it and be thankful for it and it will bring Him joy!

And now at last the moment has come when:

III. The Groom Is Finally United With His Bride in the bridal chamber. Because of the way that Solomon has praised her beauty and has expressed his love to her and his appreciation of her:

1. the bride passionately desires to give herself completely to the groom (16) She says with poetic modesty, "If I am such a garden full of fruits; they are all for you and I want you to come and enjoy them with all my heart!" And so they come together at last, but the chapter division here is unfortunate. 5:1 is actually Solomon's response afterward and notice in it that:

2. the groom and bride are completely satisfied in their union (5:1) Solomon is expressing how fully satisfied he feels and the chorus in the poem, the daughters of Jerusalem, now join back in to affirm how good it is for the couple to be "drunk with love", to be totally satiated and fulfilled in their desire for one another. But how does this apply to us? It reminds us that:

3. in heaven we will fully enter into eternal perfect union with Jesus at last. How we usually think of it is that:

a. it will be a union of presence We will be together in the same place with each other forever. As **Rev. 21:2-3** says, *...I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.* Bride and Groom now dwell together in the same home as one; they share a common life together. So, we will be present with each other forever, but it will be more than that:

b. it will be a union of Spirit I want you to look with me at what Jesus prayed for us in **Jn. 17:21**. He prayed that each of us who believe would be *in US*. The Father and the Son are one; they are united in spirit so that they are not two but one. And Jesus is asking that we would enter into that very same holy union together with them so that the oneness He has with the Father would be the same oneness that we have with Him and the Father. Now that is accomplished by Him giving us the Holy Spirit when we believe. **1 Cor. 6:17** says, *...he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.* Our very spirits are joined together as one and Paul said that sexual union in marriage

is a picture of that, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. - Eph. 5:31-32. As husband and wife are "one flesh", we and Jesus are "one spirit". It is indeed a thought too deep to comprehend, but we are already joined as one spirit with Jesus and the depth of that oneness will be most apparent at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb when we are present with Him.

I read this in an article in Family Life's website: *Just as a husband and wife become one in their physical life, so too Christ and the Christian, through the indwelling of the Spirit, become one in their spiritual life. Through our union with Christ, His life becomes our own.... The very life of God through Christ via the Holy Spirit has taken up residence inside us. We are irrevocably wed to the divine nature, and human marriage is a powerful picture, or symbol, of this union. In the end, our final hope of salvation is that we have been married to Christ. When we come to God for salvation, He makes us one with Christ—just as a man and a woman become one in marriage. This union with Christ is the very thing that provides eternal life. Indeed, the eternal life that we have now begun to live is the eternal life that Christ lives. The sap of the vine is the sap of the branch. He has become our head, and as His bride, His job is to present us "to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless". And He will do it. Marriage and sex are powerful illustrations of the union that exists between Christ and the Christian, and they were created specifically for that purpose.* <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/romance-and-sex/understanding-the-deeper-purposes-of-sex> All that He is and all that is His has become ours and together as one we will live His life forever.

Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

Our Unresponsiveness 5:2 - 6:3

We are gradually making our way through Song of Solomon and applying it to our lives. In every "episode" of the book we see in Solomon a picture of Jesus and in his new bride a picture of ourselves personally. Their love is a picture of the love we share with Jesus and their intimacy is a picture of the intimacy that we have with Him. But tell me, are you ever unresponsive when the one who loves you is trying to express their love to you? Maybe you're really trying to snuggle with your husband on the couch but he's so absorbed in the TV program in front of him that he's brain-dead to your affections! And I know that all you husbands just had the phrase, "I've got a headache," flash through your minds. We all have times when someone that we actually do love is trying to love us but we really don't feel like loving them back in that moment so we are unresponsive. We don't respond to their love. Well, if that's true of you, then you should relate very well to the bride in this part of the story. As we enter this section, we find that:

I. The Bride Has Another Bad Dream (5:2a) She was sleeping but awake enough to remember her dream and to have it be very realistic and participate in it, just as though it was actually happening. I don't know what this lady's problem is, but she keeps having nightmares like this, first in chapter 3 and now here again! It's too bad they didn't have Sominex or Simply Sleep in drugstores back then! At any rate, here's her dream **(2b)**. In her dream she's in her bed sleeping when she is suddenly awakened by a sound:

1. her lover was outside knocking on her door at night desiring to be with her. She hears his voice asking her to open the door so that he can come in. It's late and he's come far through the fields to reach her door; the evening dew has soaked the locks of his hair. In endearing terms, he entreats her to open the door for him. However, in her dream:

2. she was reluctant to respond and open the door (3) She had already gone to bed for the night. Her feet had been washed, her clothing all put away. In that moment she just didn't feel like responding; she was pulled to go back to sleep and just didn't want to be bothered to get up and go to the door. In her grogginess it seemed like too much trouble, sort of like the friend Jesus talked about in His parable who wouldn't get up and help his neighbor at midnight because he was already in bed. In that case the friend just kept on knocking until he got up, but in this dream, it didn't work like that. It seems that doors in those days didn't have locks that could be opened from both sides. The lock had to be on the inside to keep intruders out, so there would be a hole next to the latch so a legitimate person outside could reach his hand in and insert the crude wooden key to unlock the door. Well Solomon stuck his hand through the hole and:

3. the sight of his hand through the latch stirred her desire (4-5) When she saw his fingers come through the hole, reaching, grasping the latch and then disappearing, she came to her senses and realized that it was her lover coming to her. Her strong desire for him welled up within her and she fought off the grogginess, sprang up and ran to the door. As she touched the latch where his hand had been, she felt it covered with liquid myrrh, a sweet perfume which his hand had left there for her as a reminder of himself. So she drew back the bar and flung open the door but when:

4. she opened it, found him gone and was filled with shame and despair (6) He wasn't there! He wasn't even in sight; he had already gone away! She called his name, but there was no answer and, the text says, her heart went out from her. She was crushed. She was so ashamed, thinking, "What have I done? Why, oh why, didn't I get up and open the door for him? Now he is gone and he thinks I don't want him!" She was crushed and began to despair that he would still love her. So she hastily dressed and ran out to look for him.

5. she again searched through the city as she did in her previous dream, but this time **the watchmen punished her (7)**. They took her to be a prostitute out plying her trade and beat her and took away her veil of modesty. She is left trudging sadly home in despair. Now let's break there for a moment to see that this is really a parable about ourselves. Like her:

6. we do not always respond appropriately to Jesus' longing to be with us, do we? How often does He want us to spend time with Him, to give Him our attention and our love and let Him speak to us and love on us, but we're distracted? Our minds are on other things. Our focus is on sleeping or working or on TV or on working out and somehow we just can't be bothered by Him at the moment. Well, the picture of Solomon knocking on the door of his snoozing sweetheart reminded me of the familiar picture of Jesus knocking at the door in **Rev. 3:20**. The believers at Laodicea had become lukewarm; they had lost their zealous love for Him and were caught up in the things of this world. And He says, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* Listen, Jesus:

a. He always knocks at our door when we've grown lukewarm He always bangs on the door of our life and calls to us to let Him in to enjoy close fellowship. The present tense indicates that He keeps ON knocking, He keeps on sending us messages of His love and desire through people, through circumstances, through songs on the radio and sermons in church and whispers in our minds. He keeps putting His hand through our latch hole saying, "I love you and I want to be with you!" and never gives up until we let Him in. But, like the bride:

b. we make poor excuses for our lack of desire for Him I'm reminded of the story Jesus told which was in reality about His own wedding banquet. When it was time to come, the invited guests *...all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'* - **Lk. 14:18-20**. Like you couldn't go look at a field tomorrow; what, is it going somewhere? Or try out your oxen later? And sure, blame the wife, it's her fault! Our excuses are so flimsy, "I need my sleep." "It's too much trouble to get up and get dressed!" "I just washed my feet and they'll get dirty again if I get up; come back tomorrow!" Our excuses may be different but they are no less flimsy and no less just that, excuses. The truth is that we have lost our first love; the flame has burned low. But He keeps knocking loud enough that eventually we catch a glimpse of Him and "wake up" and:

c. when our heart is finally stirred, we experience shame - **1 Jn. 2:28** says that we should *...abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.* We should make time for Him and walk in close communion with Him every day so we won't someday be ashamed of ourselves. When we see His great love for us and His burning desire to be with us, we think, "Oh, what a fool I've been, to miss the experience of His love as though all this worthless stuff had more value!" And like the bride in her nightmare:

(1) we may worry that He will no longer want us because of our unresponsiveness to him. But here's the good news: **2 Tim. 2:13** *If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.* He cannot cease being who He is; He can no more stop wanting us and wanting to be with us, than He can stop loving His own Father and wanting to be with Him. His desire for us does not depend on us. Even when we've been unresponsive to Him, He is still faithful in loving us! Or, as the bride may have seen her punishment by the watchmen in her dream as fitting for what she had done:

(2) we may fear punishment for our lack of devotion We may somehow fear that He will make us pay somehow for our lack of loving Him. If you feel like that, listen to **1 Jn. 4:18**, *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.* If you fear that He will punish you, you don't yet understand His love. There is NO FEAR involved! There is nothing to be afraid of. His love for you is perfect and He will never punish you for not loving Him enough!

Now as we move into the next section of the text, verses 8-16, in her dejected state in the dream, the Bride again runs into her friends, the Daughters of Jerusalem and in a bid to enlist their help to find him:

II. The Bride Describes Her Lover To Her Friends (8-9) She says, "If you see him, please tell him I am sick with love for him!"

1. she wants him to know that she is now overcome with desire for him Her unresponsiveness is all gone and now she is driven by a desire for him that is so strong that it's making her ill! So they ask, "Why? Can't you just find someone else? You're beautiful; you could easily have another lover! What's so special about this guy that you're so smitten with him?" So, she explains her love to them. In the first place:

2. she sees him as unique above all other men (10) Ten thousand is the highest number that is ever used in comparisons in Hebrew poetry. It isn't meant to convey an exact number; it is a poetic way of saying there is absolutely no one like him! She's saying, "There is no other man, there is no other lover like him!" And then she goes on to describe:

3. she describes the perfections of his physical appearance as he did of hers in the last chapter. Follow along in verses **(11-16a)**. "The skin of his face is gleams like the finest gold and his pure black hair tumbles down over it in curls. The pure whites of his eyes make his pupils stand out like doves' eyes. His cheeks and his lips smell sweetly of the finest perfumes. His tanned arms are firm like rods of gold with jewels on them and underneath his robe his body is pure white like polished ivory. His legs are strong like two pillars set upon the tanned bases of his feet. When I see him, I am filled with awe, just like at home when I used to look up in awe at the snowcapped peaks of Mt. Lebanon. Everything about him is perfect." And her conclusion is in **(16b)**:

4. she sees him as totally desirable He is "altogether lovely", completely, supremely desirable in every way. I wonder what we would say if our friends were to ask us:

5. why do we love Jesus so much? What is so great about Him? What makes Him so special? I think we'd have to say the same three things the bride said. The truth is that:

a. there is no one like Him Just as Moses told Pharaoh, *...there is NO ONE like the LORD our God!* in **Ex. 8:10**, look around and see, there is NO ONE like Jesus! And Jesus Himself said, *...a greater than Solomon is here!*

b. everything about Him is perfect Though Solomon may have appeared perfect to his bride in every respect, Jesus IS perfect in every respect! And:

c. every desire we have is fulfilled in Him I'd like to share with you a brief excerpt from the extensive testimony of Napoleon Bonaparte, the great French general, after he was defeated and exiled at St. Helena near the end of his life:

I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires, and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and whatever other religions the distance of infinity. We can say to the authors of every other religion, "You are neither gods, nor the agents of the Deity. You are but missionaries of falsehood, molded from the same clay with the rest of mortals. You are made with all the passions and vices inseparable from them. Your temples and your priests proclaim your origin".... It is not so with Christ. Everything in him astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between him and whoever else in the world there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by himself. His ideas and his sentiments, the truths which he announces, his manner of convincing, are not explained either by human organization or by the nature of things.... Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and, at this hour, millions of men would die for him.... Christ speaks, and at once generations become his by stricter, closer ties than those of blood, -- by the most sacred, the most indissoluble, of unions. He lights up the flames of a love which prevails over every other love. The founders of other religions never conceived of this mystical love, which is the essence of Christianity....
http://biblehub.com/library/schaff/the_person_of_christ/napoleon_bonaparte.htm. I love how the Psalmist put it, *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.* - **Ps. 73:25**. Every desire of our heart is met through Jesus' amazing, incomparable love! There truly is no one like Him! Well, back in our text, it seems that as she finishes her description of Solomon:

III. The Bride Awakens To The Presence Of Her Lover

1. she is still wondering where he is as she comes out of her dream (6:1) Her friends ask her, "Wow, where could he have gone? He is so wonderful that we want to seek him with you? Wherever could he be?" And as that echoes in her mind, it seems like at that very moment:

2. she awakens to discover he is there beside her and kissing her (2) If you remember from last time, in his poetic language SHE is his *garden*. And him *grazing* on the flowers is a modest poetic way of describing his lips kissing her. He is right there beside his bride and as she tosses in her nightmare, he is gently kissing her awake until she realizes, "He is right here and he is loving me!!!!" Her dream is over and, as before, it was not real. It was an illusion, but it has inflamed in her this deep passion for him and:

3. as they are united in love together once again she is reassured of their permanent union (3) Before in 2:16 it was, *He is mine and I am his!* Now it is reversed, *I am His and He is mine!* It's a subtle difference but, I think, noteworthy. When she was back home, her focus was on *He is mine*, on the joy of him belonging to her. But after this unreal dream about losing him and then waking up to realize he never went anywhere and he was right there desiring her, her focus shifted. The most important thing is, *I AM HIS* and he will never forget that, even if I do! Here's the lesson. In those times when we have been unresponsive to Him, when we have put His desire to be with us on the back burner and lulled ourselves to spiritual sleep:

4. Jesus awakens us to His Presence when we desire it His principle is always that of **Jer. 29:13**, *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.* As I mentioned, He stands at the door of our heart and life and

constantly knocks, but He also promises that when we want Him at last, when we open the door, that He will come in and have fellowship and communion with us once again (Rev. 3:20). Even when we're spiritually asleep, He is always there gently nudging us to awaken with expressions of His love. The apostle John said:

a. even when our heart condemns us and wonders whether He still wants us, **He knows the truth**. He is greater than the feelings of our heart; He knows what is actually true (1 Jn. 3:20) and what is actually true is this: ...*God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his,"...* - **2 Tim. 2:19**. He knows that we are His, that we belong to Him and:

b. He will never forget that we are His I love the way that God so poignantly expressed this to His people through the prophet Isaiah, *Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...* - **Is. 49:15-16**. Jesus can never forget that we are His; He has literally engraved us on the palms of His hands. The marks of the nails are still there in His resurrection body, not to remind Him, but to remind US that He loved us so much that He died for us and He will never forget that we belong to Him, even if WE forget it for a time. He assures us that we are His and:

c. nothing in all creation can separate us from His love Turn with me to Paul's beautiful assurance of that in **Rom. 8:35-39**. Did you see that? NOTHING! Nothing in the whole of creation, no experience that we have, not even our own failures, can separate us from His love. We are HIS forever. Hallelujah!

I'd like to share with you an illustration I read on the internet but modernize the words a bit, if you don't mind: *A Christian gentleman was taken ill and it caused him to reflect on his life. It genuinely troubled him to discover that he really had little love in his heart for Jesus, and he complained bitterly about his "loveless" state to a brother in Christ. His friend said to him, "When I leave you and go home, the first thing I plan to do is to call my baby girl, put her on my knee, look down into her sweet eyes and listen to her babble and, even though I am extremely tired, her presence will give me rest, because I love that child with all my heart. But the truth is that she actually loves me very little. If my heart was breaking, it would not disturb her sleep. If my body was racked with excruciating pain, it would not interrupt her playing. If I was dead, she would probably be amused looking at my pale face and closed eyes and when friends came to remove my body, she would probably clap her hands in glee, and in a short time she would probably totally forget me. Besides that, she has never brought me a penny, but I have constantly been spending money on her ever since she was born. Yet there is not enough money in all the world to buy my baby from me. So, what is really the case? Does she love me or do I love her? Do I withhold my love until I know that she loves me? Am I waiting for her to do something worthy of my love before I extend it to her?" At this the sick man began to cry and with tears running down his cheeks he exclaimed, "Oh, I see it! I see it clearly. It is not my love for Jesus, but Jesus' love for me that I should be thinking about. And seeing that, now I love Him as I never loved Him before."* [—Selected. Found at: <http://www.moreillustrations.com/illustrations/go's%20love%202.html>] John said, *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us...* - **1 Jn. 4:11**. This the great assurance we have in our relationship with Jesus; what really matters is not how much we love Him, but how very much HE loves us. Doesn't that make you want to love Him with everything in you?

Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

The Maturing Of Love 6:4 - 7:10

Remember that as we go through Song of Solomon, we are using Solomon's relationship with his new bride as a picture of Jesus' relationship with us and drawing important lessons from it. In the "episode" of the Song that we consider today, the setting is after the second bad dream that the bride had in chapter 5 and the time frame seems again to have advanced once again to focus around another experience the bride had. You know, usually after marriage you discover a person's flaws relatively quickly. You find out that her golden hair actually has black roots and her silky-smooth skin is made that way by makeup and her flawless teeth have cavities! It's true of men too, of course. He isn't that perfect gentleman that dated you. He no longer opens car doors and belches in your presence without thinking about it. And he's really scruffy when he doesn't shave. In other words, we get to know the flawed reality of each other, accept it, and life goes on. But somehow that didn't happen with Solomon. In this next section (6:4-10) we see:

I. Solomon's Growing Love For His Bride Now that he's been married to her for some while:

1. Solomon is even more awestruck by her than he was before Rather than growing used to her or even tired of her:

a. his attraction to her beauty remains the same (5-7) Her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her cheeks, all her features hold the same attraction for him now that they did on his wedding day in chapter 4. He describes them using most of the same words. Her beauty remains undimmed to him, however:

b. he now compares her to shining cities and heavenly bodies He is even MORE impacted by her beauty now! Look at **(4)**. Jerusalem, Solomon's capital, was considered the most lovely city in all of Israel. *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.* - **Ps. 50:2**. And the city of Tirzah (whose very name means *pleasing*) was at

that time a major city in the north of Israel that would soon become the capital of the newly divided northern kingdom. It too was beautiful. That phrase about *bannered armies* he repeats again in **(10)**. To him she shines like the dawn, is beautiful as the moon, is bright as the sun and this phrase *awesome as an army with banners* is probably a figurative reference to the stars which are often compared to heavenly armies. She is not less attractive but MORE attractive to Him now, supremely attractive!

I remember a few years ago seeing a note from Hu Mathews, the Crow Bible translator, then already in his 80's. His wife Clara had had a stroke and he was caring for her personally like a devoted nurse day after day. And his comment was something like this, "Our love for each other has grown; in fact, it has almost reached a honeymoon fever pitch!" Indeed, in a healthy relationship our love for our spouse should grow and increase and mature over the years. We should love each other more now than we did then, even though we have more and more physical flaws as we grow older. But, although our love for Jesus may mature as we pass the years together:

2. Jesus' love for us is already full and complete It doesn't grow; it doesn't increase; it doesn't mature. It is as long and high and wide and deep as love can ever be. He has loved us with a perfect love from before the creation of the world and just as Solomon's intense love for his bride continued, so:

a. His joy in us will continue through the ages to come. Eph. 2:6-7 says that God *...raised us up with [Jesus] and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*. We are the glorious Bride of Christ that He is going to display to the entire universe throughout all the ages that are yet to come; we will be His greatest joy forever and ever. And just like Solomon, Jesus:

b. He compares our future glory to a shining city in Rev. 21:2. John said, *...I saw the holy city – the new Jerusalem – descending out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband*. We're in that city! Its glory is our glory! **And**, like Solomon, **He compares us to heavenly bodies**, *...the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father*. - Mt. 13:43. Paul said, *...there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies....There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory. It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory* - 1 Cor. 15:40-43. In our eternal resurrection bodies we will be glorious and radiant like the sun, moon and stars!

Solomon's exuberant description of his earthly bride is really fulfilled in us! But then he goes on to say that:

3. his love for others does not diminish his love for her (8-9) Here is the part of Solomon's life where he is NOT a good example and was not obedient to the Lord. Even at this point, which must have been early in his reign:

a. there are many other women in his harem, 60 queens and 80 concubines. By the end it grew to 700 wives and 300 concubines and proved to be the cause of his eventual downfall. Yet even now he knew that his new bride must have been worried that he already had all these other women with a lot more willing virgins just standing in line ready to sign up. How could he love her so deeply with the harem that he had? Well, in the earthly reality of it, he couldn't, for long. God never intended for a man to have more than one wife or vice versa. It was a humanly invented practice that God tolerated in Old Testament times. But Solomon wants to reassure her so:

b. he declares that she is the only one to him, the only one he really cares about, the only one he loves deeply like this. The rest are just so much window dressing, the trappings of being an exalted king, treaty-marriages and such. He even says that all:

c. these other women actually agree with him and praise her When they saw him bring her home to the palace, rather than being jealous of a new rival, even THEY praised her amazing beauty! Well, as bad as Solomon's example is to us, from it we can draw an amazing truth:

4. Jesus' love for ALL of us does not diminish His love for EACH of us Joshua Project estimates that the number of people who profess belief in Christ in the world right now is about 2 1/4 billion, though many of those may not be genuine believers. Even so, at this moment there are hundreds of millions of people who are part of Christ's bride, whom He loves with His perfect everlasting love. Yet His love for ALL of us does not decrease in the least His love for EACH one of us individually! He has no favorites! His love for each one of us is as deep as if we were the ONLY one He loves! Paul said, *...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved ME and gave himself for ME!* Yes, Jesus loves us all, but He loved ME personally and gave Himself up to the cross for ME personally! Years ago, we used to sing, *I am so glad that Jesus loves me, Jesus loves me, Jesus loves me. I am so glad that Jesus loves me, Jesus loves even me!* Hallelujah!

Now in the next brief section (11-13) the scene changes. We read about:

II. The Bride's Excursion Out Of The Palace Maybe she got a bit weary of the palace and the city and her new urban life and wanted a breather. At any rate:

1. she goes down to Solomon's nut orchard to enjoy the beauty of nature (11) It was spring and she just longed to be outdoors, to go where she could see the flowers blooming and the vines budding, as she loved to do back home. And I have to tell you that this next verse is one of the hardest verses to understand in the Bible; nobody knows for sure what it means. Translations of it vary immensely **(12)**. So here's my take on it: when she gets down to the nut grove:

2. she finds herself meeting Solomon's chariots and returns with him The Jewish historian, Josephus, writing of Solomon's love for horses says, *...so great was the regard for beauty and swiftness, that nowhere else could horses of greater beauty or greater fleetness be found. All had to acknowledge that the appearance of the king's horses was wonderfully pleasing, and that their swiftness was incomparable. Their riders also served as an ornament to them. They were young men in the flower of their age, and were distinguished by their lofty stature and their flowing hair, and by their clothing, which was of Tyrian purple. They every day sprinkled their hair with dust of gold, so that their whole head sparkled when the sun shone upon it. In such array, armed and bearing bows, they formed a body-guard around the king, [whose habit was], clothed in a white garment, to go out of the city in the morning, and even to drive his chariot. These morning excursions were usually to a certain place which was about sixty stadia [i.e., about 6 miles] from Jerusalem, and which was called Etam; gardens and brooks made it as pleasant as it was fruitful.* (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. VIII. 7. 3). I can't prove it but I'm guessing that as the Bride wandered mindlessly among the groves enjoying nature, not looking for him at all, suddenly here came Solomon in all his glory on his morning chariot ride and he swept her up and took her back to the city with him. But hey, there's a beautiful picture:

Wherever we go in life, we discover we are with Jesus, whether we're looking for Him or not! The Psalmist said, *You go before me and follow me....I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.* - **Ps. 139:5-10 NLT**. Even when I don't know it, even when I'm not thinking about it, no matter where I am or what I'm doing, behold there is Jesus right with me! You can't get away from Him even if you wanted to, and aren't you glad!! Well now:

3. the chorus appeals strongly for her return so they can gaze at her beauty (13a) They cry out four times, *Return, return, return, return!* as though they are desperate to see her again, but:

4. she still wonders why they would ever want to look at her (13b) Those are her words. "Why would you want to gaze at me like you'd gaze at some spectacular dance?" The meaning of that last phrase isn't too clear either, but you get the drift. But there is one very noteworthy thing in this verse:

5. she is here called the Shulamite for the first and only time in the Song. Now, one would automatically take Shulam to be a place name, the name of her home village. Except there is no known reference in the Bible or in history to any town or village by that name. In Hebrew, the word *shulamith* is the female form of the name Solomon, just as, for example, Danielle is the female form of the male name Daniel. So, they could actually be calling her "**the Solomoness**", the one who has become one with Solomon, the extension of Solomon in all his glory. Have you ever thought about the fact that we are called Christians, that is, "little Christs"? We are joined to Him and our lives are extensions of Him! The Bible says that:

a. we are being transformed into the image of Jesus, step by step, stage by stage in **2 Cor. 3:18**. We are reflecting more and more of the Lord's glory to everyone around us as we mature in Him and are made more and more like Him. In fact, **Rom. 8:29** says that we are actually *predestined to be conformed to the image of [God's Son]*. God Himself guarantees that this is happening and that it will be fully completed in the future when we arrive in heaven. So just as the friends of the Bride want to gaze at the reflection of Solomon's glory in her:

b. people gaze at us in order to see Him John McArthur said, "You are the only Bible some unbelievers will ever read." When people look at our lives, when they watch how we live, when they see the way we act and listen to the words we say, they literally see Jesus living out His life in us! *On a wall near the main entrance to the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, is a portrait with the following inscription: "James Butler Bonham--no picture of him exists. This portrait is of his nephew, Major James Bonham, deceased, who greatly resembled his uncle. It is placed here by the family that people may know the appearance of the man who died for freedom."* [Bill Morgan] No literal portrait of Jesus exists either, but He has made sure that the whole world can gaze at His likeness as they look at us who wear His Name and whose lives are being made to look like His! Now finally, in the third section of our passage (7:1-10):

III. Solomon Declares His Passion To His Bride He breaks into the conversation and answers her question as to why anyone would want to look at her:

1. he describes her beauty from toe to head in most glowing terms From her feet clear up to her head he describes the beauty he sees in every part of her. Follow along in **(1-5a)**. Her feet are beautiful. Her thighs are like finely ground jewels. Her navel is a perfect round bowl (she must have had an "innie", not an "outie") and her belly is softly rounded and tan like a heap of freshly threshed wheat. Her youthful breasts are perfectly symmetrical and her neck is

tall like a tower but white as pure ivory. Her eyes are deep pools, her nose a strong tower and her head crowns her body like the majesty of Mt. Carmel, crowned with flowing locks of hair. In his eyes, everything about her is just exquisite and as he gazes at her, he is powerfully stirred so that:

2. he declares the depth of his passion for her (5b-9a) Notice that:

a. he cannot help his deep attraction to her In (5b) he says the very locks of her hair hold a king captive. He means, "I cannot help myself; I cannot stop myself from loving you!" And in the obvious language of the rest, he is saying that:

b. he cannot deny his deep urge to be joined to her in intimate union. His passion for her is so strong that he talks to himself and says, "I must, I will, I have to..." And just as he is declaring his desire for her:

3. she declares the depth of her pleasure in his desire She breaks right into his line about passionately kissing her and says (9b-10). She is thrilled to her very soul that she is his bride and that he so passionately desires her. Her woman's heart finds its deepest desire fulfilled in being desired above all other things by the one whom she loves with all her heart. Of course, that passionate mutual delight and desire should be part of every marriage, but on a higher plane, I think this whole interchange is meant to declare to us that:

4. Jesus has an incredible passion for us I want you to turn with me to the Psalms and look at how the Sons of Korah described it. They are actually prophetically extolling the glory of the King, that is Jesus. **Ps. 45:9-15**. Beloved, WE are that queen, so gloriously arrayed:

a. He has made us to be royalty That Prince's daughter in (7:1) is us; the daughters of kings are merely our ladies of honor. We are the Queen, the Bride of the Heavenly Bridegroom, the wife of the Lamb! And:

b. He has a desire to possess us that cannot be denied The King desires our beauty. The Hebrew verb is an intensive; He greatly desires, He passionately desires, He has an extreme desire to enjoy the beauty of an intimate personal relationship with us that is stronger than a husband's passionate desire for his wife. He cannot help it; He cannot stop it; it is part of who He is! And:

c. our ultimate pleasure is found in His desire for us We will never find it in thinking on other things, the things of earth. The Psalm says, "Forget those things, put them out of your mind and bow before your Lord and King. Fall down and worship Him! Revel in His passionate love for you! Connect with His heart! Tell Him of your love and praise Him for His. Let His desire for you sweep you up in spiritual ecstasy." That is the maturing of love, when His love for you thrills you above all other things! And that is what will fill your heart with joy and gladness as you are led along your journey to the palace of the King!

The other day I saw a YouTube video by Francis Chan in which he was telling this story; I'll try to relate it as closely as I can. *"Yesterday I did a wedding and it was so cool. Some of you know this lady named Jean who has just been through some unimaginable things in her life. Jean has a daughter, April, who is 28 but is mentally disabled and has the mind of a 6 year old and she was the flower girl. Jean has just been beaming these last 18 months because of this guy, Rick, who has come into her life. During counseling, she would say to him, 'Are you sure? Are you really sure? Look at me, I'm old! Look at all my wrinkles!'" And he would say, "No, those are like dimples to me! You're beautiful!" She said, "I can't believe he keeps telling me how beautiful, how beautiful I am!" "But are you sure you want to take all of this on with my daughter and all? I mean, this is difficult!" Well at the end of the ceremony after all the vows and rings and all, I made a surprise announcement, "Rick, this morning, has also bought a ring for April, Jean's daughter, because he wants her to know that he is taking her as his very own." April was standing on the floor below the platform and the moment I said this, she screams and runs up the steps onto the stage crying - picture this, a 6 yr. old in a 28 yr. old body, just screaming and hugging Rick, crying, "I love you, I love you, I love you! I love you! I love you!" as tears are coming down her face. Just crying and screaming, "I love you, I love you!" and everyone's bawling. And I cried too. I lost it. And I just had to stop the ceremony and say, "Do you guys realize what just happened here? I don't think you will ever see a better illustration of this book..." And he went on to share exactly what we've just seen in Song of Solomon, that we are the Bride of Christ and though we may be like Jean, going, "Are you sure, just look at me!", He is saying, "You're beautiful! You're beautiful! I want you as My Bride!" And all of us should have a reaction every day that is like that of April this morning. We should be running to Him in awe, going, "Are you kidding me? You really want me? I can't believe it! I love you! I love you! I love you!"* [<https://youtu.be/IL2WAbbaauQ>] The deepest pleasure there is in life for me is the ecstasy of realizing that Jesus desires me with His whole being. The deepest pleasure there is for Jesus is that out of my ecstasy I love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength.

Song of Solomon: Intimacy With Jesus

The Renewing Of Love 7:11 - 8:14

Today we come to the final "episode" in our study of the Song of Solomon. Again, more time has gone by for our royal couple and something is stirring again in the Bride. It is only natural to miss home, isn't it? Especially when you have gotten married and had to move away from your familiar surroundings. The Bride had moved from her quiet country life in Lebanon to the hustle and bustle of the palace in Jerusalem, from the life of a farm girl to the life of a Queen, a head of state. No doubt the change was abrupt and difficult for her and there were times when she really missed home and longed for the simple relationship that she and Solomon had known there during the time of their courtship. So, in this first section (7:11-8:4):

I. The Bride And Groom Plan To Return To Lebanon (11-12a) Out of her longing:

1. the Bride suggests a visit to her countryside home, not simply a walk through the gardens near Jerusalem as in the last episode, but a trip to the villages where she was brought up in Lebanon, lodging and staying there for a few days to enjoy the delights of spring, the budding of the vines and the blooming of the plants in her familiar countryside. But it is not simply the beauty of nature that is on her mind:

2. she desires to give her love to her husband in that familiar context (12b-13) Mandrakes are the roots of a plant that was regarded as an aphrodisiac; eating them was believed to stimulate sexual desire. You may remember the story of Leah and Rachel fighting over mandrakes in Genesis as they vied for Jacob's love. She says, "We'll have mandrakes together and I will give you all the choice fruits of love that I have stored up for you on my shelf, both old and new!" During their courting days, their enjoyment of love in the countryside was limited because she was chaste. But now she desires him to experience the fullness of her love in the context of the place that she loved so much. It will be a new and fulfilling experience for them. But then comes this odd verse (8:1). Who would wish for their husband to be their brother? Then you couldn't be married to him! Especially after the strong desire she just mentioned! Well, the reason for this thought is that:

3. she wishes she could express her affection to him openly in public You see, the display of affection in public was not acceptable among the Jews, except for family affection. If he were her brother, she could kiss him out in public every time she saw him and nobody would look down on her. As it is, she always has to wait for privacy and act modestly, even while she's burning with desire inside. But it's more than that (2):

4. she wishes they could live together constantly in the simple life of her home If he was her brother they would live in her mother's house and he would teach her *[as the Hebrew can be read]* with his wisdom and she would nourish him from the fruits of her orchard and vineyard. She wants Solomon to know and get a taste of the simple life of her youth, to be fully a part of her life as she has known it. Well, Solomon is evidently touched and:

5. he says yes to her desire to go with an expression of love (3) He pulls her to him and embraces her passionately, as if to say, "Oh, how I love you, of course we'll go!" but then:

6. he again adjures the chorus (the daughters of Jerusalem) that loving him must be HER choice (4) This is the third time we have heard him give them this refrain. *Do not arouse or awaken my love until she pleases! NASB.* He reminds them yet again that this desire to love him so passionately must be HER choice and hers alone. Now let's pause for a moment and reflect on how we might apply the Bride's desire to our own relationship with the Lord. Thinking about "home" spiritually, to me, means thinking back to those early days when we first really fell in love with Christ and began to live for Him. I remember praying three times a day, even at lunch using a handwritten set of lists I had made. I remember having the desire to share about Him with people I knew. I remember two of my college classmates praying to ask Him into their lives and being involved with others from my church in praying strategically for particular people to be saved and seeing them come to faith. It was a simpler time that I remember with fondness, set in the environment of my familiar home and school and church connections, before all the complications of studying theology and pastoring churches and preaching sermons and dealing with incredibly complex problems in people's lives. You know, I think that, like the Bride:

7. we all need occasions that renew our "first love" for Jesus Look with me at the letter Jesus wrote to the believers in the church at Ephesus in **Rev. 2:2-3**. They did love the Lord and they were busy serving Him. They were doing everything right, enduring difficulties with patience, weeding out falsehood, not growing weary. **4-5a**. They were busily serving Jesus, but they didn't love Jesus the way they did at first! Their service had more actions than heart and Jesus called on them to repent, to change their thinking, to go back to loving Him deeply the way they did at first and living out of that love. For this Bride a trip to the countryside to her home village was an occasion to renew her love for Solomon and we all need occasions that re-focus our hearts on our first love. For some of us that could mean that:

a. we need to simplify our lives Maybe we're living the fast-paced life of the court in Jerusalem, running from one engagement to the next, instead of the simple life of the countryside where there's time to walk in the fields and ap-

precipitate the beauties of God's creation. Someone has said, *Beware of the barrenness of a busy life*. We may need a retreat or a vacation where we can get away and focus on Him who is really most important in our lives. We may need to cut some things out of our schedule that really don't help us. Or we may simply need to set aside sacred time to rekindle our love in the midst of all that we are doing. I don't have any idea what Jesus may be saying to you along these lines; you'll have to ask Him, "What can I do to get back to where we were?" But I CAN tell you this:

b. He is continually loving us the way He should. His love for us never diminishes in the slightest degree; therefore, **renewing our love for Him is our choice** and when we make it, He, like Solomon, will be more than glad to cooperate!

So, they do go back to Lebanon for a visit as she requested and there in the next section (8:5-7):

II. The Bride Expresses Her Love For Solomon In Her Home The chorus, whom Solomon had spoken to in verse 4, now sees them coming in the new scene and asks **(5a)**. The couple are walking up to her village home, which was evidently set in the shade of a spreading apple tree that Solomon remembers fondly from their courtship and:

1. he reminds her that he first awakened her love for him there (5b) In the very place where she was born, under the shade of that very tree they had first fallen in love. He points out that her strong desire for him was first awakened in that very place and she finds that so romantic in him that:

2. she expresses her desire to securely belong to him forever (6a) A seal is either a signet ring or a cylindrically shaped seal mounted on a tiny post, either of which was pressed into clay and made a mark of ownership. The seal was either worn on a chain around the neck inside the garment which placed it over the heart, as it were, or it was bound securely on a bracelet at the wrist so that it would not be lost. She bursts out poetically saying, "I want to be like your seal, to be precious to you and lie upon your heart at all times, to be safely bound to your wrist so that I am secured to you forever!" And then:

3. she gives a beautiful poetic description of the nature of love (6b-7) This is her poetic "Ode to Love", sometimes referred to as the "1 Corinthians 13 of the Old Testament", one of the most poignant descriptions of love found in ancient literature anywhere. She uses four strong descriptive analogies. She says:

a. love is as powerful as death and its ardor or its zeal is as unyielding as the grave. When death has you, you don't get up again; when you're in the grave, you're not coming out; its power is that strong. Up to this point in time death had never released a prisoner! Once you are gripped by love it has you and it will never let go! Then she says:

b. love is as all-consuming as fire and she specifies which fire she's talking about, even **the very fire of the Lord**. The fire of the Lord appears several times in the Old Testament and when it does, it is an all-consuming fire. The fire of the Lord fell for Elijah and completely consumed his sacrifice on Mt. Carmel and even the water in the trench. The fire of the Lord fell again on the two captains with their companies of soldiers who came to seize Elijah and it consumed all of them. When love burns in you, it consumes you, it takes over and controls your life completely and unstoppably. Thirdly, she says:

c. love is more unquenchable than any earthly flame It's a flame you can't put out with a whole river full of water! Love can't be extinguished; nothing can quench it and put it out. And finally:

d. love is more valuable than any earthly possession It can't be bought. All of a man's possessions can't buy it; all of your invested wealth can't make someone love you. And if you said to someone, "Here is all I have, all my money; I want to buy your love!", they would not only laugh but would despise you for it because love can't be bought! To have someone love you is the most precious thing in the world. And those four statements, dear friend, are:

4. it is a beautiful description of Jesus' love for us His love for us is stronger than death itself, mightier than the grave! It takes us through death to real life and makes the grave give up a new resurrection body for us! His love for us is as all-consuming as fire, even His own fire! He is completely consumed with love for us; it is the purpose and the object of all human history and existence. His love for us is more unquenchable than fire. Nothing can ever put it out. He will never stop loving us nor let His love for us diminish in the least. And His love for us is the most valuable thing in the universe. Giving all we have can't get it for us; He laughs at those who mistakenly think they can earn it. He offers it to each of us freely, of His own will, and once we know and experience His love, we would never trade it for anything in the world. And we will belong securely to that love, which He first awakened us to so long ago, forever and ever! Hallelujah! Let that sink in a minute! Hallelujah!

Now on this visit home, the couple, of course, meets her brothers, whom we first met back in 1:6 where she said that her brothers were angry with her and had made her work long hours in the family vineyard so that it had darkened her skin, remember? Well, in (8:8-12):

III. The Bride Speaks Concerning Her Brothers And again, the language here seems a little strange to us and also a bit direct. She repeats to them what they actually used to say about her when she was young **(8-9)**. In verse 8 there seems to be a bit of teasing going on, "How will we ever marry our little sister off? Her womanhood is undeveloped; she's a bean-pole. Who will want her?" But in verse 9 she is being more serious and:

1. she actually shares their protectiveness of her virtue when she was young Most interpreters think the symbols of the wall and the door have deeper cultural meaning. "If she grows up to be like a wall...", that is, if she is strong and virtuous and remains resistant to all suggestions of immorality by men, "we will build on top of her a battlement of silver", that is, we will bestow on her the honor which is her due. And that could even possibly refer to a beautiful wedding headdress of silver. But on the other hand, "if she proves to be a like a door..." that swings back and forth and lets men in to her, then "we will encircle her with cedar planks". We'll enclose her safely within the network of our own protection and make sure that she remains virtuous. That's what her brothers used to say, but now on Solomon's arm she teases them back with how her life actually turned out **(10)**.

2. she declares how her virtue in her maturity won Solomon's favor She says, "Well boys, I've grown up, I actually grew my own towers of womanhood, thank you! And I was a wall! I kept myself pure and clean; I resisted all the advances of men and look who married me! The King! Solomon himself! In his eyes I am one who finds peace, that is, finds favor. He is supremely content and pleased both with my body and especially with my virtue!" Then in the next verse, which also seems rather odd:

3. she recalls the terms of Solomon's letting the vineyard to her brothers (11) Solomon owned the huge vineyard in Baal Hamon and her brothers were his tenant farmers who lived on the land and cared for the crop. The agreement was that they were to produce or gather 1000 shekels worth of grapes annually for Solomon in his absence. The rest they could keep plus he would also pay them accordingly. But now catch the tricky analogy she is making in verse **(12)**:

4. she declares that her "vineyard", the vineyard of her own self, her own person, her own body, belongs freely and fully to Solomon. "Solomon, I am ALL yours, without hesitation or reservation!" But in the same breath **she requests special treatment for those who "kept" her.** Her brothers were the keepers of her virtue who encouraged her to stay pure and kept her fruit for Solomon alone and she urges that they should receive 200 shekels because of what they have done for her and thus for him. I read somewhere that the normal pay for a tenant would be a tithe or a tenth; I honestly don't know if that's accurate, but if it is then she is requesting a favor, a doubling of the payment for them. Despite their anger sometimes and the hard work they made her do, she is thankful for their role in her life making her fit for Solomon. Now if there's a lesson in all of that, it could be this:

5. we should appreciate those who brought us to love Jesus Paul asked a favor of Philemon, the owner of the runaway slave Onesimus. He asked that Philemon would forgive him and take him back without punishment now that he had become a believer, not because he deserved it, but simply because of Paul's request and he added, *...not to mention that you owe me your very self.* - **Philemon 1:19**. We owe a great debt to those who witnessed to us, who nurtured our faith, who tended the vineyard of our life and brought us to the point where we gave it to Jesus. Without their influence we would not be enjoying the love of the King today. Even though you're all grown up now and have become the Bride of the King, have you remembered them? Have you sought to do for them what you can? Have you asked Him for a blessing for them?

Well, in vs. (13-14):

IV. The Song Concludes At Last with one line from the Groom and one line from the Bride. It concludes:

1. with Solomon loving her contentment and requesting a song (13) She's in her element now. She is a person who dwells in the gardens, who lives outdoors in nature. She is content and surrounded by her companions who love to hear her sing and Solomon says, "Sing for me! I love who you are and I love what this trip has done for your heart and your love for me! **Now** sing to us your joy!" And so, the Song concludes:

2. with her singing the inviting love song from their courting days (14) She voices almost the same thing that she did in **2:17**, back in the days when Solomon used to visit her at home and would have to leave. Only now they are together, so she sings, "Hurry! Come away with me, my Beloved; come with me swiftly and gracefully like a gazelle or a young stag on the beautiful mountains full of fragrant aromas. Let us go and enjoy it together!"

And so, in the words of one commentary, *With this song breaking forth in the joy of love and of life, the poet represents the loving couple as disappearing over the flowery hills, and at the same time the sweet charm of the Song of Songs, leaping gazelle-like from one fragrant scene to another, vanishes away.* [Keil and Delitzsch on 8:14] The whole point of this series of studies has been that you and Jesus would go gracefully away over the mountains of life, hand in hand, and deeply in love. It has been that, seeing the depth of His passionate love for you, your love for Him would be renewed and deepened and strengthened. So, to close our series, rather than telling you a story, I'd like you to watch one: <https://youtu.be/QvmbUifyKcc>.

Insights From Isaiah Outline

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Insights From Isaiah

Today we begin a brand new study together through the Book of Isaiah. Let me begin by giving you a brief:

Introduction To This Series Of Studies The Book of Isaiah is among the longest portions of Scripture that we have. It is both familiar to us and at the same time largely neglected. Chapters like 6 and 53, along with sections of chapters 7, 9 and 61 are among the best known and most beloved parts of the Old Testament, but sadly, much of the rest of the book is virtually unknown to most of us Christians. In fact, though I've read it through many times, in 45 years of pastoring I've never preached a series through the book, only messages on select passages like those I've mentioned. Yet Isaiah is quoted or alluded to some 85 times in the New Testament, 30 of those in the Gospels and Acts, 29 by Paul and 6 by Peter; it was a favorite of Jesus and the New Testament authors, so it merits our attention! Look at verse **(1)**:

1. Isaiah prophesied through the reigns of four kings of Judah. From the data we have, that means his active ministry lasted from about **740-681 BC**, about 60 years. He lived in the city of Jerusalem during the time when Israel and Judah were in decline and were being threatened by the rise of the Assyrian Empire. Tradition says he was a cousin of King Uzziah, though we can't verify that, but he certainly had access to the royal court and spoke directly to at least two of those kings. Tradition also says that:

2. he was cruelly martyred during the reign of evil King Manasseh, who ordered him to be sawn in half with a wooden saw when he must have been around 80 years old - and no doubt still preaching against sin and idolatry! Most feel that he is the one whom the writer of Hebrews mentions as being *sawn in two* in 11:37 and we must honor him as one of that faithful company who were victorious over Satan because they *...loved not their lives even unto death*. Now because his book is so long:

3. we'll survey select chapters, chapters which **highlight key insights** for our life and faith and, to help us remember them, we'll use **key phrases** that are found in each of those chapters, many of which are already familiar to us. The first phrase, found in chapter 1 is:

The Ox Knows Its Owner - Ch. 1

This chapter is sort of a summary of Isaiah's whole message to His people in the first 39 chapters. Over and over in these chapters God uses Isaiah to call His people to repent of their sins. Now Uzziah and Jotham were godly kings, as was Hezekiah who came later, and God prospered Judah under their rule. But in between came Ahaz who reigned for 16 long years and this chapter seems to belong to his time. To get a picture of what this era was like, turn with me to **2 Chron. 28:1-7, 17-19**. Ahaz led his people back into the deepest forms of idolatry and God disciplined them severely for it, allowing them to be raided and defeated by both the Syrians and the King of Israel from the north, the Edomites from the east and the Philistines from the west. The king's own son was killed in the process, yet despite all this he plunged the nation even deeper into idolatry. So at some point, God sent Isaiah to the people with the message of chapter 1 where:

I. God Charges His Children With Rebellion (2-3) His language is that of a courtroom and He summons the very heavens and the earth as witnesses to the justness of the charge that He brings against the people, whom He calls His own

children! And it is on that basis that we can apply the exhortations in this chapter to ourselves because, as John said, *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... - 1 Jn. 3:1*. Collectively, God's people Israel were called the children of God, but since Jesus came, *...to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - Jn. 1:12*. All of us who believe in Jesus Christ have the awesome privilege of being God's actual children here and now. Now notice three things in this passage. First:

1. the wonderful privileges God gives to His children He says they were *reared and brought up* by Him. You know the tremendous investment you make in raising a child, all the love that you pour into them, the tender care you give them, the sacrifices you make for them, the sleepless nights, the anxious concern for every aspect of their life, the training, the teaching, the encouraging, the comforting. God did all of that for the children of Israel! He birthed them by rescuing them out of slavery in Egypt. He parted the Red Sea to make a way for them. He led them personally through the wilderness and gave them the promised land. He raised them up to a high position under David and Solomon so that they were looked up to by all the nations around them. And God does all of that for us too! By His Spirit He gave us new birth into His family and through that same Spirit He has been maturing us stage by stage into the image of Christ. He has guided us and provided for us and protected us and been patient with us and forgiven us a thousand times over. And He has raised us up to be the heirs of all that is His and promised that we will reign with Him forever and ever. Oh what wonderful privileges our Heavenly Father has bestowed upon us out of His amazing love! But notice:

2. the awful way that His children have forsaken and spurned Him In spite of all that He had done for them, they turned to other gods and ran after them. They rebelled against everything they had been told and taught and adopted a lifestyle of unrighteousness. They became dishonest and untruthful. In the very worship of their false gods, they practiced sexual immorality and burned their own children in the fire as human sacrifices. They showed absolutely no appreciation of what He had done for them; in fact, they despised their Father and everything that He stood for. If you remember, Jesus told a story about a son like that. Despite being raised in a wonderful home with the love of a Father who cared for him deeply, he demanded his share of the inheritance, as though he wished his father were already dead, went off into a far country and threw all his money away living a wild life, doing things his father despised, drinking and using prostitutes until it was all gone. How ungrateful! But before we raise our hands to cast a stone at him or at Israel, let's not miss the lesson that is here for us: what an awful, ungrateful thing it is when we choose to rebel against God and sin, after all that He has done for us! God expresses the irony of it pointedly in vs. 3:

3. even the ox knows its owner! Now let me ask you, what is an ox? Did you know it's not a separate species of animal? It's simply a cow of any breed that's been trained to work, to pull a plow or a wagon. It's usually a steer, a castrated bull, and due to its large size and great strength, it can pull very heavy loads. Oxen were often used by the pioneers to pull their covered wagons across the American west and they are still used as draft animals all over Africa and Asia today. Because oxen are large and slow, our culture has caricatured them as dumb; we even coined the phrase *dumb as an ox*. But oxen are not dumb at all and God recognizes that here. You don't drive a team of oxen with reins or put a bit in their mouth like a horse to control them. Oxen respond to the voice commands of their owner who often walks alongside and tells them "get up" or "whoa" and guides them left or right by "Gee" and "Haw". God says, "An ox knows its owner's voice and willingly submits to his commands, but My own children don't know ME and submit to what I tell them to do! An OX is smarter than my children!" Then He goes further saying, **and the donkey knows his master's crib**, that is, he knows that his master feeds him and where the feed rack or feeding trough is. When I was a kid, we didn't have a donkey, but we had ponies and I remember one day I was trying to ride one of them way up on the hillside at the top of our property. Well, she got one thing in her mind and took off at a run down the hill, through the gate into the stable and stuck her nose in her feeding trough and nothing I did would stop her; I just held on for dear life and ducked under the door frame! She knew where her provision came from! God says, "A donkey knows that its master feeds it and just when and where, but My own children don't understand that everything in their lives comes from Me; they don't recognize the generous care that I've given them! A DONKEY is smarter than my children!" Listen, when we rebel against our Heavenly Father's commands, ignore His grace in saving us and all His tender kindness and provision for us, and go off and make sinful life choices to do things that are displeasing and even abominable to Him like Israel did, we're stupid! In our ungratefulness we're dumber than animals!

Notice the quotation marks end after verse 3. God's charge ends and now the Spirit inspires Isaiah to reprimand the people of Israel and point out to them:

II. The Consequences Of Their Rebellion (4-9) Read (4-7). "Israel, don't you get it? You've been invaded from every side; you've lost every battle. Your cities have been ransacked; your possessions stolen by enemies! God has removed His blessing and protection from you and you're bringing all this upon yourself by your own behavior!" When the ox won't listen to his voice, the owner carries a goad, a long sharp-pointed rod and he painfully pokes the thick skin of the ox until it goes the way he wants it to. And God does that with His children:

1. rebellion leads to being wounded Like any good parent, God gives us His rules for living not to deny us fun or pleasure, but always for our good. We always hurt ourselves when we rebel against Him. We run off into sexual immorality and wound our souls, alienate our kids, destroy our family and end up alone. We run off and party with alcohol or

drugs and get hurt or hurt someone else or develop a habit and get addicted and end up lying and stealing and alienating everyone that matters to us. You see:

2. the greater the rebellion, the greater the wounds The more we rebel, the deeper we go into sin, the more it hurts us, until, like Israel, we're covered with emotional and even physical wounds and still we keep on hurting ourselves until we end up like them:

3. they are left in a state of devastation (8) At harvest time the workers build a little hut out of branches in the vineyard or in the field where they can rest in the shade and eat lunch or take a break, but after the harvest is done it just stands there deserted, empty and barren, falling apart, the rest of the year. Israel had become desolate, an empty shell of its former self, and that's how it is when God's children decide to rebel against Him. They wound themselves more and more until their lives become broken and empty and desolate, until they come to an end of themselves. God uses the circumstances that come upon them as painful goads to try to drive them back toward Him and:

4. but for the mercy of God, there would be annihilation (9) God was merciful and gracious and left Israel survive; otherwise, their enemies would have wiped them out completely. God is merciful with His children, not giving them up completely, not allowing them to be lost, always going after them, seeking them, urging them to come back to Him. Now the crazy thing about Israel's situation is that through all this time of idolatry and suffering, the Temple and the sacrificial system continued to operate day after day like normal somehow. The nation continued to pay at least lip service to God while pursuing their sinful ways, so now Isaiah challenges them about that, declaring that:

III. Religious Practice Is Hypocritical Without Obedience (10-14) The whole point of offering a sacrifice during Old Testament times was to acknowledge your sins before God and receive forgiveness. So, on the one hand they were giving the appearance of seeking God and atonement for their sins, while on the other they were delighting in continuing their sin with no thought of stopping. You see:

1. when we're disobedient our religious acts are disgusting to God The things that God loves to have us do, the things He has commanded us to do, become abominations to Him when they're done insincerely, when we're simply going through the motions of going to church and singing and saying prayers and taking communion without any comprehension that the very things we're happily involved in doing elsewhere are the very things God sent His Son to die as a sacrifice for. Our hypocrisy makes a mockery of the sacrifice of Christ! Furthermore **(15)**:

2. when we're disobedient our prayers are not answered by God The Psalmist said, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me!* - 66:18. And Solomon wrote, *If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.* - Prov. 28:9. We can't pray with bloody hands, with hands that are engaged in that which God hates, in that which caused the shedding of the blood of His son, and expect Him to hear and help us! Look ahead to what Isaiah said in **59:1-2**. God is more than able and more than willing to hear and answer us, but He will not support and enable us in a habit of sinful behavior! He lets the consequences of our sins fall upon us. Think about it; if your son was about to go out and get drunk and asked you for \$50, would you give it to him? Would you pay the bill to repair his car if he damaged it in the process? I think not and God won't do that either with His children. The only prayer He's listening for when we have backslidden and gone our own way is one of repentance, "I'm sorry, Lord!"

And here is the Good News:

IV. God Offers His Children Forgiveness Skip ahead to verse **(18)**. Oh what a beautiful invitation! When we have fallen, no matter how deep, God gives us this invitation to come back to Him. He says, "Come to Me and let's talk! You tell Me you're ready to confess the awfulness of what you've done and that you've changed your mind, that you're sorry for it and willing to forsake it, and I'll tell you that you're forgiven and restored to fellowship with Me!" Isn't it wonderful that:

1. we can receive complete and thorough forgiveness No matter what we have done, no matter how awful our sins are, no matter if they are red like scarlet or bright red like crimson, they will be cleansed as white as snow or freshly washed wool. In other words, they will be completely erased and forgotten so that our fellowship and our walk with God is restored! But God does expect two things on our part. First:

2. we must cease doing what is evil (16) He'll help us by the power of His Spirit, but we must stop our sinful behavior. We must make the choice to not continue in it any longer and want it out of our lives. And second:

3. we must learn to do what is good (17) We must begin by His power to do the things that are right and true and just. It won't happen all in an instant but as we trust in Him and call upon the Spirit to strengthen and help us, we learn to do the right things instead of the wrong ones. And then He says this:

4. the choice is ours (19-20) We can repent and return to the Lord and allow the blessings of relationship with Him to flow into our life once again or we can refuse His invitation and keep on rebelling and wounding ourselves even deeper.

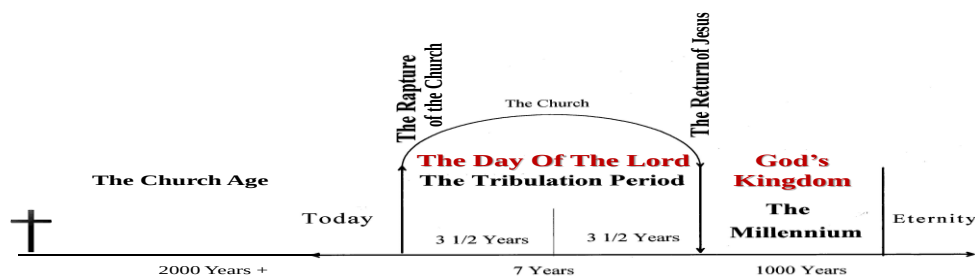
Jessica Alvarado is 36 years old. From the age of 13-24, she served with her parents as missionaries in Mexico. She writes, "When I was 24, I hit a very dark place when unexpected life events happened. I know people at church meant well, but I was the center of attention and didn't appreciate the pity looks I received. So, I started missing church and looking for friendships outside of church. This wasn't a bad thing, but I started joining my newfound friends in ungodly activities. For the first 24 years of my life, I was sheltered. I was home schooled and dedicated all my free time to assist newcomers, persons in need in hospitals, and on the streets. I had never so much as set foot in a movie theater and all of sudden everything that I had never done started looking very appealing. My dad then was very strict and had a serious conversation with me about coming back to church. He was hoping I would snap out of it and told me that I had to pick God or my new friends. To which I stared him in the face and said 'my friends'. To which he replied, 'give me the key to the house'. Which I gave to him and was gone by morning. My choices went from bad to worse, and my dad came looking for me many times after that, but my heart was hardened. I was severely depressed and became an alcoholic. As soon as I would get out of work, I would drink my life away. This was daily and weekends were worse because I didn't have to work. After a year of this nonsense, I decided to come back to the States to finish my education.

In the States, not only did I feel depressed, I felt the worse anxiety ever. I was tired of the life I was living yet I could not leave my addictions. I felt out of place at church, and even in this country. I was from U.S. but spent so much time in Mexico, the fast pace life was a little too much for me.... It was a very stressful time for me and alcohol and cigarettes weren't enough for me anymore. I started sinking deeper into a hole I myself was digging. There were times I started to doubt God existed, then I would remember miracles I saw in Mexico... and remember God speaking to me. Yet I was prideful and needed help getting out. Then I met my now husband, not a believer but "Mr. Health guy" with a bachelor's degree in Kinesiology. He gave me plenty of sermons about my drinking and smoking. I think God started working with me then. Any doubts I had about him disappeared when I got pregnant with my first daughter. How could he not exist when here I was carrying a precious miracle growing inside of me? He literally took my addictions away through my pregnancy; my taste buds had changed and I couldn't even stand the smell of cigarettes!!! I had people praying for my return and I don't think I would have made it without their prayers. I finally gave myself completely to Christ again last year in January 2017. A random lady at the library I had been talking with gave me her number before we parted and she invited me to church for about a month. Then one Sunday I was feeling low and tears were coming down for no reason; I felt led to go to her church. The preaching that day was the story of when Mary and Joseph lost Jesus and had to go looking for him. The story can be found in Luke 2:41-52. I have not looked back since... I cannot change the past, only learn from it and use it to help others. If I had not gone through what I did, I would never have had the ability to truly understand backsliders, people with addictions, or even know how visitors at church feel. I was only fortunate God saved me before I ended up 6 feet under." [\[https://www.rocksolidfaith.ca/backsliding-christian-testimony/\]](https://www.rocksolidfaith.ca/backsliding-christian-testimony/) Aren't you glad that whether you've only taken one step in the wrong direction away from God or whether you've fallen all the way into a deep pit like Israel or like Jessica, God's gracious invitation still stands: "Come let us reason together! Be wise like the animals. The ox knows its owner and the donkey knows its master's crib. I'm your Owner and your Master. Come back to Me. I want to wash away all your sins and make you white as snow!"

Insights From Isaiah

The Mountain Of The Lord - Ch. 2

Last week we focused on one major aspect of Isaiah's ministry in chapter 1 which was to call God's people to repentance, to turn their hearts away back to God and away from sin. But already in chapter 2 we find the second major aspect of his ministry which was to comfort and encourage God's people by pointing to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, and the changes He will bring to the world. Now before we look at Isaiah's words, I'd like to take time to give you some background information about Jesus' second coming. For some of you this may be old hat and simple information; for others it may be the first time you've really thought about it. Also, if you are a visiting Presbyterian, you may not agree with what I'm about to say, but that's OK. Different branches of the church hold differing views of what will happen when Jesus returns; this is the best way that I know to make sense out of what the Bible teaches and it has been the teaching position of our church since its beginning. I've put a diagram in your outline and here it is. We believe in:



I. The Millennial Reign Of Jesus Christ That is, we believe that:

- 1. Jesus will return to literally rule upon the earth** The Book of Revelation talks clearly about that period of time. About the great multitude of believers from every people who are around God's throne, **Rev. 5:10** says, "...you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth". And Rev. 20:4 says that we reign with

Christ for 1000 years, a millennium, and that's what we commonly call this period. The prophet Daniel described it by saying that after the kingdoms of earth are destroyed, *...the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed - 2:44*. This millennial reign of Jesus is what He and the prophets referred to as the Kingdom of God. Now during this era, Jesus:

2. He will rule over real people, over flesh and blood human beings just like us, **in a real world**, on the actual earth we live on now. Jesus said in **Mt. 25:31-34** that when He comes all living human beings will be gathered before Him and, *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*. They will go on living on the earth under Jesus' rule and repopulate it, while those on his left are cast into eternal fire. So, this period when Messiah reigns at last upon this earth **is what the Old Testament prophets are describing** and what Isaiah sees in his vision in the first half of this chapter. Now we also read that:

3. His return will be preceded by a time of great suffering Jesus described it in some detail in **Mt. 24:21-30**, calling it a time of great tribulation for all the people of the earth, so it has been commonly **known as the Tribulation**. Both Daniel and Revelation tell us that this period of suffering will last for 7 years, with the last half becoming especially severe and the very last of it culminating in the appearance of Jesus and His return. This awful time is **often called the Day of the Lord by the prophets** and is what Isaiah is talking about in the second half of this chapter. But wait a minute, what about the Church Jesus is building? Paul tells us in **1 Thes. 4:16-17** that:

4. His Church will be caught up to meet Him in the air and be with Him. We call this the **Rapture** of the church and, for a variety of reasons, believe it will happen **before this** awful suffering of the Tribulation. However, Paul calls this a **mystery** in **1 Cor. 15:51-52**, a sacred secret that was not known to the Old Testament prophets, but was **only revealed** to us later **in the New Testament epistles**. This is what WE look forward to first, but Isaiah is talking about Messiah's Kingdom, the Kingdom of God on earth.

Now our key phrase to remember this chapter is:

II. The Mountain Of The Lord You see it in verse 2 and again in verse 3. The mountain upon which the city of Jerusalem and God's temple are built is called Zion and the three terms are basically synonymous. The mountain of the Lord, Zion, IS the mountain of the Lord's House, the Temple and includes the city of the Lord, Jerusalem. Now, through Isaiah, God is revealing to us:

1. the conditions that will prevail in the Kingdom (1-4) By the way, let me interject here that the prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah who also lived in Judah and he heard and described the same exact vision that Isaiah had, in **Micah 4:1-3** in virtually identical words, so God must have wanted us to hear this twice as we read through our Bibles! In the *latter days* or the *last days*, that is, during the days when Jesus rules as King over the earth:

a. Jerusalem will be the center of world government It will be His capital city for earth. Geographically it is situated at the intersection of the three continents that make up the eastern hemisphere, Europe, Asia and Africa. God says repeatedly of Jerusalem in the Old Testament that it is *...the city where I have chosen to put my name*. Indeed, He says, *...In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever. - 2 Kings 5:21*. And He wasn't kidding! When Jesus comes, a geographically raised, renewed, re-structured Jerusalem will be the place from which He rules the world, no matter how much the world may hate that idea today! And in that new city will be:

b. the millennial Temple - Ez. 40-48 describes a Temple that has never yet been built. Now why would God give exact dimensions and building plans for a Temple that He never intended to exist? During Christ's reign, a glorious Temple of the Lord **will be the center of world worship**. Idolatry will be gone. Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism and animism and all the other "isms" of earth will be no more. False worship will not exist. The entire earth will at last worship the True and Living God and His eternal Son, their King! Isaiah says in verses 2b-3 that:

c. all peoples will come there in a continual stream There will be a constant flow of persons coming up to Jerusalem and returning to their own lands from all over the earth. Every people, every ethnic and language group, will be represented; not one will be left out. And they will come, Isaiah says:

(1) to receive the teaching and instruction of the Lord Zechariah says, *And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.... Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. - 14:9, 16*. The entire earth will come up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and to receive His instruction and laws. And they will do it, Isaiah says:

(2) so that they might live according to His ways Imagine! The entire earth living the way that GOD wants them to live! No more rich people wallowing in luxury while millions of the poor starve! No more dictators forcing their will upon a powerless population through guns and armies. No more living in fear and terror or hating other people whose skin is a different color. No more suffering of millions through disease brought about by lack of

clean water or malnutrition. Imagine a world like that where no one cheats, lies, steals, murders or oppresses others. Imagine a world like that where everyone lives God's way! Well, that world is coming and one day it will be here!

But how can it be so, if you still have real human beings who are like us? Well, verse 4 says that the King, Jesus:

d. He will administer justice among all the peoples It will no longer be left to human judges and potentates! He Himself will take care of resolving all differences and disputes and He will be completely fair and truthful. And all parties will have to obey! There will be no rebelling against His rule. And, Isaiah says:

e. He will enforce an era of complete peace upon the world You can sing "Let there be peace on earth" the rest of your life and the world will never be one iota closer to it. You can put bumper stickers on your car and negotiate all the disarmament treaties that you can make, but there never has been and never will be peace among the nations and the people in this world - until Jesus comes! And under His rule, *they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks* because they won't need them anymore. Nobody will train for war and nobody will make war. The entire earth will live in peace and harmony because of the power of Jesus.

Now if you're sitting there thinking, "You're nuts! How can a guy with all your education and a master's degree believe such mythical fairy tale nonsense! You're crazy!" Well, if I'm crazy, then I'm in good company! Isaiah believed it, Micah believed it, Zechariah believed it, all the prophets believed it, John believed it and Jesus believed it and I'm sticking with them! Jesus is coming to change the world and rule it! Hallelujah! Now in verse 5 we have Isaiah's point of:

2. application (5): People of God, **Let us walk in the ways of the Lord NOW!** It'll be too late then! If the whole world is going to be forced to walk in the ways of the Lord and worship Him only THEN, why not do it now! Why not obey Him now? Why not love Him now? You see, if you don't, there is another Day coming, the one we've already mentioned:

II. The Day Of The Lord (7-22) which is what Isaiah goes on to talk about. In verses 7-9 he spells out the sins of Judah, their idolatry, their haughtiness and pride, the way they were currently living. And for us:

1. the sinful condition of Judah in his day reflects the condition of the whole world in those Tribulation days, the days prior to the coming of Christ. Virtually the whole world will be given up to idolatry, to false worship and to war and violence, to awful times, so severe that Jesus said if they hadn't been shortened, the human race would not survive. And He went on to say, *Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* - Mt. 24:29-30. As all the prophets proclaimed, *the Day of the Lord is coming!* And Isaiah says:

2. the Day of the Lord will be a day of terror for the proud (10-12) The coming of Jesus, which will be hailed as the greatest joy by believers, is a day of terror for the rest of the world:

a. all the haughtiness of mankind will be humbled before the Lord (17) During that period of trouble before Jesus comes, mankind will take pride and haughtiness to new heights. Paul tells us, *Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.* - 2 Thes. 2:3-4. There will be a world leader who will proclaim himself God and demand that the whole world worship him and force them to do it! But all that pride, all that power, all those armies and all those weapons, all of the things that mankind will lift up against God, will dissolve like vapor when Jesus comes and destroys it all with one word from His mouth! See Rev. 19! His appearing will be a moment of terror for the world and in that day, Isaiah says:

b. people will hide in rocks and caves from the terror of the Lord (19) This is exactly what it says in **Rev. 6:15-17**, *Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"* And in their haste to hide from Jesus and the destruction they realize is coming, Isaiah says:

c. they will discard their worthless idols (18, 20-21) They will see how worthless and useless their lifeless idols are and throw them away as excess baggage, leaving them among the disgusting creatures of the earth. The language is showing God's utter disdain for the idolatry of mankind! It will all come to nothing and worse than nothing! You say, "Wait a minute, you mean you really believe Jesus is going to show up in the sky and return to earth to annihilate all those who stand against Him and destroy all power and pride of man?" Yes I do! *Charles Spurgeon, probably the greatest preacher of his day, said that the greatest compliment ever paid him was spoken by one of his outspoken enemies who said, "Here is a man who has not moved one inch forward in all his ministry. At the close of the 19th cen-*

ture, he is teaching the theology of the first century, and is proclaiming doctrine current in Nazareth and Jerusalem in the first century!". I'm with him! That's what the coming of Jesus has always meant to His people, the end of all the corrupt and powerful systems of this world! And then Isaiah stops once again to make a point of:

3. application (22): He says, People of God, **Stop following mortal man; all his "glory" is worthless!** Human beings, even the most powerful of them, are but a vapor that is soon gone and all the things they regard as their "glory", power, position, wealth, pleasure, economic power, military might, they will all vanish in an instant like smoke when Jesus comes! So, regard HIM instead! Follow Him! Worship Him and walk in His ways!

Dear friends, one day, as John records, when the last trumpet sounds there will be *...loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."* - Rev. 11:15. Oh, how He will change this world! Oh, what a wonderful place it will become! Years ago, we used to get so caught up in arguing the details of how it was going to happen and the timing and all of that. I think it was the well-known Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe who said regarding Christ's return, "I resigned a long time ago from the Planning Committee and joined the Welcoming Committee instead!" Let's join the Welcoming Committee! Let's look forward to that day when He comes to rule and reign and all the nations of the earth stream up to the Mountain of the Lord to worship Him! As the writer of Hebrews puts it, *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe* - 12:28.

Insights From Isaiah

The Branch Of The Lord - Chs. 4 and 11

We'll continue our series unearthing insights from the prophet Isaiah briefly this morning. You know Jesus has quite a number of names or titles that He is given in Scripture. He is called the Way, the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life, the Lamb of God, the Resurrection and the Life, and on and on. Well, in both Jeremiah and Isaiah, He is called by yet another name, a very unusual name. He is called, The BRANCH. The Hebrew word is *netzer* and the Gospel writer Matthew noticed that the name of the town where Jesus grew up, *Nazareth*, is derived from that same root word and saw it as a fulfillment of prophecy that Jesus would be called a *Nazarene*, Jesus of "the branch" (2:23)! But here in Isaiah we read the prophecy that he was probably referring to; we read about:

I. The Coming Forth Of The BRANCH (11:1) Now when I was young, we owned an acre or so of woods and we heated with wood and coal, so I cut down a lot of trees as a teenager. And I learned the lesson back then that's contained in this verse:

1. when a living tree is cut down, its stump doesn't automatically die. There is still life in the roots and if that stump has enough water and sunlight, very often it **sends forth new shoots which become branches** before long. You actually have to kill the stump to prevent it from doing this by using a chemical or grinding it out. If you just leave it, very often it will sprout branches. Every farmer or forester, even every gardener, knows this. Now, of course, God is using this to make a spiritual analogy here:

a. the stump or root here is Jesse. And who is Jesse? Every Jew knows that Jesse is **the father of King David and the line of kings of Israel that came from his sons**. Isaiah is referring to the promise that God made to David which is reiterated over and over again in Scripture that he would NEVER lack a man to sit on the throne, that his line, his dynasty, would continue forever. However:

b. despite God's promise, the line of Davidic kings in Israel was cut off Because of the awful sins of Israel, becoming filled with idolatry and immorality and covered with the blood of innocent victims, Jesse's tree was cut down! Babylon came and conquered Judah and that was the end of kings from David's line ruling on his throne. Jesse's line was left looking like a dead, lifeless stump in the ground. Yet here through Isaiah:

c. God promises that He will "sprout" a new BRANCH from this line A shoot will grow out of that same root and one day become a branch, a King who will rule on David's throne. And who is that?

2. this BRANCH is the Messiah, Jesus, who will one day rule as King (11:2) Notice that this branch is a *him*, a person, a man, the new King who will sprout from Jesse's line and fulfill the promise. And Isaiah says literally in the Hebrew that:

a. the Spirit of the Lord will settle and remain upon Him When you hear that, you can't help thinking about what happened at Jesus' baptism. As He was coming up out of the water the Spirit of God appeared and descended upon Him in the form of a dove, came to rest upon Him and evidently sort of "merged" into Him. And John the Baptist testified, *...he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'* - Jn. 1:33. That is, "This is the Messiah, My Son, in whom I am well pleased." as God's voice from heaven said. And this fullness of the Spirit without measure, Isaiah describes with three pairs of complimentary characteristics. The New English Translation nicely combines them into three thoughts. First:

(1) it will give Him extraordinary wisdom He will rule with wisdom greater than Solomon or any of the Davidic kings or any human being. He will rule with the very wisdom of God Himself! Second:

(2) it will provide Him with the ability to execute plans The earthly kings made all kinds of plans on their own, plans that failed. He will not only have wisdom to know what to do and make godly plans, but will have the power and might to carry out what He plans to do! And third:

(3) it will produce in Him absolute loyalty to the Lord The earthly kings were fickle; even the best of them failed the Lord and many forsook Him altogether. But He will know (and be one with) God the Father and be absolutely loyal to Him. Jesus said, *I always do what pleases Him!* And therefore, when Jesus reigns:

b. He will reign as an absolutely Righteous King (11:3-5) Now when are we talking about? It's clear that we're now talking about the second coming of Jesus described in Rev. 19, where, like here, the wicked of the earth are slain simply with a word going out of his mouth. When He comes and sets up His Kingdom, He will be a completely righteous King! He will not take bribes or tolerate corruption like human kings. He will not be deceived by outward appearances or by tearfully told stories as we so often are. He will know what is actually true and will do what is completely just and fair. So many human rulers take advantage of the poor because they are powerless but He will treat everyone the same and be completely just in His dealings.

Now the next verses are the ones we are thoroughly familiar with and they go on to describe:

II. The Glorious Reign Of The BRANCH which we call **the Millennial Kingdom**. Last week I shared a diagram of the end times with you, if you'd like to refer to it. When Jesus returns to earth, He will destroy the wicked, set up His Kingdom and rule on the earth for 1000 years before creating new heavens and a new earth that last forever. But when He rules as King over this world things will be different! Isaiah says:

1. there will no longer be violence and destruction (11:6-9a) What a beautiful description! Last week in chapter 2 we saw that the human race will be completely at peace, that the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and never learn war any more. Here we see the same transformation in the animal world. Today all over the world wolves eat lambs, leopards eat goats, lions eat cattle and cobras bite and kill people. Go to Africa or India and you will see the reality of how the local people fear all these things. But when Jesus rules the world, the very nature of the animal kingdom will be changed. It will revert to the way it was in the beginning before Adam fell and sin entered the world. Even the animals will not hurt and destroy one another, nor will they harm people any longer. The world will become a place of complete safety. Why? Look at **(11:9b)**:

2. the knowledge of the Lord will completely pervade the earth, the way that the waters of the sea fill every trench and crack and cave and fissure of the ocean floor. There is nothing on the bottom they do not fill and there is no part of the earth's surface, no creature that lives upon it, that will not be transformed by Jesus' powerful Presence in that glorious day! And in that day:

3. the BRANCH, King Jesus, will be sought out by all the peoples of earth (11:10) As we saw last week, all the nations of the earth will stream up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord and their King, Jesus. Now quickly turn back with me to Chapter 4 where we see:

III. The Glorious Capital Of The BRANCH, that is, Zion or Jerusalem. God is not only not done with the kingly line of David; He is not done with His people Israel **(4:2)**. In the Kingdom:

1. the BRANCH, King Jesus, will be the glory and pride of His people Israel At His first coming they rejected and crucified Him. At His second coming their hearts will be changed and they will receive Him as their Messiah and King and He will become their glory and pride. Isaiah says:

2. His people Israel will be cleansed from the filth of their past (4:3-4) Those who believe and survive and are recorded for eternal life will become His holy people once again. Their past will be washed away; they will once more occupy a special place in His rule of the earth. And Isaiah says:

3. Zion, the place of His dwelling will be covered by a Divine canopy (4:5-6) Just as God sheltered the Israelites in the desert in Moses' day with a pillar of cloud by day to shade them and a pillar of fire by night to warm them, so over the whole of Mt. Zion where Jerusalem stands and where the world will come to worship God, His glory cloud will be a shade by day and a shining fire by night; it will be the greatest wonder in all the world!

So, what do I want you to get out of all this? First, I want you to realize that:

1) These things are real! Please don't disregard them as symbolic pictures of a utopian world that we can somehow create ourselves if we just try hard enough. The Old Testament Jews always believed that Messiah would one day come and literally rule the world. The church has always believed that Jesus would one day come again and rule the world. Jesus Himself said He would come again and have a Kingdom! God has declared it plainly in His Word and He

can't lie! So these things are real! One day Jesus WILL come and we should not only look forward to that day, but devote our lives to sharing the Gospel with as many people as we can while there is still opportunity! Secondly, I want you to realize that:

2) God is not done with Israel. As Paul put it in *Rom. 11:2, 25-26*, *God has not rejected his people.... Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"*. In this age Israel has been set aside, cut off and left like a stump in the earth. Down through history she has been hated by the other nations of earth and its fashionable to hate her today. But there's life in the stump! When the great harvest of all the nations has been gathered in and Jesus returns, many Jewish people will believe and she will become His people once again and the center of His rule on earth. So don't despise Israel; pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the salvation of many of the Jewish people now!

Years ago, Mark Kagan testified that while he was on a visit to the Holy Land, he and some other Christians gathered together in an upper room within the city wall of Jerusalem, to remember Christ's sacrifice and death. Then after the meeting was over, he and another friend went out to go to the Mount of Olives. As they passed along, they caught up with a Jewish man who said that he also was going to the Mount of Olives. "We orthodox Jews," he said, "as we watch the things that are happening in the world, cannot come to any other conclusion than that the Messiah's coming must be near at hand. Zechariah says that on that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, and I am going there every day so that I may be ready to give Him a welcome." [Christian Herald.] Friends, if an orthodox Jew can so believe that Messiah is coming and look so earnestly for it, even though he doesn't yet realize that his Messiah is Jesus, should not we who KNOW Jesus believe His words are true, devote our lives to His service and look for His coming?!

Insights From Isaiah

Here Am I, Send Me - Ch. 6

As we continue to unearth insights from the book of Isaiah, chapter 6 is one of the most well-known portions of the book and it is foundational to everything else in Isaiah's ministry because in it we have recorded for us:

I. Isaiah's Call To Service Verse 1 tells us that it happened during the year in which King Uzziah died, which was 739 BC. Why it is placed here, instead of as chapter 1, we can only speculate, but there is little doubt that this experience that Isaiah had launched his 60 plus years of ministry. Now in that year Isaiah had a life-transforming:

1. his vision of God (1-4) Note that this is a vision, like John saw in Revelation or those that Daniel saw. It's much like a dream except Isaiah was awake and it contains a mixture of earthly and heavenly realities. In it, he sees the interior of the earthly Temple of God, but apparently it has no roof and he sees the Lord above it. Verse 1 says:

a. He was high and lifted up It's as though above the Temple he sees directly into heaven and the heavenly realities that exist there. And the first thing he sees is a throne, just like John did when He was caught up to heaven in His vision in Rev. 4. It is the throne of the universe, the throne from which everything that exists is ruled. And, like John, he sees Someone sitting on that throne. Who is it? Isaiah calls Him *the Lord* (small letters), the Master, the King. Verse 3 calls Him *Jehovah Sabaoth*, Jehovah of Hosts, of Armies. But in his Gospel, John quotes from later verses of Isaiah 6 and says, *Isaiah said these things because he saw his [i.e., Jesus'] glory and spoke of him.* - **John 12:41.** Isaiah sees Jesus in all His glory, shining and radiant, sitting on His Throne in heaven! When John saw Him in Rev. 1, He was *...clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.* Isaiah says the train of His robe was so long that it flowed down into the earthly Temple and so huge that it filled the whole thing! In verse 2 Isaiah noticed that:

b. He was worshipped by angels, that are called here *seraphim*, which means *burning ones*. He doesn't say how many there are, but they too are shining with glory above His throne. Their wings humbly cover their faces and their feet, yet they are not shy. Verse 3 says that with their mouths:

c. His holiness was declared One of the seraphs chants, *Holy, Holy, Holy!* In Hebrew, *Qadosh, Qadosh, Qadosh! Yahweh Sabaoth!* Then I'm assuming the next one picks it up and then the next, growing louder and louder until, as verse 4 says:

d. the very foundations of the Temple shook, not in reality but in Isaiah's vision. The whole building shook and trembled at the presence of God.

Now try and picture this scene, the brilliance of God's glory shining, the shining angels above Him, the ear-shattering proclamation of how holy He is, incense rising before Him. What would your reaction be? When John saw Jesus in heaven, he fell at His feet as though dead and had to be revived! When Isaiah saw the reality of who His God really was:

2. his view of himself was brought sharply into focus (5):

a. his heart was deeply struck by the holiness of God In his vision, he blurted out, in Hebrew, *Oy!* Yiddish still retains that expression in *Oy Veh!* It means, “Oh, woe!” It’s a passionate cry of grief or despair. He says, *I am undone, lost...* “I’m going to die, I’ve seen the King, God Himself, whom no man can see and live!” And the reason that he says it is that when he grasped the awesome purity and holiness of God as more than a doctrine, when he actually saw and felt how holy God is:

b. he immediately became conscious of his own sinfulness *I am a man of unclean lips!* “I can’t stand before Him; I am a sinful man; I have offended His glory; I deserve to die!” And notice that He mentions his lips, his speech. It wasn’t that he wasn’t sinful in his actions or thoughts, but in this vision, God is about to call him to speak on His behalf, so his thoughts in the vision are about his own mouth and how unfit it is to declare God’s holiness like the angels do, how many times his mouth has said wrong things, proud things, angry things, false things. It could never be used to declare God’s glory! And notice that:

c. he was also acutely aware of the sinfulness of his people They too had unclean lips; they were not worthy to worship the Lord or to praise Him with their mouths. They were polluted and defiled and could not enter His presence. They were lost too!

But in the midst of this crushing moment of grief, God gave Isaiah a powerful:

3. his experience of grace (6-7) He sees there in heaven an altar of incense just like the one in the earthly Temple and one of the seraphim takes a pair of tongs and picks up a burning coal from the holy altar, comes to him and touches Isaiah’s lips with it. Did it burn him? No, it purified him! The angel tells him that:

a. his guilt was completely taken away and he was made holy He was cleansed! All of his sins were atoned for and they were gone! He was no longer unclean and about to die in the presence of a holy God; He was now clean and able to stand in His Presence! And how did that happen? Not by anything that Isaiah did. Not by sorrow on his part:

b. it was provided by God from the sacrificial altar Jesus said the altar makes the gift offered on it holy. The altar is holy because it is a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus Himself which purified us from our sins once for all forever! Isaiah couldn’t cleanse himself, couldn’t make himself pure enough to stand before or to serve God, but in grace God purified and took away all his sins!

Now imagine Isaiah’s response! After being certain of his own death because of sin a moment before, now imagine his tremendous joy and relief at being freed from sin, at passing from death to life. Imagine his thankfulness and gratefulness to God at sparing him from what he deserved and making him what he could never be, holy in God’s own sight! Imagine the tears of joy running down his face! And now you’re ready to understand:

II. Isaiah’s Response To The Call (8) When he hears God ask for a volunteer, for someone to send in His service, Isaiah instantly and without hesitation shouts, *Here! Send Me!* You see:

1. the grace extended to him created a willingness to serve He is so profoundly grateful to God for cleansing him that it changes him. He doesn’t even ask what he’s volunteering for! It doesn’t matter! “I’ll do anything the King needs! I’m at His disposal! I’ll go!” Because of grace:

2. he eagerly volunteered to serve God (as we find out in the rest of the chapter) **by declaring His message** God says, *Go and tell this people...* He sends him to go and be a prophet to His people, to declare God’s message to them. He goes on to tell him that they won’t listen, that he’s going to preach to them over and over and it won’t make a difference; they’ll remain stubborn and unyielding and unhearing. And that this will go on until the land is taken into captivity, basically until after he dies! But that doesn’t stop Isaiah. He doesn’t back out of his commitment. He is willing to go anywhere and do anything the Lord wants; in fact, he is eager to do it because of God’s grace that saved him.

Now I’m guessing you can see where this is heading. Isaiah’s call is pretty similar to:

III. The Call That Jesus Gives Us To Make Disciples Look with me at **Mt. 28:17-20**. There Jesus is, high and lifted up in verse 18. He’s the King, the Lord of Hosts seated on the Throne of the universe who has all authority in heaven and earth! 17 says that when they saw Him, they worshipped Him; they fell down on their faces at His feet! They were deeply impacted just as Isaiah was. And then He gave them an assignment just like He did Isaiah, *Go and make disciples of all the peoples of the earth...* It was largely a verbal assignment, a speaking assignment, as He had put the same command to them earlier in **Mk. 16:15**, where *...he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”* And that commission was not meant only for the eleven disciples; it was given through them to those who would afterward believe on Him through their word. It is given to every believer in Christ, every follower of His. “Go and tell the whole world about Me, about how I have died for them and how I want to save them. Start right where you live, in your Jerusalem and go beyond that to the nearby regions and keep going further and further until you reach the very ends of the earth!” And just like in Isaiah’s day, God is looking for volunteers. He does not force us to be His witnesses. He expects us to respond, to step up, to say with Isaiah, “Here am I, send me!” Why?

1. we must respond based on the absolute authority of who He is He is the Lord, high and lifted up, seated on the throne of the universe, the Lord of Hosts who owns and controls all things, before whom we should bow down and say, "Yes Lord, I hear and obey!" But Jesus doesn't want it to be only sheer obedience. Like Isaiah:

2. our hearts should be touched because of the grace and mercy we've received WE were lost and undone! We were to be banished from His holy Presence forever in a pit of flames and we deserved it. We not only had unclean lips; we had unclean hearts and minds and hands and feet! Everything about us was unclean and unfit for His holy Presence! *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.* - Eph. 2:4-5. *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* - Col. 1:13-14. Hallelujah! What grace, what mercy, what cleansing we have been given, when we didn't deserve any of it. So, when He calls, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?":

3. we ought to eagerly volunteer to serve His cause in any way He desires Like Isaiah, we ought to jump up waving our hand like a kid who knows the answer in Math class and say, "Here! Here! Here I am! Choose me! Send me!"

This week I read a story in the Asia Harvest October (2019) newsletter about a Chinese man named Huang. Huang first believed the gospel when he was in his forties. Years later, he developed painful boils on his feet which caused him great agony and prevented him from working. Locals gave him the nickname, 'Lame Huang.' In his desperation, Huang cried out to Jesus for healing. A short time later he received a vivid dream, in which the Lord told him: "You must truly believe in Me, and I will heal you. You must witness for Me." In his dream, Huang thanked Jesus for the help he would receive and promised that once he could walk again, he would share the gospel widely. Huang said the Lord told him: "A verbal promise is not enough. You must write a contract of indenture by which you offer yourself up as My servant." Huang had only a primary school education and didn't know what a contract of indenture was or how to write one. He again cried out for God's mercy and help, and received another dream, in which the Lord showed him how to word the contract. Huang composed the following document: "I, Huang Detang, sign this indenture by which I offer myself up forever. Because of my own uselessness, I have boils on my feet. They are very painful and I have nowhere to turn. I can only ask my gracious Savior, my Lord Jesus, to be merciful to me, a great sinner. I now receive the precious Blood of the Lord as the ransom price which has redeemed me from death to life, and I know that the Lord will heal my feet, take my soul to the heavenly kingdom forever, and I will become a child of God with honor and glory. Because I have nothing to repay the grace of God, I will most gladly dedicate my body and soul to Him. After my dedication, I am totally at the disposal of the Lord. No matter where I am sent, I will go. Whether it is to the east, south, west or north, whether it is climbing mountains or crossing seas, cold or hot, whether I am hungry or thirsty, or if I suffer want and persecution, I will follow the Lord to the end and not be disheartened. No one in my family or among relatives and friends will be able to pose any obstacles or cause me to go back on my promise. This indenture is the common wish of both parties and neither of them raises any objection. I sign it as evidence of my willingness. Huang Detang." A short time after signing his unique contract with God, the boils on Huang's feet disappeared and he was able to walk freely again. Over the years, each of the points in Huang's solemn contract was sorely tested, as God took Huang at his word and stretched his faith by sending him on dangerous adventures that resulted in thousands of people hearing the gospel. From the 1950s to the 1970s he ministered during the darkest days of Communist persecution, and was arrested and tortured by the authorities on several occasions. Huang's ministry was characterized by many instances of God prompting him to do things that made no rational sense, but with his indenture in mind, Huang obeyed the guidance of the Holy Spirit and remained true to his pledge, even when it resulted in great personal hardship. [For instance, He was told to love a leper, give him his only jacket and lead him to Christ.] Once the Lord directed him to share the gospel and demonstrate God's love to a disheveled prostitute, who was near death from syphilis. Huang shared the gospel and provided her with food and clothing. The ladies in the local church, however, did not want to stoop so low as to help such a wretched person, but due to God's love demonstrated by Huang, the woman died a short time later as a follower of Jesus. Huang continued witnessing for his Lord right up to his death in 1981, at the age of 96. Few people outside his home region in Zhejiang have ever heard of 'Lame Huang,' but in heaven he is known as the man who kept his contract with God. [\[https://asiaharvest.org/zhejiang-the-jerusalem-of-china/\]](https://asiaharvest.org/zhejiang-the-jerusalem-of-china/) Now I don't know what crazy things God may send you to do. He may want you to go live overseas among an unreached people as a missionary. He may want you to go teach refugee immigrants at Grow ESL in northeast Philadelphia. He may want you to go with Victory Outreach to invite crack addicts to a recovery home. He may want to send you to Greece or India with one of our teams. Or he may want to send you into your neighborhood to invite people to send their children to Pioneer Clubs. What He sends you to do doesn't matter. The grace shown to you is so great that whatever difficulty you may suffer pales into insignificance in comparison. The only question is, Are you willing to sign the contract like Huang Detang? Are you willing to say with the prophet Isaiah, "Here am I, send me!"

Insights From Isaiah Immanuel - Ch. 7

Chapters 7 and 9 of Isaiah are two of our favorite Scriptures at Christmas time. What you may not realize is that the beautiful prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 comes to us because of:

I. The Terrifying Problem That King Ahaz of Judah Faced In 734 BC Let me just summarize it briefly. We read in verses (1-2) that two enemy kings to the north of him:

1. Kings Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel allied against him Ahaz knew he had no hope of withstanding an invasion. His heart and the hearts of his people shook in fear like trees in the wind! Now Ahaz was NOT a godly king and the people were idolatrous, but God sent Isaiah the prophet to him anyway and:

2. through Isaiah God made a promise to Ahaz He said plainly in verse (7) that:

a. they would not succeed in their plan to conquer Judah He said, "It WILL not happen!" and then He added a very specific prophecy that:

b. within 65 years Israel would be shattered as a people (8) However, that was still pretty far in the future to provide any immediate reassurance, so God went even further. He then offered Ahaz the opportunity to ask for any sign he wanted but Ahaz refused, so:

2. through Isaiah God gave a sign to Ahaz anyway. And that brings us to our beloved verse (14). God declared that:

a. a virgin would marry and bear a child named Immanuel Evidently this young lady would have been someone that Ahaz knew, perhaps in his court or his own family. He would have understood these words in the most natural sense, that some young woman who was at the moment unmarried would marry, become pregnant, have a son and name him Immanuel and through the meaning of the child's name, Ahaz would realize that "God is with us!" in this awful trouble. But then God adds this in (15-16). He says that:

b. before the child reached the age of discernment, that is, around 2 years old or so, **the enemy land would be destroyed.**

Now we know from history that:

II. This Prophecy Was Directly Fulfilled In Isaiah's Day We don't know anything about who the woman or the child named Immanuel might have been, but we do know that, whoever he was, before he could have been even two years old:

1. both enemy kings died! The King of Assyria destroyed Damascus, the capital of Syria, **two years later in 732 BC** and put Rezin to death. And in that same year Pekah, King of Israel, was assassinated. What a specific fulfillment of God's Word! And then God fulfilled His first promise:

2. Israel was carried off by Assyria in 722 BC and then was repopulated with foreigners by yet another king of Assyria in 669 BC. Do the math! That's exactly 65 years later, just as God had said! From that point the inhabitants of what was the northern kingdom became a mixed race, despised by the Jews and we meet them in Jesus' day as the Samaritans.

How great to see that God keeps His Word! But what really interests us is that:

III. This Prophecy Was Ultimately Fulfilled In Jesus Look with me at **Mt. 1:20-23**. Isaiah's words have a double fulfillment. They were fulfilled immediately in Ahaz' day, but Matthew tells us that they ultimately point to the birth of Jesus and find their greatest fulfillment in Him. And how were they fulfilled? First of all:

1. Jesus was literally born to a virgin You know Mary's words in **Lk. 1:31, 34-35**, *How will this be, since I am a virgin?* and Gabriel tells her the Holy Spirit would do a supernatural miracle never seen before nor since, that she would conceive and become pregnant completely without a man - totally UNlike the maiden in Isaiah's time. And, UNlike the child born back then who was merely named Immanuel as a sign of assurance of God's presence:

2. Jesus literally WAS Immanuel. It was not His name, but His person; He WAS **God with us** in a human body! Therefore:

a. we reject any teaching that He is less than God and there is a lot of that all around us! It is not only the cults like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons and the New Church who teach that. That view has crept into liberal main-line Protestant churches and it is certainly the view of the secular world around us. To them Jesus was just a great religious leader. But **Col. 2:8-9** warns us clearly, *Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body* - NLT. God Himself came to be with us in a body as one of us, Immanuel! And what does that mean to us? First:

b. we rejoice because He revealed the Father to us John writes, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.* - **Jn. 1:1,14, 18**. God is a glorious spiritual being. Humans can't see Him in all the fullness of His glory, so Jesus who is fully God became one of us, a real human being that we could see with our eyes and touch with our hands and talk with face to face. Why? So we could KNOW God in

the way human beings know! When Philip asked Jesus, *Show us the Father...*, Jesus replied, *Whoever has seen ME has seen the Father!* What a privilege we have that the Almighty God of the universe is not merely some high and holy distant far-off Being, but He is Immanuel; GOD who came to us in a body so we could know Him! Second:

c. we are encouraged because He became one of us The writer of Hebrews says, *Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying... This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.* - **Heb. 2:14-15, 4:15-16.** He had to become one of us in order to save us by dying for our sins. But that also means that He experienced everything that we experience, every difficulty we suffer, every temptation we experience. So, we can come to Him now in prayer with all our burdens and even our failings and He understands! Because He is Immanuel, one of US! Last:

d. we are comforted because He is always with us Jesus Himself promised, *...be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* - **Mt. 28:20.** He is not the God who WAS with us 2000 years ago; He's the God who IS WITH us right now and always. His very Spirit has been given to each of us who believes and He is always IN us wherever and whenever we go. He is Immanuel to us personally, right now, today!

Think of it: GOD..WITH..US! In 1873 a Belgian priest by the name of Joseph Damien was sent to minister to lepers in Hawaii. As soon as he arrived on Molokai, he began trying to build friendships with the residents of the leper colony, but they rejected him. He poured himself into the ministry, building a small chapel and holding worship services, but hardly anyone came. After 12 long years, he gave up. As he was standing on the pier about to board the ship that would take him back to Belgium, he looked down at his hands and saw tiny white spots. He knew they could mean only one thing; he had contracted leprosy. So instead of going home, he returned to his work in the leper colony. The news of the missionary's disease spread through the community within hours, and soon the lepers --hundreds of them--had gathered outside his hut. They understood his pain and despair. The following Sunday when Damien arrived at the chapel, the small building was filled to overflowing. It was the beginning of a long and fruitful ministry. What made the difference? Now the lepers knew that he understood their condition. There was no question about whether he cared or not because he became one of them. [Adapted from *Moments for Pastors* by Robert Strand. New Leaf Press, 1994. Day 11.] Friends, Immanuel means that in Jesus God Himself became one of us. That shows just how deeply He cares for us. And it guarantees His presence WITH us. Always!

Insights From Isaiah

For To Us A Child Is Born - Ch. 9

Perhaps the most well-known passage in Isaiah that we remember, and one that we love to read at Christmas time, comes from chapter 9:6-7. And the reason I think we remember it so well is likely that we have heard over and over again that famous chorus from Handel's Messiah, "For Unto Us A Child Is Born". I can hear the violin section introducing it right now and the sopranos starting to sing! And we would be remiss in our study of Isaiah to skip over it, so today let's take a deeper look at the first half of chapter 9. In it God makes two very great promises that should will mean a lot to us if we take them to heart. The first is:

I. A Great Promise Concerning Israel (1-5) Read (1-2). He promises that Israel:

1. they will see a great Light when Messiah comes To put the passage in context, it is tied back to chapter 8 where God predicts the coming invasion by Assyria in which the northern Kingdom of Israel would be carried away into captivity in 722 BC. Later on, foreigners, Gentiles, were brought in and mixed with the local population. So, Isaiah is writing as though all that has already happened. He tells us that:

a. northern Israel had been in great darkness They had been shattered as a people. Any that were left lived dismal lives in fear with no hope for the future. Their world was dark. Plus, they were in great spiritual darkness. They had long worshipped idols and now the new Assyrian gods were mixed in with that, so they had no spiritual light among them anymore and their sad situation went on and on. But God promises that these people in the north who would walk in darkness for six centuries would see a great light and He says:

b. this great light will shine in the region of Galilee And we know how that light shined and that promise was fulfilled, **through Jesus!** Look with me at **Mt. 4:13-16.** Jesus grew up in Nazareth in Galilee and lived there His first 30 years. When He began His ministry, He did not go to Jerusalem the capital, but spent more than 80 percent of his time in Galilee according to one source. 25 of His recorded miracles were performed in Galilee and it was there that He taught the great crowds of thousands on several occasions and gave the Sermon on the Mount. And Matthew is telling us that the fact that Jesus focused His ministry in Galilee fulfills the promise of God through Isaiah

and proves He is the Messiah! But the joy they would experience during Christ's ministry there is not all that is in view. God further promises that:

2. they will experience great joy when Messiah comes to rule (3-5) Have you ever stood at a great distance and looked at a mountain range? From far away it appears like all the peaks you see are in one line at the same distance. But when you draw near, you see that one mountain actually stands behind the other and in between there is a large valley that you didn't know about from the distance. That's how Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets saw the coming of the Messiah. They saw from a distance and didn't realize that Messiah would actually come twice and that there would be this huge gap of the church age in between His comings. That's why you find prophecies of Christ's first coming mixed with those of His coming in glory and that's what you have here. Now Isaiah is talking about the great joy Israel will have when Jesus, their Messiah, comes to set up His Kingdom on the earth. In one sense, even though Jesus has come and died, the whole world is still in darkness. Billions are steeped in the spiritual darkness of Islam and Hinduism and just plain unbelief. Wars abound around the globe bringing terror and poverty. Sex trafficking, slavery, child labor, greed, abuse of power, hatred and genocide fill the earth. Viewed as a whole you have the words of **1 Jn. 5:19**, *...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one*. It has no hope; there is nothing to change it, nothing to save the race from destroying itself. The world itself stands in the shadow of death! But one day Jesus, the great Light of the World will come again and shine over all the earth! He will come and set up His Kingdom of righteousness and His people, not only believing Israel, but we too, will experience great joy! And Isaiah says:

a. it will be like the joy over a good harvest We have no idea what it's like to be an agricultural society, to be a farmer who subsists on the crops his land produces. He has to stretch his harvest out over a whole year and make it last until the next year's crop is ready to harvest and by that time the remaining stores of food can be growing pretty thin. So, he nurses a desperate hope that the harvest will be abundant this year and when it is, there is tremendous rejoicing and celebrating. That's what it will be like when Jesus comes! Further he says that:

b. it will be like the joy over a great victory in battle and specifically he mentions it will be **like the defeat of Midian by Gideon and his 300!** You remember the story in Judges of how Israel lived in the darkness of oppression by the Midianites for seven long years, having all their crops ruined by them and living in fear and abject poverty. And then God raised up Gideon and 300 brave men with him and in one decisive battle they defeated the Midianites and drove them off and the land had peace and rest for 40 years! Oh, what joy there must have been in that day as Israel celebrated their release! Their whole world was changed! Can you imagine their dancing and shouting and celebrating as their darkness was lifted? That's how it will be when Jesus comes! Hallelujah! And all that joy:

c. it will be because oppression is ended and peace has come The trampling boots and the bloodstained garments of the warriors will all be burned as fuel! As we read in chapter 2, *He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore*. At last, there will be peace on earth during Jesus' Millennial Kingdom!

A missionary who taught at West African Bible College Students was challenged by one of his students. "Reverend, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from heaven with a loud command. I would like to know what that command will be." He writes, "I wanted to leave the question unanswered, to tell him that we must not go past what Scripture has revealed, but my mind wandered to an encounter I had earlier in the day with a refugee from the Liberian civil war. The man, a high school principal, told me how he was apprehended by a two-man death squad. After several hours of terror, as the men described how they would torture and kill him, he narrowly escaped. After hiding in the bush for two days, he was able to find his family and escape to a neighboring country. The escape cost him dearly: two of his children lost their lives. The stark cruelty unleashed on an unsuspecting, undeserving population had touched me deeply. I also saw flashbacks of the beggars that I pass each morning on my way to the office. Every day I see how poverty destroys dignity, robs men of the best of what it means to be human, and sometimes substitutes the worst of what it means to be an animal. I am haunted by the vacant eyes of people who have lost all hope." The student repeated, "Reverend, you have not given me an answer. What will he say?" " "Enough," " I said "He will shout, `Enough!' when he returns." A look of surprise opened the face of the student. "What do you mean, enough?" "Enough suffering. Enough starvation. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough lives trapped in hopelessness. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time. Enough!" [Gregory L. Fisher in Leadership - Vol. 12, #4]. Oh, what tremendous joy there will be when Jesus comes and says, "Enough of this darkness! Now light, righteousness and peace will fill the earth! And it will!" Hallelujah! Now God makes a second promise through Isaiah:

II. A Great Promise Concerning The Messiah, concerning Jesus! (6-7) These are the words with which we're so familiar but we don't just want to be able to repeat them; we want to understand what God is saying to us. First of all, the LORD says that:

1. He will be born a Child, a Son given to Israel Jesus was born as a child; He didn't just magically appear on the scene as a man! What a small and a humble beginning for a great light which would light the world. God's light came into the world in the form of a baby born in a stable, a baby who was the Son of God. But this little baby grew up and

died on a cross for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and is seated at the Father's right hand and one day:

2. He will reign over God's Kingdom on earth When He comes again, this Son who is given will be King and He will reign on David's throne, not merely over Israel, but over the whole earth! The government of the world will be the royal robe draped upon His shoulders. And in that day:

3. He will have four titles by which He will be called and each one of them reveals something about Him that will not only be a blessing then, but He is all these things to us right now, today! First of all, Jesus is our:

a. Wonderful Counselor The word *wonderful* in Hebrew means *miraculous*; it tells us that **He has Divine wisdom**, the all-knowing wisdom of God to guide us. **28:29** says of the LORD, *...he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom*. If you need guidance, if you need direction, if you have a problem and don't know what to do, listen! You have a Wonderful Counselor in Jesus who KNOWS what you should do! Ask Him and then listen for Him to guide you, but be willing to do whatever He shows you! Second, Jesus is our:

b. Mighty God He is *El Gibbor*! That's a title given to the LORD throughout the Old Testament. **Deut. 10:17** says, *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God...* But Isaiah tells us that this Child who is born as a man is really *El Gibbor*, the Mighty God Himself in human flesh. So, our **Jesus has omnipotent power as God**. There is nothing that He cannot do if it is His will. There is no difficulty He can't solve, no need He can't provide, no situation from which He can't rescue. With Him, nothing is impossible! Third, Jesus is our:

c. Everlasting Father This does not mean that within the Trinity the Son is identical with the Father. The understanding of the Trinity is not developed in the Old Testament, only hinted at. Rather, remember what we read about Jesus in **53:10**? *...when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring...* WE are His spiritual offspring; we are His children and in that sense, He is our father who gave us new birth and we say to Him the words of **Is. 63:16**, *For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name*. And as a Father, **He eternally cares for His people**. Jesus will never stop caring for us, His children! He will never stop loving us, His children! He will never abandon us, His children! Oh, when you're feeling all alone in life, remember that in Jesus you have a father who loves you so much that He came to earth for you and died for you and now He will be WITH you forever! And finally, Jesus is our:

d. Prince Of Peace, As the Ruler of All, **He will bring about permanent peace** in three ways that I can think of. First:

(1) He will bring peace between man and God As **Rom. 5:1** says, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*. The Bible says we were enemies of God through our sin, that each of us deserves punishment and destruction for the evil we have done. But when we believed, our sin was pardoned; we were justified, forgiven, so that now we have a permanent standing of peace with God. And it was Jesus that gave us that peace! Listen, if you don't know Jesus as your Savior, if you've never repented of your sins and cried out to Christ to save you, you NEED peace with God and the only way to get it is through the Prince of Peace, Jesus! Cry out to Him today and this peace will be yours forever! Second: **Is. 26:3** says:

(2) He will bring peace to the hearts of those who trust Him, *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you*. Are you worried about things all the time? Are you, like Martha, anxious for many things? If you will trust in Him and simply place your needs and your worries in His hands and leave them there, our Prince of Peace will give you the very peace that God Himself has, a peace that passes all human understanding! But what's really in view here is that when He comes again, Jesus:

(3) He will bring peace to the entire world Right after God predicts the triumphal entry, saying to Israel that her King would come to her humbly, riding on a donkey, the very next verse, **Zech. 9:10**, says, *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth*. Listen friends, there is coming a day, a Millennium, when the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever! Back to Handel again, aren't we? In verse 7 God promises that:

4. He will establish an eternal Kingdom that will never end, never mind the details, but ultimately there will be new heavens and a new earth in which dwells righteousness. Peter says that's what we're waiting for! And **Is. 66:22** declares *...the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD....* It will last forever

more, eternally. Oh, it sounds too good to be true! How can such a thing ever be? How can I know that He will do this? Look at the end of verse 7:

5. the LORD's own passion and power will bring this about God did not create this world, He did not create the human race, to be in perpetual darkness. He created it to be a Kingdom of light. He created people to know Him and worship Him and give Him glory and you can bet that one day He will actually make it happen. His own righteous passion to see that He is glorified the way that He should be will not rest until He brings it to pass! A world full of light is as sure as God Himself! He CANNOT fail to do what He has committed Himself to do!

This Christmas, let's not only celebrate the beginning of the story; let's also celebrate the END of the story! And to help you, I'm going to let Travis Cottrell tell it to you in song. If you know it, feel free to sing and worship with him. You can hear it here: <https://youtu.be/wMHXJsHvROU>.

Insights From Isaiah

Woe To Those Who Go Down To Egypt - Ch. 31

We are going through the Book of Isaiah together choosing to unearth various insights from different portions of it. Today we pause to examine chapter 31. In each of the chapters we've considered, I've tried to leave you with a key phrase from Isaiah's words that drives home the lesson from that chapter and today's key phrase is *Woe to those who go down to Egypt!* Say it with me. Now in order to understand what that means or what this chapter is about, first you have to understand:

I. The Setting Of Isaiah's Message which is found in **2 Kings 18**, if you'll turn there with me. Now:

1. Hezekiah was a very godly king of Judah (5-7a) He was one of the best Judah ever had. He never fell into idolatry; he was always loyal to the Lord. He clung to Him tenaciously and kept what God had commanded in the Law of Moses. And so, God blessed him in everything he did. In verse 8 we read how he defeated the Philistines. In everything he did, he seemed to prosper. But there is a grave danger in that. When God really blesses us, when we have success upon success upon success, it can go to our heads. We start to think that we can do anything, that we'll never fail. So, we begin to trust in ourselves and our abilities. Really, it's a form of pride that develops in us and it seems to have developed in Hezekiah:

2. his successes emboldened him to rebel against the King of Assyria (7b) Now at this point in history, Assyria is the major power, the major empire in this entire part of the world. Nobody seems to be able to stand up against them or defeat them. Hezekiah has thus far kept them off his back by paying them tribute as a subject state, like the king of Israel had. But now, a few years into his reign, he decided to rebel, to refuse to pay the tribute and recognize the authority of the King of Assyria over him. Well, the King of Assyria did not take this lightly **(11)**. He invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and after besieging their capital for 3 years:

3. Assyria carried Israel away into captivity and then invaded Judah (13) Now Hezekiah realized the depth of the trouble he got himself into. The Assyrian army was the largest on earth in its day and before it the army of little Judah would seem like two flocks of helpless goats. Plus, the Assyrians had a reputation for stark cruelty. When they conquered a region or a city, they slaughtered its inhabitants mercilessly and inflicted cruel tortures upon them. Hezekiah panicked and his first response was this **(14-16)**:

a. Hezekiah tried to buy his way out of trouble unsuccessfully He said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I was wrong! I should never have opposed you! Please spare me; I'll pay whatever you demand!" So, the King of Assyria demands a huge amount, 11 tons of silver and one ton of gold. I don't know how much that is worth today but you're talking millions, a sum so large that the royal treasury doesn't contain it, and Hezekiah has to raid the Temple treasury and even strip all the gold off its doors and doorposts! But the King of Assyria wasn't actually satisfied with that and continued his conquest of the cities of Judah so Hezekiah became even more desperate:

b. he secretly tried to form an alliance with Egypt The writer of Kings doesn't tell us about that, but Isaiah does. Leave a hand there and look with me at **Is. 30:1-5**. Evidently Hezekiah secretly dispatched some envoys to travel through the southern desert of Judah, away from the eyes of the Assyrians, down to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to try to enlist his help as an ally against Assyria, to get the second biggest army in the region to come and rescue him and that's what chapters 30 and 31 are about. But before we judge Hezekiah too harshly, let's make some:

4. application to ourselves: *When we are in dire circumstances our first inclination is what?* When we lose our job, when we can't pay our bills, when we find that we or a loved one has cancer, when some person hurts us or abandons us, just like Hezekiah, immediately we want:

a. to find some THING that can protect us and often that thing is money, or if we can't get money, then at least credit! We become occupied with, "How can I get money? Money will pay these bills, money will pay for this treatment, money will take care of me. If I can only get money..." And, like Hezekiah we want:

b. to find some ONE that can protect us We run to our relatives to ask for help. We run to our friends. We run to people that have means or have power, to whoever we think can rescue us and solve our problem. That is the natural way that human beings react to trouble. So now we're ready to understand:

II. Isaiah's Message To Hezekiah And To Us in Ch. 31. What's our key phrase? **(1)** When He says *those who go down to Egypt*, He's referring to Hezekiah! But this lesson is intended for ALL those who do what he did. God is declaring boldly to us that:

1. it is wrong to trust in earthly resources, to rely upon earthly things and earthly people, rather than upon Him. You see, trust, reliance, is the fundamental issue here. He's challenging us to think who we're really relying on, who we're really trusting in. He's not saying that we don't need any earthly resources or that we should never need other people to help us. Very often God provides those very things as the solution to our problem. He makes a way for us to have the money we need or uses someone in our lives to help us. His concern is about what or who we're placing our trust in. You see:

a. we tend to trust in earthly resources because they appear very powerful In the warfare methods of Hezekiah's day, horses and chariots were basically the tanks that went before their infantry. Foot soldiers could not stand against the power of a team of horses driven full speed into them. Chariots would mow them down and break their ranks. And if an army had many chariots, it would be easy to trust in their great power to go before and plow the way to victory. But we tend to forget that another Pharaoh did that once before and his entire chariot corps ended up at the bottom of the Red Sea while chasing God's people because of his pride! And *horsemen* are cavalry, mounted soldiers who are so very powerful against foot soldiers. Hezekiah had neither chariots nor cavalry and, in his flesh, he thought those things were the answer to his problem. Whether you're talking about powerful things like chariots or tanks or guided missiles or money or the technology that we rely so much upon today, or about people like doctors or lawyers or politicians, our tendency is to place our trust in the "thing" or in the person because they appear so powerful to us. If we're ill, we tend to trust that all the medical knowledge and procedures and the amazing doctors we have will be able to cure us. We tend to trust that a good lawyer will get us out of our trouble or that money will buy our way out of problems, that if we just have more of it, we can get the car we need to transport us or the education we need to have a better income or buy the things we think will make us happy. We tend to rely on things and people because we can see what they could do and they seem so strong to us and at the same time:

b. we tend NOT to trust the Lord because we can't see how He could help In our flesh we don't look to Him because we don't see how He could possibly rescue us or solve our problem. We're like King Asa who *...In the thirty-ninth year of his reign... was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians.* - 2 Chron. 16:12. As Isaiah said:

c. we tend NOT to even consult the Lord and ask His guidance In our desperation to be rescued or fix our problem, we don't even stop to say, "Lord, what should I do? How shall I deal with this?" We run to a doctor without even praying, "Lord, I'm depending on YOU for healing and asking that You use him, but YOU'RE the one who heals!" We run to take a loan we can't afford to pay back or get another credit card we can't afford to pay on without praying, "Lord, I'm depending on YOU to meet my needs; what steps do you want ME to take?" We tend to trust that a person or a thing is the answer to our need instead of trusting our Heavenly Father who knows what we need before we ask Him!

Now Isaiah goes on to explain:

2. why we should put our trust in God (2) Isaiah lists four reasons why we should put our trust in God first, above all else. First:

a. He is wise and always knows the right thing to do We think people are so smart and they have all the answers, but God is all-wise. He knows what's going to happen before it happens and He knows what is the best thing you can possibly do and sometimes what He tells us seems a little bit crazy to us. He told the Israelites to march around Jericho seven times and shout to knock down the walls; we would have been out looking for bulldozers! But whatever He tells us to do is the right thing; He makes no mistakes. So why would we neglect to ask Him? Second:

b. He is all-powerful and can do anything He deems necessary If He wants to heal you, He can do it instantly. In India this summer one of our team members prayed over a 19 year old girl named Bavitha whose creatinine levels were very high due to malfunctioning kidneys. Later testing at the hospital showed both kidneys are now normal! Of course, He can also bring healing using doctors and medicine and often does. He can bring you an opportunity to make the extra money you need or move someone to give you a gift at the right time. He can rescue you from the enemy any way that He chooses, so why wouldn't you trust Him? Third:

c. He is faithful and will always do what He has said He would He never makes a prediction He doesn't fulfill. He never makes a promise He doesn't keep. He never takes back anything He says or changes His mind. So, if He tells you what to do or what He intends to do, you can count on it! Why wouldn't you trust Him? And fourth:

d. He is just and will oppose those who work evil He is always on the side of His people who love and trust Him and stands opposed to evildoers and all those who help them! You can count on the fact that He is not helping them and stands opposed to their cause and their actions. Now in His wisdom He does sometimes allow them to succeed, but only so that His greater purpose ends up being accomplished. He causes ALL things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose! Trust Him! And then Isaiah explains:

3. why we should NOT trust in earthly resources (3) In other words:

a. human beings and earthly resources are limited Human beings are not God! There is a limit to what they can do and how much they can help. Money can't solve every problem and technology can't fix everything that is wrong. Doctors can't heal every disease and police can't provide 24/7 protection for you. Every resource we turn to on this earth is limited. Look at the wisdom that the King of Assyria unwittingly spoke to Hezekiah in **2 Kings 18:20-21**, if you'll turn back there with me. Trusting in human beings and in earthly resources always fails and it hurts us the way that leaning on a broken reed for a staff pierces the hand of the person who leans on it! Furthermore:

b. God will not tolerate His children trusting in earthly things He will most often let us fail, just to teach us a lesson. He's always looking to teach us that lesson that we are absolutely and completely dependent on Him for everything, even the very breath we take. And we need that lesson over and over because we forget and keep going back to trusting in ourselves and earthly resources. Egypt didn't come to Hezekiah's aid. They refused and he was left with nobody and nothing to turn to except the Lord His God and, as we'll see in a moment, that's exactly what He did.

But before we get there, even in warning Hezekiah, God gave him real hope to hang onto. In the next verses we have:

III. Isaiah's Message About Assyria's Destruction (4-5) Isaiah says that even though there is no earthly help to turn to:

1. God Himself will protect Jerusalem He will be like a lion who is guarding his kill. And even though a band of people come with menacing spears and shouting and making all kinds of noise, He will not be terrified and leave his prey. He will come down and hover over the city of Jerusalem to protect it like a mother bird hovers down over her nest and protects her chicks when a predator comes. Even though all the rest of the cities of the land have fallen before the Assyrian army, and even though there is no earthly possibility of their rescue, God says, "I Myself will protect you!; trust in Me!" Now I don't want to generalize this promise to say that God will ALWAYS rescue US out of every situation. Sometimes God lets believers be persecuted and even killed. Sometimes He lets us get sick and die. Sometimes he lets us even be homeless for a time or hungry for a meal or two. But always He is there for us, hovering over us like a protective Father who is caring deeply for us in every situation we face and who will ultimately take us to heaven to be with Him forever one day! So, because of His care for us, Isaiah says:

2. His people should all repent of sin now (6-7) Stop trusting in the idols you have set up! They may not be made of silver or gold, but whatever earthly thing you're placing your trust in and relying upon with your heart is an idol just the same. Cast them away; do it now and turn to Him from whom your heart was led astray! And then Isaiah comes to his punchline **(8-9)**:

3. Assyria's army will fall by the hand of the Lord There will be a supernatural, Divine deliverance that is not due to armies and swords and spears. Did that happen? Well, I don't want to spoil the story because it comes later in our study so I'll just summarize it. The Assyrian generals came and taunted Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem and Hezekiah went into the temple and prayed. And God sent him word again through the prophet Isaiah. Flip back with me now to **2 Kin. 19:34-36**. That very night 185,000 Assyrian soldiers woke up dead, as I like to put it. God did a miracle no one could have ever imagined; it couldn't have ever entered their minds, but our God can do anything! He can rescue! He can save!

So, when you're in trouble, when the Assyrian army has you surrounded in life and you're powerless before your circumstances, don't place your trust in people or things. Trust in the Lord your God and in Jesus your Savior. I was teaching the missionary candidate class at WEC last week and I heard Rhoda Longenecker tell this story which I'll summarize for you. *"We had been in a number of countries in the Middle East but were home between assignments and the Lord seemed to clearly say to us, 'Go to Lebanon.' We had three teens and a preteen at that time and I responded, 'But Lord, there's a war on there! We see the news. They have snipers in the city of Beirut! How can I take four children into a place like that!' I was very upset about it, but as I continued to pray, the Lord said, 'If you get your eyes off the news reports and get them back on Me where they belong, you'll be alright!'" So we went. Two of our older boys volunteered their time in the mission hospital there regularly and one day while they were at the hospital, I heard a tremendous explosion, an explosion louder than anything we had ever heard before. We didn't know what it was, but in a couple of hours we heard on the radio that Israel had made a retaliatory strike against the Palestinians that was designed to take out their leader. Our boys normally*

came home at the end of the afternoon, but that day they didn't come home. An extra hour went by and then another and we became really worried. You just didn't go out on the streets at night wandering about looking for somebody at that time and we just had to wait. Finally, at 7:30, here they came and when I asked what had happened, one son said, 'I was so busy carrying stretchers from ambulances into the hospital for hours that I couldn't leave!' There were soldiers with AK-47's everywhere. The other boy said 'One of the western doctors grabbed me and said, 'With that blond hair your life and mine won't be worth a nickel if that man out there dies! We're going to hide!', so we hid behind the refrigerator until it was safe.' We were so thankful the Lord had protected them! But then some days later we received a letter from our closest prayer partner who lived in England. She asked, 'What happened on that specific date? I know that the boys work at the hospital. That day I was praying for your family by name and as I prayed the Lord showed me a vision of your older son carrying stretchers of wounded people and I prayed for him. Then I asked, 'But Lord, where is Brad?' Then He showed me a vision of Brad and another man hiding behind a refrigerator and I prayed for them!' Oh, what a lesson about the power of fervent, deep prayer! Oh, what a lesson about the power of God to protect! But don't miss God's original point, "Get your eyes off of the things you can see and get them on ME where they belong!" God says, *Woe to those who go down to Egypt and trust in chariots and horses! The Psalmist says, Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* - Ps. 20:7. I'm with him; are you?

Insights From Isaiah

You Have Mocked The Lord - Chs. 36-37

At chapter 36 the book of Isaiah changes in form. Up to this point it has been the record of a series of prophetic messages given by Isaiah. At chapter 36 it changes to a historical narrative of several key events that happened during King Hezekiah's reign, events in which Isaiah was directly involved. Then at chapter 40 it changes back to a second series of messages given by Isaiah. In our last study together in chapter 31 we saw that Hezekiah and the people of Judah had rebelled against the powerful King of Assyria and they were now facing the very real threat of being annihilated by his army. If you remember, Hezekiah back-pedaled and tried to buy his way out of war, yet at the same time he also secretly sent envoys down to Egypt to try to recruit them as an ally in the fight, and in that chapter, God warned him strongly NOT to trust in human resources but only in the Lord. Now today as we enter chapter 36, we see again:

I. The Desperate Situation Of God's People (1) In 701 BC the army of King Sennacherib of Assyria swept through the land of Judah, taking all of its fortified cities until the capital of Jerusalem alone was left. We have Sennacherib's own records and in them he boasted, *As for the king of Judah, Hezekiah, who had not submitted to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams.... As for Hezekiah, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem.* [Wikipedia]. Listen to his arrogant boasting, but it was true. Hezekiah and his people were indeed trapped within the city walls. The Assyrian army stood before them and was about to surround and lay siege to the city. So they had two choices. One:

1. they could fear the enemy, accept the situation as hopeless and surrender We can only imagine how terrified they must have been. When the US withdrew its troops from Syria a few weeks ago, Turkey launched an invasion into Syria against the Kurdish people. More than 100,000 fled as refugees from the border towns, among them a number of dear believers in the network of underground churches that our friends at Power and Light Partners encourage. Please pray for them! But imagine the terror of facing a powerful army that is coming to kill you or worse and not seeing anyone who will help you or anything you can do. That's how God's people must have felt as they cowered behind Jerusalem's walls. Surrender must have seemed the only reasonable course of action, yet that didn't hold out much hope as many would likely be killed and all would be taken away as captive slaves. Or they could make choice number two:

2. they could trust God who had promised to deliver them Look back with me to **31:5, 8**. Through Isaiah, God Himself had specifically promised to come down and fight for them, to protect them and deliver them. He said that His own sword would destroy the Assyrian army. So, the choice essentially came down to this, "Do we believe what our eyes see and surrender or do we believe what our eyes CAN'T see, trust the promise of God and stand and fight?" And while actual war may not be on our personal horizon today, we still have those same two choices when we face battles and difficult situations in our own lives. Paul said that the way we handle suffering in our lives is this, *...we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* - 2 Cor. 4:18. We can either let fear control us and frantically try to do anything we can think of or hear of to solve our problem on our own, OR we can continue to faithfully trust in the Lord, seek His guidance about what to do and obey whatever He tells us. When I was in seminary a "few" years ago, we belonged to a major denomination and I was pastoring one of that denomination's churches. In those years I had come to the conviction that the Bible teaches that baptism was for believers, not for infants and somehow when my ordination interview came up that was the first question the committee raised! And it didn't help that I also believed the Bible is inerrant and the sole authority for our lives, because it was a committee of very liberal pastors who didn't accept this. So, in the end they told me that maybe I should go find a denomination of churches that believed like I did. In other words, "We're not going to ordain you." In one sense that was a relief because we had been praying for God's guidance for our next step after graduation. But in another sense, it was very scary, because essentially, we didn't know hardly anyone in or anything about the church world outside our own denomination. How do you go about finding a church to apply to and who will even consider you when you come out of a liberal denomination? In that

world the denomination takes care of you; it finds you a place to serve, has a pension fund, provides scholarship help for schooling and so on. No, our lives weren't in danger, but leaving meant that all our earthly security was gone and financially we had nothing to fall back on. So, we could either compromise and toe the line and become acceptable or we could trust the biblical convictions God had brought us to, stand firm on the fact that we knew God had called us to pastor a church and trust Him to provide a way forward for our future, when there was absolutely no way in sight. We chose to trust God and so should you! Now look at:

II. The Mocking Words Of The King of Assyria (2-4) Sennacherib sent his generals to try one last time to convince Hezekiah to surrender and look at their argument, "What the world are you trusting in?" Then they proceed to put forth all the lies that Satan tries to use on us to get us to make the wrong choice. First, they say **(5-6)**. In other words:

1. you are all alone with no one to help "Egypt isn't coming to your rescue and even if they were, they're like a useless walking stick made out of a flimsy reed that can't support you. If you lean on it, it'll break and pierce your hand. You're all alone; nobody will help you!" Oh, we're afraid of that, aren't we? To be all alone without human help in sight is a scary thing! Ah, but we're not alone! Our God is with us! However, then they say **(7)**:

2. your god will not rescue you "You're not even worshipping him properly. You tore down all the high places and altars where he used to be worshipped and now you only let people worship him at one place. You've sinned against your god and don't deserve to be rescued. He's not going to help you." The devil loves to tell us that! "Look how sinful you are. You don't deserve His help. He won't help you!" Furthermore:

3. you certainly can't do anything to rescue yourself (8-9) "If I gave you 2,000 horses, you wouldn't have enough riders to use them. You have no cavalry, no chariots; you're so weak it's embarrassing!" Well, in this one they're not lying, maybe exaggerating a bit, but not lying. Hezekiah didn't have enough soldiers to fight the Assyrian army and we surely don't have enough strength in ourselves to solve our own problems. And realizing that can be devastating. Then they added **(10)**. What arrogance:

4. God himself has sent me to destroy you "He's on MY side, not yours! That's obvious because I win all the time! If He was on yours, you'd have the big army out here and I'd be cooped up like a chicken!" Besides:

5. if you surrender I will treat you kindly (16-17) "I'll treat you well. You can go back to your homes and your fields and enjoy your life again. And then one day I'll come and take you to my land which is just like yours and you can enjoy the same things! You'll be happier if you surrender!" What a lie! But Satan always uses it. "Just give in, let go. Look how much happier you'll be!" Yeah, right! That's the path to misery! Satan always lies to get what he wants. And then the argument winds up with this **(18-20)**:

6. no other gods have been able to rescue their people "and yours is just like all the rest of them! Look how many cities have tried to resist and failed! You'll be just like the rest of them! My gods are superior to yours!" Oh, Satan will whisper all kinds of lies in your mind to get you to surrender, to give in, to follow what he wants you to do and abandon God's instructions! But this time Hezekiah doesn't buy the lies. He goes to the one place he has left to go, the one place where he should go. He goes into the house of God to pray! Turn over to the next chapter and look at:

III. The Faith-Filled Prayer Of King Hezekiah (37:14-15) And look at the faith he exhibits as he prays. First of all, he confesses his belief **(16)**. He says:

1. You are in control of all the kingdoms of earth and therefore surely of this situation. "Sennacherib and his army are NOT in control of the world. YOU are! You are Jehovah of Hosts, the God of Armies! You made the very heavens and the earth and there is no force or power on this earth greater than You!" Ah listen, when you're in trouble that's something you'd better know in the depths of your being, something you'd better remind yourself of every day! Jesus said, *My Father, who has given you to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch you out of the Father's hand!* - Jn. 10:29. No earthly king, no army, no enemy, no circumstance, nothing is greater than He is! Our God is in control and He can do whatever He wants to do in any situation that you face. Then Hezekiah says **(17)**. "Lord:

2. You hear how the Assyrians have mocked and insulted You They think because they've won all these battles that their gods are superior and You are nothing, You're limited and powerless. That's blasphemy! You made them! You allowed them to have success and now they're boasting against You as though they did it all themselves because they're so great!" **(18-19)** "Of course the gods of those other nations could not help them:

3. the gods of those other nations were not real "They were only statues made out of wood and stone. They were gods that they made with their own hands out of trees and rocks and then fell down to worship them! YOU are the only God there is; besides You there is no other! All the gods of the nations are idols, false gods!" Anything that anyone else is trusting in, whether it is an idol or an army or money or power or fame, whatever it is, that idol is nothing! It stands powerless before the Lord. In my devotions I was reading Daniel 6 where Daniel is thrown into the den of lions and King Belshazzar, who doesn't want to see him die, says an incredible thing and it struck me. In the morning he

cried out in anguish into the den, *“O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”* He calls Daniel’s God the **LIVING** God as opposed to all the other lifeless gods around him in Babylon! Jeremiah said, *...the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.* - 10:10. Our God is alive! He is all powerful and all knowing and limitless! So, Hezekiah prays **(20)**:

4. deliver us, not just for our sake so that we can be spared, but for YOUR sake, **so You will get glory among all the kingdoms of earth**. Oh, we always want God to rescue us, to fix our problems, to make life easier or better for us, but what about Him? He’s not here to serve our purposes; we’re here to serve His purposes! And we should pray, “God, rescue me, heal me, save me, help me so that it will display that YOU are real, so that people will see YOU act and become worshippers of You because that is Your purpose, that’s what You’re about! And I will tell the story of what You do to anyone who will listen!” Pray for Him to be glorified in whatever He does in your situation. And it would be good to add what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said when they refused to bow to the king’s statue, *If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up* - Dan. 3:17-18. We ought to pray, “And God, even if You DON’T deliver me in the way I want, I will STILL worship and obey You only!”

Well, God listened to Hezekiah’s prayer and He sent Isaiah to Hezekiah to declare HIS:

IV. God’s Message To The King Of Assyria He said **(23-24a)**. There is the greatest charge that can be levied against any human being:

1. you have mocked the Lord Rebellion is bad enough but at least if you’re rebelling against God, you’re acknowledging that He is real and a force to be reckoned with at some level. But mocking Him as though He doesn’t exist, as though He is some pitiful concept thought up by the feeble minds of weak people who need a crutch, that is blasphemy of the worst sort! And God won’t tolerate it! If His people will just stand firm and trust in Him, He will use their plight as an opportunity to show Himself powerful. He does it over and over again in Scripture in the life of every major character, in the life of Noah and Abraham and Moses and Joshua and David and Daniel and the three young men in the fire and Nehemiah and Esther, and He’ll do it in your life. Further, God says to Sennacherib **(24b-27)**. God says:

2. it was I who determined that you would succeed long ago “You think it was all you, but it was all ME! I made you victorious! I gave you a great army! I let you win all those battles! You’re simply serving MY purpose!” Listen, if you’re in great trouble facing an enemy, facing a battle, facing a desperate situation in life, it’s only because God has allowed it to be there! It’s only because God has long ago planned to use it to serve His purpose. It’s only because God has long ago determined that He is going to use your life by allowing you to go through this and face this difficulty. It’s HIS doing, not chance or luck or even people or circumstances. HE has brought you to this place and this situation for His purpose and He has a plan to get glory through you in it! And then God says to Nebuchadnezzar, “But now I’m finished with you **(29)**” God says:

3. I will put my hook in your nose and lead you back home You know how a rancher will put a ring in a bull’s nose to lead and control him. The Assyrians used to do that with their captives! They would put a hook through that soft tender part between their nostrils, the septum, and lead them by a chain to control them. Now God says, “I’ll put a hook in YOUR nose like an animal, I’ll put a bit in YOUR mouth like a horse, and lead you back where you came from!” Further God says **(33)**. He promises Hezekiah that:

a. his army will not even attack the city Not a single arrow will be shot! No siege mound will be erected. There won’t be ANY attack on the city, despite the fact that the Assyrian army is there all around it just waiting! In fact, God promises that Sennacherib:

b. he will return to his own land (34-35) and that he will be killed there (7). That’s a tall promise, one that seems so far out that no one would believe it. Yet Hezekiah and his people believed the Word of the Lord. And look at:

V. God’s Deliverance Of His People (36-38) As I shared with you last time:

1. the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in the night They all woke up dead. No strokes or heart attacks; the angel of the Lord simply took their life breath away and left them corpses in their beds. Not 10, not 100, not 1,000 but 185,000 of them! That’s almost three times the seating capacity of the Eagles’ stadium, Lincoln Financial Field! Imagine it! Maybe a third or a half of the Assyrian army died in one night simultaneously with no explanation except that the God of Israel did it! It’s no wonder that:

2. the King of Assyria withdrew and went home immediately; the whole rest of his army retreated and withdrew to Nineveh as fast as they could go. This was not a defeat; it was a massacre and the beginning of the end for Assyria. They never set foot in Judah again. But God doesn’t miss fulfilling a single line of what He promises. Sennacherib:

3. he was assassinated 20 years later in 681 BC **by his own sons**, ironically enough, **in the temple of his god** Nis-roch. He was stabbed to death, not by an enemy, but by his own two older sons while he was worshipping a god who couldn't save him, exactly as God said it would happen.

Listen, OUR God can do ANYTHING. Jesus said, *...with God all things are possible (Mt. 19:26)*, no matter how impossible they seem. Whatever your situation is, God is well able to get you through it and that's not just something He did in Bible times. He still does it today. Let me close with a true story that happened to someone that a number of us actually know. *My friend Chuck Walton served as a Wycliffe missionary in the southern Philippines on the Muslim island of Mindanao. And one night the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf came for him and kidnapped him at gunpoint. They took him to their camp in a remote area and they put him in a wooden cage, too small for him to stand up fully or move about much. For weeks they kept him there, hoping for a ransom to be paid, and he sustained himself by meditating on the Word of God which he had memorized and by prayer. His wife was home in the States caring for her mother at the time. Government troops couldn't find him and even if they had, he'd have been shot as the Abu Sayyaf retreated into the jungle. It seemed there was no hope but one day he was told that his freedom had been arranged and he was unceremoniously dumped out of a boat where he could get to help. He had no idea what had happened or why he was let go until sometime later officials showed him a copy of the document which had obtained his release. And guess whose signature was at the bottom of it? His ransom had been arranged and release negotiated by none other than Muammar Gaddafi, the former dictator of Libya! Chuck kept trusting in God and God used a hated tyrant from thousands of miles away to set him free from those who mocked his faith and his God! Oh, and about LuAnn and I, we put together a one page resume which we gave to our pastor who was now in Philadelphia, who gave it to his father, who was in the Christian Businessmen's group, who gave it to a friend in the group, Mel Hunsicker, who was the chair of the pulpit committee of this church and we met with them and preached here a couple of times and in September of that year we took up the pastorate here! And for 40 years we've been preaching the Word of God! God made a way for us when to us there seemed to be no way, despite those who viewed our beliefs with disdain and didn't consider us worthy to serve with them! Listen, when you're in that place of desperation and circumstances seem to mock the Lord and His ability to take care of you, when Pharaoh and his army are behind you and the Red Sea is in front of you, don't give up and surrender! Choose to trust Him! In the words of the song by Don Moen, *God will make a way, Where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see, He will make a way for me. He will be my guide, Hold me closely to His side. With love and strength for each new day, He will make a way! Trust Him!**

Insights From Isaiah

The Shadow That Went Backwards - Ch. 38

I told you last week that chapters 36-39 are a historical narrative of important events that happened in the life of King Hezekiah of Judah, in which Isaiah was involved. What I didn't tell you was that they are out of chronological order. The events of chapters 38-39 happened immediately BEFORE the invasion of the Assyrian army and its miraculous defeat that we looked at in chapters 36-37. There is a good literary reason for this arrangement but we'll leave that for another time and move on to consider:

I. Hezekiah's Situation (1) It is probably early in the year 701 BC. Hezekiah had already rebelled against the King of Assyria and his army was already on the march. Now in addition to the desperation and fear that brought, Hezekiah got sick. Really sick. He didn't just have a condition that often proves fatal:

1. he contracted an illness that progressed rapidly until he was near death Instead of recovering, he got worse and worse until he and everyone else realized that he was almost certainly going to die from it! Then, to top it off, God sent Isaiah to him with a message confirming that fact:

2. God warned that he would indeed die and urged him to prepare for it, to "set his house in order".

So, let's talk about terminal illness for a moment. The first thing I want to point out is that we are ALL terminal! 1 out of every 1 people die! Unless the Rapture happens, every single one of us is in the process of dying and WILL die, whether it's 50 minutes or 50 years from now. The average life expectancy in the US is 79. If that holds true for me, I have 14 years left and some of us are a lot closer than that or are already past it. The fact that we will die is a reality that all of us must face and deal with and God warns us to be prepared for it, to set the house of our lives in order with that in view. That's why the Psalmist prayed, *So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.* - Ps. 90:12. That means much so much more than things like get life insurance, make a will, designate a power of attorney, do a living will and all those kinds of practical things that wisdom says we should do. It means that we must realize that life is short and fragile. So, invest the brief time you have wisely; invest it in pursuing the things of God, God's Kingdom. Don't waste it pursuing material things and pleasures that will all evaporate like smoke one day! However, when the doctors tell you that you have incurable cancer or when you end up in the ICU after a heart attack or stroke or when you're struggling to breathe with pneumonia, that brings a whole different level of awareness that death is real and about to happen to you. And unless we die suddenly in an accident or some other unexpected event, most all of us will find ourselves in the very moment that Hezekiah experienced one day. But Hezekiah did not simply give up on life; he prayed! Look at:

II. Hezekiah's Prayer (2-3) Now Hezekiah:

1. he wept in bitter anguish for several reasons and they are the same things that cause us grief when we face death. First of all, he recognized that:

a. he would be cut off in mid-life If you take the length of his reign from 2 Kings and subtract the 15 years you'll hear about in a moment, you realize that he was only **39 years old** when this happened! He was our Ben's age! He was in the prime of life! Look at his thoughts in verse (10)! "I'm in the middle of my days! I'm going to miss the whole rest of my life!" No matter what the age, when we find out we're going to die, we grieve all that we're going to miss out on! "I won't get to walk my daughter down the aisle!" "I won't get to see my grandkids grow up!" "I won't get to see this or that happen..." It fills us with regrets. And in Hezekiah's case:

b. he still had no son to continue his line Again, if you do the math, his son Manasseh wasn't born until three years after this. Remember, King David started a dynasty. Each King had a son who replaced him on the throne and ruled after him. At this moment Hezekiah may have had daughters, but he evidently had no son to succeed him, so the line of David would be broken! And what's worse, this is the line that God had promised would never end, the line that the **Messiah**, the Christ, the Savior, would come from! That promise was in danger! And often, of course, our first concern when we face death is our family. What's going to happen to those we love without us? How will my wife, my children, my parents, survive without me? Concern for those left behind is probably the thing that causes us the most anguish. And then remember at that moment:

c. his kingdom was in great danger from Assyria Judah could be wiped out! "What's going to happen to my work, to my ministry, to my home, to the things I've invested my life in building, if I'm not here?"

These things and many others all cause us anguish as we think about dying! So, in his bitter anguish, Hezekiah turned over on his bed toward the wall and prayed. He poured out all his heart to God. And notice in verse 3 how:

2. he pled with God on the basis of his whole-hearted walk It's not mentioned in Isaiah but **2 Chron. 29-31** detail what a godly man he had been. The very first thing he did was to cleanse the Temple of all the filth his predecessors had accumulated, reconsecrate the priests and Levites, reinstitute proper worship and celebrate the Passover for the first time in many years! The author summarizes his reign in 31:20-21, *Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.* So, when he prays in anguish about his dying, he's not vainly bargaining with a Judge; he's not saying, "But look at all the good things I did; I deserve better than this!" He's humbly pleading, "Oh Lord, please remember me, please have mercy on me, please hear the cry of my heart! You know I've done my best to be faithful to You. Oh God, I know you can heal me; please have mercy."

When you're deathly ill, you can still pray! If you've been walking with God through life, you can pour out your heart to God. You can tell Him everything you're thinking and feeling. You can plead with Him as your Heavenly Father to spare you, if it's His will. Remember Jesus in the Garden praying with loud cries and tears? *Father, if it be possible, let this cup [the cup of death, of suffering, of the cross] pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as you will!* Like Him you can pray, "Father, if it be possible, please change this and heal me!" That's perfectly fine; it's your privilege as His son or daughter! But be sure to humbly add, "But if that is not possible in your wisdom and your plan then Your will be done!" And listen, God hears heart-felt prayers! Look at:

III. God's Answer To Hezekiah (4-5) 2 Kings says that even before Isaiah got out of the palace God told him to turn around and deliver this new message that had three points. First:

1. God heard his prayer and saw his anguish He always does! You can count on that. When you're in agony and pour out your heart, God not only hears you; He feels what you're feeling! He is touched with the feeling of your infirmities! His heart is with you the same way that your heart is with one of your children when they are suffering. Second:

2. God promised to extend his life, by fifteen years to be exact. But wait a minute! Is God fickle? Does He change His mind? Does He say one thing and then ten minutes later say something different? No, this is a prime example of the amazing mystery that God chooses to work together in concert with the prayers of His people! In a very real way, prayer moves the hand of God. There are things He will not do unless and until His people pray! And you'll never discover just what great thing He is willing to do until you pray for it! Ask Him for the hard things; ask Him for the impossible things! Ask Him to do them for His glory, so that everyone will know that He is real and praise Him! Tell Him that you know He is able! But leave room for your own imperfection in knowing His will. He does not heal all terminally ill people; sometimes He does something even better and heals them permanently by taking them to heaven. Mark Driscoll said, *Sometimes prayer moves the hand of God and sometimes prayer changes the heart of the person who is praying!* Sometimes as you pray God makes it clear that it's time to go home, that His will is to take you into His presence and the praying makes you ready to go, as it did in Jesus' case. But in Hezekiah's case God not only promised him 15 more years:

3. God promised to deliver him and Jerusalem from Assyria (6) That was a promise God had already given him earlier, as we saw last time, but what a reassurance to hear it again at this painful moment, in the midst of his anguish.

Listen, even if God does choose to take you, He will still take care of all the things you're concerned about, all the things you think can't happen or can't function without you. He's got it all under control, no matter what it looks like. Well:

4. God quickly healed him In three days he was up in public and in the house of the Lord worshipping according to 2 Kings. But look how God did it **(21)**. This verse and the next are added on at the end by Isaiah just for further information. Notice that God **used medical treatment** as an instrument to heal. A poultice made of figs was the ordinary medical treatment for a boil. However, since he was dying this was probably not an ordinary boil but an aggressive tumor and we and they both know that no figs were going to fix it. God could have healed it outright, made it disappear, yet He chose to use and empower ordinary means to do it instead. God often does that. He uses medications and surgical procedures and human treatments of all sorts, but we must never forget that the healing really comes from Him and by His power. But now comes the most interesting part of this chapter:

IV. God's Miraculous Sign To Hezekiah You see, the three promises God made through Isaiah were almost too good to be true to a dying man, almost beyond belief, so:

1. Hezekiah actually asked for confirmation of God's promise (22) And **2 Kin. 20:8-11** explains that Isaiah actually gave him a choice of whether God should make the shadow of the sun go forward ten steps or go backward ten steps. Of course, he chose for it to go backward because going forward is something that would just naturally happen. So:

2. God made the sun's shadow go backward ten "steps" (7-8) Now I'm pretty sure that sundials showing actual hours hadn't really been invented yet. They don't appear in history for another 500 or 600 years as such. However, long before that people recognized that the shadow of a tree or a pole changed position as the sun moved across the sky and could be reliably used to tell what part of the day it was. The word *dial* in the ESV is misleading. Evidently Hezekiah's father Ahaz had built a rude timekeeping device of sorts somewhere in his palace, a set of stairs and however it was built, the shadow cast by the sun would go down the "steps" as it moved through the afternoon. Never, ever, did it go up the steps, but that day it did! Instead of the shadow continuing to lengthen and go down, it grew shorter and went back up and Hezekiah and everyone else believed God's promise! But how could that be? Did God reverse the earth's rotation? I doubt it. Did God refract the light and bend it to reverse the shadow? I don't know. How did Jesus walk on water? How did He multiply 5 loaves and 2 fish into enough to feed 5,000? I don't know; it's a miracle! That's the whole point! It's a supernatural act of God that only He can do! And when fire falls from heaven or when the shadow goes backward, you simply fall on your face and say, "The Lord, He is God!" Amen?

What a gracious thing for God to do to encourage poor Hezekiah! And the joy of it wasn't lost on Hezekiah. In the rest of the chapter, we have:

V. Hezekiah's Psalm Of Praise After Healing (9) He composed a psalm and wrote it down so he and Judah would remember this event forever and we have what he wrote still today! Notice that first:

1. he remembered how he felt and how he prayed (10-14) He's not denying life with God after death; he's simply recalling all the anguish he felt because he would not continue in this earth life any longer and how bitterly he cried and pled with God to deliver him. But secondly, notice that through this awful experience he learned a valuable lesson:

2. he came to understand that God is his very life (15-17) The New Century Version translates verse 16, *Lord, because of you, people live. Because of you, my spirit also lives; you made me well and let me live.* Life does not depend on doctors and medicines, on sickness and health, on good or tragic circumstances; life comes from God! In Col. 3 Paul spoke of *Christ who is our life* and said our lives are *hidden with Christ in God*. He's our life! He's the One who gives me life, the One who sustains my life, the One who decrees when my earthly life will end and the One who has given me His own eternal life so I can be with Him forever! So *...if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* - Rom. 14:8. You see that most clearly when you're staring death in the face! Then, when Hezekiah cried, God answered and promised to extend his life and:

a. he saw God's faithfulness to His promise Listen, our God is a faithful God! And it is in the times of our greatest anguish and suffering that we realize just how faithful He is, because He is there and He sustains us and He brings us through. He never leaves us or forsakes us. And He always keeps His Word, no matter what! Furthermore, Hezekiah:

b. he saw that this anguish was for his benefit Verse 17, *it was for my welfare that I had great anguish!* Now that he was on the other side of it, he could see that God used this awful experience in his life, that it was a blessing in the end, that because of it he was changed. He was a better follower of the Lord for having gone through nearly dying and seeing the Lord's deliverance. Job became a better follower of the Lord through the agony of losing everything he had and all his children. Paul became a better follower of Jesus through imprisonment and stoning and shipwrecks and beatings. He found that when he was weakest the power of Christ was most at work in him! And we too will find that on the far side of our suffering and anguish that we are the better for it spiritually! In Hezekiah's case he learned a specific lesson. In verse 15 he says:

c. he learned to walk humbly through it The NLT gives the proper sense, *...Now I will walk humbly throughout my years because of this anguish I have felt.* He had become proud; all his successes and blessings had puffed him up to rebel against Assyria. But God humbled him by letting him nearly die; He showed him that his life and his survival were completely dependent on God, not on his own abilities and efforts. And maybe that's why he showed such faith in God when the Assyrian army finally showed up later that year in chapter 36! God often teaches us humility through our trials. He shows us that apart from Him we are nothing and can do nothing. He reminds us over and over of our absolute need to depend on Him. The Apostle Paul testified to that same thing; will you look with me at **2 Cor. 1:8-10**? Paul was once where Hezekiah was. In the province of Asia many terrible things happened to him to the point where he was convinced he was going to die. But now, like Hezekiah, he could see that that awful time taught him to rely fully on God and gave him confidence that God would help him in the future. And God will use our suffering and anguish in the same way. No wonder that in the end of his psalm Hezekiah:

3. he committed himself to praise the Lord all his days (18-20) For the rest of his life Hezekiah promised to sing to and praise the Lord and tell his children, yet unborn, of the Lord's goodness.

You might recognize the name of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Russian novelist, dissident and later Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was sent to one of Joseph Stalin's "corrective labor camps" for 8 long years and eventually became a believer. In *The Gulag Archipelago* he wrote: *It was granted to me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of youthful successes, I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power, I was a murderer and an oppressor. In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts.... That is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: "Bless you, prison!" I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation: "Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!"* [The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956, Vol. 2, 615-617] Reflecting on that passage, John Piper comments: *O that I would be done with murmuring against my tiny prisons. Lord, grant me greater faith to live in the coming day when I will say, "Bless you, all hardship and pain! You have cut me off from the death of prosperous idolatry again and again.* [John Piper, 8/3/2008, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/thank-you-lord-for-solzhenitsyn>] May God grant us all grace to value His working in those times of anguish in our lives and worship Him all our days!

Insights From Isaiah Behold Your God! - Ch. 40

Here's something that's very important to know as we continue gleaning insights from the book of Isaiah. At chapter 40 you turn a sharp corner in the book. In fact, the difference between the first half and the last half of the book is so great that some liberal scholars who don't believe in predictive prophecy have theorized that it was written by some person who lived later, which of course we don't believe.

1) in chapters 1-39 Isaiah warns of judgment and calls God's people to repent That message is repeated over and over. The enemy always in view is Assyria and during Isaiah's life Assyria actually defeated the northern Kingdom of Israel and carried away all its people but, as we saw, God spared King Hezekiah and Judah. Then:

2) in 39:5-8 Isaiah predicts the Babylonian captivity which occurred a whole **century later** in 605 BC. [Read 5-7] There, by the way, Isaiah is predicting the taking of Daniel and his friends to Babylon. Babylon would be the new major power in the world after Assyria. It would conquer Jerusalem and the Jews would be taken captive there for 70 years in punishment for their sins. But now:

3) in chapters 40-66 Isaiah speaks of their return (which happened in 538 BC) and comforts them The Expositor's Bible Commentary says, *We emerge in 40:1 in a different world from Hezekiah's, immersed in the situation foretold in 39:5-8... Nothing is said of the intervening century and a half; we wake, so to speak, on the far side of the disaster, impatient for the end of the captivity...* [Kidner, "Isaiah", p. 611 in Expositor's Bible Commentary p. 240] It also says that, by His Holy Spirit, God enabled... *Isaiah to live in spirit in a future day so that he might be the vehicle of God's message to the people of that day.* In these chapters He assured Israel of their return to the land, mentioned King Cyrus of Persia by name 150 years before he lived as the one who would crush Babylon and free His people, and declared that He would show His glory to all peoples.

And the Holy Spirit begins in chapter 40 by painting an amazing picture of our God for us, declaring in poetic and descriptive language just how awesome and wonderful He is. The first thing we read is that:

I. Our God Is A Comforter Of His People (1) God not only wants His people to be convicted as in the former chapters; now He declares how much He wants them to be comforted and consoled in their suffering and difficulties. Look with me in the New Testament at **2 Cor. 1:3-4**. He is the God of ALL comfort, a merciful Father who is the very source of all our

comfort! And He comforts us in ALL our troubles, in every one of them! Of course, He plans to use us to comfort others as a result, but that's not the primary reason why He comforts us; He's our Father! And as the original Father of all fathers who models what fatherhood is supposed to be like, He is full of mercy and compassion for His children! A good father is deeply touched when His children fall and get hurt and always rushes to pick them up and comfort them and that's what our Father does for us! Whenever you're hurting, if you let Him, if you turn to Him, if you cry out to Him, He'll comfort your heart! Amen? Now the first comfort that He gives to His people is this:

1. He pardons all our iniquity (2) The years of Judah suffering the consequences of her sins in captivity were over and she was now fully pardoned. One of the greatest comforts we have is that all our sins were fully paid for by Jesus at the cross and now we are forgiven once, for all, forever. David wrote, *Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!* - Ps. 32:1 NLT. Nothing we've done, nothing we do now, can ever separate us from Him because He has pardoned us fully! And because we are pardoned:

2. He calls us to prepare for His coming with our lives (3-4) Whenever a King or an Emperor would travel through rough country, a road crew would be sent ahead smooth out the dirt highway, filling in the ditches and leveling off the high bumps. All four Gospel writers quote these words about John the Baptist. Luke mentions the passage most fully (**Lk. 3:4-6**), but in John's gospel when the Jews asked him who he was, he said, "I am that voice crying in the wilderness, 'Clear the way for the Lord's coming!' that Isaiah spoke of!" John said, "The Lord, the Christ, is coming; I'm His road crew going before Him and leveling His path! Get your lives right with God!" And today we're His road crew! Jesus is coming and Peter says we are *looking forward to the day of God and speeding its coming* - 2 Pet. 3:12, by living holy lives ourselves and by winning all the peoples of the earth to faith. He's coming and we're preparing the way for His entrance and the faster we do our job, the sooner He will come! And what a comfort to know that:

3. He promises to reveal His glory to the whole world one day (5) The world will not always be like this! We won't always be in exile in a world where we are only strangers passing through, bound as captives to its suffering. One day Jesus will come and every eye will see Him and He will set up HIS Kingdom on earth! How do I know that? HE has spoken it and:

4. He declares that His Word will stand forever (6-8) Human beings are temporary and all of their power and their accomplishments and all their words and their promises, they're here today and gone tomorrow like the grass or the flowers. But the Word of our God stands forever! His promise can never be broken! He's coming for His children! Hallelujah!

Then in verse 9 Isaiah challenges Israel, saying:

II. Behold The Greatness Of Our God (9) "Behold! Look! See how great your God is!" And then he launches into this tremendous description of the majestic attributes of God. Yet he begins with this one which is the sweetest. For all of His power and might and majesty:

1. He is a gentle Shepherd who cares tenderly for us (11) He carries the little lambs lovingly; He leads the ewes with their young gently. How many times have you heard **Ps. 23**, *The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down (to rest). He leads me... He restores my soul... He protects me with His rod and staff...He comforts me...He prepares a table for me...* Oh, the loving, tender care that our Great Shepherd gives to us every single day and Jesus added, *I am the Good Shepherd and the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep!* - **Jn. 10:11**. Our Shepherd protected us at the cost of His own life! No wonder He showers us with tender love all of our days! Carole Mayhall writes, *"I couldn't have been more than eight years old, but I was having my first deep struggle of faith. I don't remember what set it off, but in my mind doubts and questions had been raging for several days. 'Have I been told a fairy tale? Is there really a God who looks over the world and cares about me? Does He exist? How can a person really know that He is there?' ...One night we were visiting a favorite aunt and uncle, and I was put to bed in an upstairs room located under the eaves. The roof sloped downward steeply and overhung the small window. It was there that I challenged God to prove to me that He existed...out of desperation, it was a cry which pleaded, 'Oh, Lord, I want to believe in You. I need so much to know that You are there. Please show yourself to me.' 'But how,' I thought. I didn't feel I could ask for a vision or a voice from heaven. So, in my immature, non-thinking way, I blurted out, 'Oh, God, just prove to me that You are there by...by...by waking me up with the moon shining in the window.' Then I went to sleep. Silly girl, never thinking that God would have to bend the moonlight many degrees in order for it to shine in that window way back under the eaves. Never thinking that there might not even be a moon that evening. Never thinking. Period. But God was thinking, and preparing. First, He sent some other guests to my aunt's that night. This meant that the bed I was in was needed for an adult, so I was moved to the sofa in the living room, without even waking up. Second, God arranged for my aunt and uncle to have a house with a round window located on a landing going to the second story. He also had my aunt place the furniture so that the couch was in the exact spot it needed to be. Third, He provided a clear sky and a full moon. So, sometime that night, I was awakened as though a gentle hand had touched my shoulder. And there, framed perfectly in that porthole window, was a full moon beaming down like a spotlight. I got out of bed, fell to my knees, and cried for joy. 'Lord,' I said, 'I promise that I will never again doubt that You exist. Thank You.' I never have."* [Lord of My Rocking Boat by Carole Mayhall. NavPress, 1981. Pages 149-150.] Oh, how tenderly, how gently our God deals with His children! Yet He is not only tender, Isaiah says:

2. He has infinite knowledge and wisdom in Himself (12-14) God created this entire universe in all its complexity and all its diversity and all its immensity and He didn't need anyone to teach Him how to do it! He didn't have to google it and watch a YouTube video on how to create things! He didn't have to ask anyone for advice because He is omniscient, all-knowing! His knowledge and His wisdom are infinite! Look at what Solomon wrote about wisdom in **Prov. 8:22-31**. God's wisdom is infinite; everything God has ever made or ever done has been with wisdom! The whole of creation declares it; the heavens and the earth declare how glorious He is! His wisdom has no limit. He makes no mistakes and always does what is good and right! Then Isaiah says:

3. He transcends in greatness any earthly reality (15-17) Don't take this to mean that God doesn't care about the salvation of people, about the reaching of the peoples of earth. He says this in reference to the great Gentile empires which Israel feared, the fierce Assyrians with their huge army and the Babylonians with their unstoppable forces. He is so much greater than them all that they are like dust on a scale that has no weight, like a drop in an entire bucket that would never be missed, like nothing. They are like the froth, like the bubbled-up foam when you pour coke or root beer into a glass. It's just empty air with nothing to it and you have to wait for the bubbles to pop so you can fill more liquid into the glass. He is so great that you could cut down all the forests of Lebanon, the most expansive forests known in that region, and it wouldn't yield enough fuel, nor if you burned up all that country's animals would it be a burnt offering big enough to be worthy of Him! He is so great that nothing on this earth even comes close to being like Him and therefore:

4. He can't be compared to any human-invented god (18-20) The Babylonians worshipped Marduk as their supreme god and Nergal as the god of the underworld, gods they invented and made statues of. The world is full of gods that people have invented over the years. Go to India and you'll see them everywhere! Our God is not like any of them; He's not like any god that human beings would conceive of. Paul wrote, *For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.* - **1 Cor. 8:5-6**. You see, people make gods for themselves to worship, but our God made us to worship Him! He made everything that exists! He doesn't exist for us, to do what we want, to do our bidding; we exist for Him, to worship and serve Him! He's not a lifeless dead idol that has to be crafted carefully so it balances when you stand it up; He's the Living God before whom everything in heaven and earth must bow! Therefore, Isaiah says:

5. He controls the universe and all the kingdoms of earth (21-24) All the great rulers who were so feared, even the potentates of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, under whom His people would live in captivity, were just puppets put up in place by God and taken down by Him at His will. In fact, God taught Nebuchadnezzar himself such a powerful lesson that he said this in **Dan. 4:34-35**, *At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”* Listen, all the dictators and the tyrants, the great and powerful people of the earth who oppress millions are all nothing; one day God will blow on each of them and they'll be swept away like dead leaves! We've seen that over and over again even in our own lifetimes! God is in control of the earth, not people! Furthermore:

6. He controls the heavens and calls the stars by name individually (25-26) The Babylonians worshipped the stars, thinking they were gods, along with the sun and moon. But our God MADE the stars! We can't see too many of them here in the suburbs, yet on a clear moonless night, if you're in a dark rural area you can see about 2,000 or so of them from one spot. In the entire sky around the earth there are about 9,000 stars visible to the human eye. Of course, Isaiah had no idea that there are 100 billion stars in our galaxy alone!, but just thinking about the ones a person could see, think how great God is, not only that He made them all, but that He calls each one by name! And if God does that with the stars, think about the fact that there are 7.7 billion people on earth today and He knows each one of US by name and cares for us! He's not just a God who uncaringly sees people *en masse* but a God who loves even ME! That's how great a God we worship! Hallelujah! And:

III. God's Greatness Is A Great Comfort To Us (27-31) In their suffering during the exile I'm sure the people said, "God has forgotten us! He has cast us away and left us to our troubles. He doesn't care!" And when suffering comes into our lives, some of those same feelings and thoughts probably come to our minds. Yet the very greatness of our God should be a comfort to us as it was to them, for three reasons. First Isaiah says:

1. we can always be sure that God knows our situation He has not gone on vacation or withdrawn and become distant. My suffering has not escaped His notice and the fact that I am in this trouble does not mean that He doesn't care! He is tender toward me and He loves me! Second:

2. we can always be sure that He has the power to help us He is the Lord, the Everlasting God; He never grows weak or weary! His arm is never too short to save us and His power is never diminished. To Him NOTHING is impossible! And therefore:

3. we can always count on Him to strengthen us He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless! We can count on that! The Apostle Paul endured suffering in so many forms, beatings, stonings, imprisonment, shipwreck, hunger and thirst, but look with me at the lesson he learned through all of that in **Phil. 4:11-13**. I can make it! I can survive! I can thrive because Jesus literally puts the power in me! He strengthens me to face whatever He allows in my life!

What a comfort! I have an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God who is with me in all of my troubles to comfort me and empower me to endure them! *On March 23, 1858 John G. Paton was ordained by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland. On April 2, he married Mary Ann Robson and fourteen days later, they set sail together to the mission station on Aneityum, an island near Vanuatu in the South Pacific, arriving on August 30. The pair were soon sent on to establish a new station on the island of Tanna, the natives of which were then entirely untouched by Western civilization. They were the first white residents on an island full of naked and painted cannibals who had no idea of right or wrong, worshipping and fearing numerous gods, living in a continual dread of evil spirits, constantly fighting among themselves, and always eating the bodies of the slain. On February 12, 1859, John and Mary had a son, whom they named Peter, but sadly, on March 3, Mary Paton died of a sudden attack of pneumonia and was later followed by their baby boy on March 20th. Unaided and alone, John buried his beloved wife and their infant son with his own hands, covering their graves with beautiful white coral. He wrote in his journal, "If it had not been for Jesus and the fellowship and grace He afforded me, I am certain I would have gone mad or died of grief beside their lonely graves." But Jesus strengthened him to press on. Repeated attempts were made by the natives on his life. On one occasion the one friend he had made warned him that angry tribesmen were on their way to kill him and told him to climb up in a large chestnut tree. In his journal he wrote, "I, though perplexed, felt it best to obey. I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets, and the yells of the savages. Yet I sat there among the branches, as safe as in the arms of Jesus. Never, in all my sorrows, did my Lord draw nearer to me, and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among those chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship." Paton was strengthened and sustained by his faith. Two years later he moved to the neighboring island of Aniwa. After many years of laboring, every village on that island had professed Christ.* <https://www.seniorlivingministries.org/2018/10/finding-grace-in-fulfilling-gods-calling-4/>, <https://bethanyqu.edu/blog/stories/john-g-paton-working-among-the-cannibals/> Oh, our God is a comforting God who will console us in our troubles; He's a powerful God who will strengthen us to endure unbelievable difficulties; He's a loving God who cares for us today and will one day take us to live with Him forever. Let's worship Him!

Insights From Isaiah

The Servant Of The Lord - Ch. 42

When we arrive at chapter 42 in our study, we find something very special in Isaiah's writings. But before we consider it, I'd like you to look with me at **John 12:37-41**. The authors of the New Testament either quoted directly from or alluded to Isaiah's writing 85 times, the majority of them from the second half of the book. Of the 27 New Testament books, only 7 don't refer to him. And, after quoting Isaiah twice, John gives the reason for this in that last verse:

I. Isaiah Saw Jesus' Glory And Spoke About Him - John 12:41 Do you remember Isaiah's vision in the Temple in Ch. 6 when God called him to be a prophet? He says, *I saw the Lord high and lifted up and the train of His robe filled the Temple*. That word Lord is not in all caps in English; it is not God's personal name Yahweh or Jehovah. It is the word *Adonai*, "Master" or "Lord", the term by which John and his fellow disciples always referred to Jesus. John is telling us Isaiah saw JESUS sitting on that throne and it was HIS glory that overwhelmed Isaiah right from the beginning! That's why Isaiah spoke about Jesus all through His book! Isaiah is full of Jesus! The Spirit of God gave him prophecy after prophecy specifically describing details of Jesus' birth, His ministry on earth, His death on the cross, His resurrection and His future reign, events that would happen 700 years later and some still future to us! Now, in particular, Isaiah:

1. he has four passages that have become known as "Servant Songs". They're not songs that were sung; but Psalm-like descriptions of a Person who is obviously the Messiah, Jesus. They are **42:1-7, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12**. In them God calls Him "the Servant of the Lord" or "My Servant". Now these four passages are not the only place where this term *servant* occurs.

2. in other passages the "servant" is the nation of Israel For example, look down to **42:18-22**. Here He's obviously talking about the people of Israel being blind, but:

3. in these four “Songs” the “Servant” is Jesus, described in detail 700 years before He came. Now we’re going to leave the last one, Isaiah 53, that glorious portrait of Christ’s death and resurrection, wait for a couple of weeks, but this morning I’d like to consider the other three Servant songs with you. Each of them has a specific thing to declare about Jesus and you’ll be amazed at how clear Isaiah’s picture of Jesus is. The first “song” emphasizes that:

II. Jesus is God’s Chosen One - 42:1-7 Read (1). When Jesus had taken Peter, James and John up on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Him and then a cloud appeared and covered them, the cloud of God’s glory, *And a voice [the Father’s voice] came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”* - Lk. 9:35. Jesus is the Chosen One of the Father, the One that He has chosen to rule the nations forever, the one whom He stands behind and upholds in all things. The soul of the Father delights in Him. The Hebrew word means *to be pleased with, to take pleasure in*. Remember what the Father spoke from heaven at His baptism, *...behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* - Mt. 3:17. There is no doubt that the Father is talking about Jesus here in Isaiah and saying, “Behold Him! Look at Him! See how My glory is revealed in Him!” First of all, Isaiah says:

1. the LORD will put His Spirit upon Him Well, you remember how that was **fulfilled** at Jesus’ baptism. Look at **Jn. 1:32-34**. The Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus was the thing that identified Him as the Son of God to John! It was the very sign predicted by Isaiah! Notice in 42:1 we have the Trinity prefigured clearly in the Old Testament, the Father who is speaking, Christ the Chosen One, His Son, and the Holy Spirit whom the Father would put upon Him! Three in one! But in contrast, look at what God says next:

2. He will be meek but undaunted (2-4) What a contrast! Israel was always looking for a warrior-king Messiah, one who would raise an army and fight off all enemies. But God says, “No, when I send Him, He’ll be meek and quiet, not making any kind of public disturbance. And He’ll be gentle, caring for bruised and hopeless people. In Mt. 12 the Pharisees were angry with Jesus about breaking the Sabbath Law (in their view), first because His disciples picked a few heads of grain as they passed through a field, and then because he healed the withered hand of a poor man in the synagogue. They wanted to kill Him, but Jesus withdrew from there and healed all those who followed Him, ordering them not to make Him known. And then Matthew quotes this entire passage in **Mt. 12:17-21**. Jesus would not come to foment a rebellion, to raise up followers who would help Him defeat His enemies; instead, He avoided conflict whenever He could and gave Himself to help the sick and the poor and the hurting. But then, as we just read, Isaiah says:

3. He will be a light to the peoples (5-6) The LORD God says a very unusual thing, *I will give YOU as a covenant for the people*. Do you remember what Jesus told His disciples at the Last Supper as He handed them the cup? *...this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* - **Mt. 26:28**. God gave His Son to create a new covenant with His own blood that would bring forgiveness of sins to people. And that would not be limited merely to Israel. God says He would be a light to the nations, the Gentiles, to all the peoples of the earth! When Jesus’ parents took Him up to the Temple at a month old to dedicate Him to the Lord, the Spirit moved old Zacharias to prophesy over Him and look what he **quoted in Lk. 2:30-32**. At His birth the Spirit brought Isaiah’s words to Zachariah’s mind. Jesus would be a light that brought salvation to all nations. No Jew of his day thought like that at all! And in His final instructions, Jesus reiterated that disciples should be made of all the peoples! From first to last, that is God’s eternal purpose! Then in the next verse the Spirit described His ministry by saying:

4. He will heal and deliver (7) Instead of conquering and fighting, He will heal blind eyes and deliver people who have been oppressed. This is prophesied even more fully in **Is. 61:1-2**, if you’d turn there. He would bring the good news of salvation to the poor and comfort those with broken hearts deliver all those who are oppressed. Well, near the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was in the synagogue in his home town and look what Luke records, **Lk. 4:17-19**. And that’s exactly what Jesus did for 3½ years! To use Peter’s words in Acts 10, *He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*. He opened the eyes of blind men, healed lepers who were cast out by society and had no hope, made lame people able to walk and work again, released people from demonic bondage that had made their lives unbearable for years and even raised people from the dead to comfort their families!

Through Isaiah God told everybody what His Messiah, Jesus, would be like 700 years ahead of time and though it seems everybody knew Isaiah’s prophecies, still nobody recognized Him! *I read a story about a little boy who looked up at the sky and asked his mother, “Is God up there?” She, of course, assured him that He was. So the youngster replied, “Wouldn’t it be nice if He would put His head out and let us see Him?”* Through Isaiah Jesus “put His head out” over and over and over again so that people could see Him! The trouble is that almost nobody was looking up to see it! They were looking down at their own feet, at all their own preconceived notions of what the Messiah would be like and they refused to lift their eyes to see what God had already shown them through the Scriptures! Well, let’s move on now to the second “song”, where Isaiah’s focus is that:

III. Jesus Will Bring Salvation To All The Peoples Of Earth - 49:1-6 This song is in the first person, that is, in this “song” the Servant Himself, Jesus, is speaking personally. And look what He says about Himself **(1-2)**. Look who He’s addressing, not Israel, but all the distant peoples of the earth who live far away from Israel, even the remote *coastlands or islands* of the sea. Jesus is a Savior for ALL peoples! Then, speaking of His own future incarnation He says that:

1. He would be named before birth and hidden in childhood The angel told Mary, before He was even conceived, that she was to call His Name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. He would be the One bringing salvation to the world. And Joseph was also told to name Him Jesus before He was born, just as Isaiah's words said! And then notice that God hid Him away, like a polished arrow hidden in a quiver, for the first 30 years of His life. We have almost no record of those years, but in them God was preparing Him, sharpening Him, polishing Him to become the powerful instrument that He would use to bring salvation. And He reveals His purpose in **(5)**:

2. God wanted to use Him to bring Israel back to Himself Their hearts had strayed far away from Him. They had become focused on external religious rules and had no longer any clue what the heart of God was really like and the relationship He wanted to have with them. So Jesus came first to His own, to turn their hearts back to God, but, as John remarks, *His own people did not receive Him - 1:11*. They rejected Him and, in the end, they crucified Him. But here He reveals how He would feel about that **(3-4)**. Here let me pause and point out that even though the Father calls the Servant *Israel* in verse 3, He can't be referring to the nation itself because the Servant, an individual, was sent to bring Jacob, the nation, back to God in verse 5. He refers to Jesus as *Israel* because in His person and work He epitomizes what Israel should have been and done. He is the true Prince who fights with the power of God. But here He discloses that:

3. He would be deeply saddened by Israel's rejection of Him He expressed it on several occasions crying out, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you but you were not willing!* - Mt. 23:37. On the way down the Mt. of Olives during His triumphal entry He wept over the city and said, *"How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes."* - Lk. 19:42 NLT. He had labored so long and hard for 3½ years and it appeared like it was in vain, that He had spent all His strength for nothing, yet He knew the Father would reward Him and continued on to the cross. And now look at what the Father says in verse **(6)**. "It is too light a thing for You, my Chosen One, to simply to save the remnant of Israel. Your sacrifice is much too great for that. I will use you to bring salvation to the very ends of the earth!" Isaiah predicts that Jesus:

4. He would become a light to all peoples and He knew this would be fulfilled through the mission of His church. Do those words *to the end of the earth* sound familiar? At His ascension to heaven, Jesus told His followers that we would be His witnesses *to the ends of the earth!* Paul understood Isaiah's words as a command to us who believe. When the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia opposed him, he said, "You refuse to listen so we are turning to the Gentiles!" and then he quoted Isaiah, *For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."* - Acts 13:47. He's going to bring salvation to the ends of the earth through US! We're the ones who will take the light of His Presence into earth's darkest corners and the news of salvation to every people on the planet! That's why we focus so much on mission here! And we're doing it through our partnerships around the world as we pray and as we give and even go! The Browns have served for two decades in the dark inaccessible jungles of the Amazon in Brazil among the Yanomami people, who for centuries were violent, warring cannibals. But today the light of Jesus is shining in village after village transforming people by bringing them from darkness to light. We're helping to shine His light into dark places in Indonesia, in China, in Central Asia, in Guinea, in Liberia, in Europe, in Brazil, in Mexico and many other places as we reach those who have never heard because that is God's command to us! And I love this next verse; it looks far forward, beyond the time when we have reached some from every people, to the time when Jesus will return and set up His Kingdom on the earth. And look what it says **(7)**. The Father promises that:

5. Kings and rulers will bow before Him who was rejected by them Even though He was subject to Pilate and Herod and the rulers of the Jews and let them crucify Him, in the future Kingdom all the kings and rulers of the earth will fall down on their faces before Him. Look what Paul said in **Phil. 2:9-10, 1 Tim. 6:15**. He is the King of all earthly kings and the Lord of all earthly lords and one day at the proper time when He returns, all the rulers of earth will bow their knees before Him and fall prostrate at His feet! How do we know that? Because, as Isaiah says, the Holy One of Israel who declared Jesus His Chosen One is faithful! Hallelujah!

Oh, there we have God's eternal purpose to send His Son to save people from all the nations and to one day make Jesus the Ruler of them all declared 700 years before He came! And now we come to the third "song" which emphasizes the fact that before that can happen:

IV. Jesus Will Suffer As An Innocent Victim - 50:4-9 Again we have Jesus speaking in the first person declaring things about Himself **(4)**. The first thing He declares is that:

1. He would be a teacher of God's words, that He would be taught daily by the Father and be given His words so that He would be able to turn around and deliver God's words to those who are weary and in need of encouragement. Well that certainly characterizes Jesus' ministry; so many times His followers and others called Him "Teacher" and look at **Mk. 1:22**. They were amazed at the way He taught them. He didn't just say, "This is what I think" or "this is what the Rabbis have taught". He said, "Thus says the Lord!" He taught with the very authority of God Himself. And He declared the reason why in **Jn. 8:28**. He was taught what to say by the Father! He taught the Father's words! And as the Father's plan drew near to its completion, He declared that:

2. He would not rebel against the cross. He would not turn back but would give Himself up willingly to be struck and spit on (5-6). We know the story, how He let Himself be arrested and put on trial and mistreated exactly like this - Mk. 14:65. They beat Him! They struck Him! They spit on Him and mocked Him and evidently, from Isaiah's prediction, they even pulled handfuls of his beard out by the roots! Oh, how He must have suffered! And yet, knowing all this in advance He declared that:

3. He would set His face to go to the cross (7) Those are the very words that Luke uses to describe His determination to go up to Jerusalem to suffer - Lk. 9:51. Nothing would deter Him. Not the frantic warnings and protests of His disciples, not the anger and plots of His enemies, not even the thought of the suffering He knew He would face and foretold time after time. He set His face *like a flint*, like the hardest stone; our phrase would be *like steel*. In other words, He was immovable in His determination to carry out the Father's will and die for the sins of the world, even though:

4. He would be innocent of sin (8b-9) They couldn't find any grounds to convict Him of wrongdoing. They hired false witnesses to testify against Him but they couldn't even get two of them to coordinate their lies! He challenged His enemies, *Which of you convicts me of sin?* The only thing they could convict Him of was telling the truth that He was the Son of God! No one could condemn Him; He died, the Innocent One for the guilty, and He was willing to do it because He knew:

5. He would be vindicated by God (8a) What form that vindication would take is not declared in this "song", but the next "song" says, *After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.* - 53:11. Jesus was determined to go to the cross and experience death to save millions of us because He knew that God would raise Him from the dead! Look what Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17:31. God gave proof of who His Chosen One was, of Who is going to rule the world one day and judge it, by raising Him from the dead!

And there it is, the death and resurrection of Christ predicted 700 years in advance! But don't miss the point of this and all the "Servant Songs"; it's in verse (10). *In the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific hundreds of villages dot the coastlines. Many of them are ruled by shamans - witch doctors. These shamans are greatly feared and can command the spirits to inflict anxiety, night terrors, dreams, and worse. A Jesus film team went to one of these isolated villages that was dominated by a particularly powerful and famous shaman named Gema. They set up the projector in a field east of where Gema lived and they prayed! About 200 people began to gather as night fell and the team started the projector. As the people heard and understood the story it gripped their hearts. Suddenly, strange lights appeared, rising from the east where Gema's house was, streaking across the sky, then coming together and plunging into the sea in the distance. Everyone saw it and became afraid, but they turned their attention back to the screen, seeing the power of Jesus over demons, His love, death and resurrection and when the film ended a large number received Christ. The next morning a man approached the team. "I am Gema, the shaman. I was in the audience. During "Jesus" I had a struggle deep in my heart. Something inside me didn't want to let go and was hanging on very tightly. It kept telling me, 'Don't listen!...Don't listen!...Don't listen!' But I DID listen and I prayed to receive Christ. Immediately I experienced a great release and peace I have never known!" That night Gema stood before his village people and publicly declared, "I am a new man in Christ! I've renounced the spirits. I ask you to forgive me for all the evil I've done to you!" [Jesus Film Project Newsletter - Nov. 2019]* That's why Jesus set His face and why He died and rose again, so all the ends of the earth would worship Him! So, whoever you are, fear the Lord! Obey the voice of His Servant Jesus! Trust in the Name of the Lord Jesus and rely on Him as your God! And take the Good News of His salvation to the ends of the earth!

Insights From Isaiah

He Was Pierced For Our Transgressions - 52:13-53:12

Today in our study through Isaiah we come to the passage from his writings that is the most well-known of all, chapter 53. This is actually the last of Isaiah's four "Servant Songs" where the LORD gives us wonderfully detailed information about His Servant, His Messiah, whom we know is Jesus, more than 700 years ahead of time. Down through the centuries believers have been simply amazed at the accuracy of Isaiah's portrayal of Christ. In 1 Cor. 15 Paul gave a simple outline of the Gospel that He preached, saying, *...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* Well, this very chapter is the primary Scripture he was referring to! In it, Isaiah gave us the whole Gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, not merely predicted, but with its meaning explained to us and I'm convinced that these words are what helped Jesus' followers actually understand the meaning of His death. The passage actually begins in the end of chapter 52 at verse 13 and it divides nicely into four strophes, four sections, each describing one aspect of the Gospel. The first declares to us:

I. The Future Exaltation Of Jesus (52:13-53:3) Look at (52:13,15). The Messiah, Jesus:

1. He will eventually be exalted over all nations In Hebrew Isaiah says He will *act wisely*, He will do the wise thing, the thing that will cause Him to prosper and to succeed in His purpose, as other translations take it. That purpose is to eventually be glorified and worshipped by all the peoples of the earth and through His wise actions He will succeed in making that happen. He'll be exalted to rule all the nations as part of His Kingdom. Kings will bow down before Him; peoples from all over the earth will be astonished when they find out at last who He is and what He did! But, in contrast, before He can be exalted, Isaiah says that:

2. He would initially have to face terrible rejection Look at **(53:2-3)**. At Christmas time we sing "How Should A King Come?" and the answer is, *Even a child knows the answer of course, In a coach of gold with a pure white horse. In the beautiful city in the prime of the day, And the trumpets should cry and the crowds make way. And the flags fly high in the morning sun, And the people all cheer for the sovereign one. And everyone knows that's the way that it's done. That's the way that a King should come.* But that isn't how Jesus came! Isaiah says:

a. there was nothing about Him that would endear him to people He was like a tiny green shrub sprouting in the midst of the barren spiritual desert of Israel. As James Allen Francis put it, *He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village, where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family... He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.* Jesus' enemies were always making derogatory comments like, "Isn't this the carpenter?" "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" "No prophet ever comes out of Galilee!" The leaders, especially, had no respect for Him and eventually, Isaiah says:

b. He would be despised and rejected You can almost hear the comments from the crowd around the cross, He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. As the NLT puts it, *...We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.* Look back to **52:14**. The soldiers beat Him so badly that He wasn't even recognizable; He didn't even look like a human being any more. And:

3. that contrast between His suffering and His glory makes it difficult for people to believe (1) Who would believe that this man whose image is so marred, who is so despised and rejected by the people, who is put to death on a cross as a common criminal is the LORD's Servant, the Messiah, the Christ who will be exalted on high and rule all nations with their kings bowing before Him? It's humanly unthinkable, unbelievable. In a word, it's crazy! And that makes it hard for people to believe until they understand what Isaiah's second section explains:

II. The Purpose Of Jesus' Suffering And Death (4-6) Notice the end of verse 4:

1. people thought His suffering was because HE had sinned They thought God was punishing Him for blasphemy, for falsely claiming to be the Son of God. They thought He was the one who had sinned and was getting what He deserved, but the truth is that:

2. it was WE who had gone astray from and rebelled against God, and by WE Isaiah means every single human being! WE are the sheep who followed our own desires and ran away from God into our own ways, into sin. WE are the ones who rebelled against our Shepherd and transgressed His laws, the ones who chose to wallow in iniquity, in things that are perverse and depraved in His eyes. And:

3. His death was a substitutionary sacrifice for OUR sins The LORD laid the iniquities of all of us upon Him so that He was pierced in our place, so that He was crushed instead of us, so that He was wounded to spare us. And because of His suffering and dying, we are forgiven, we have peace, we are healed! Hallelujah! Now while that last phrase of verse 5 is echoing in our minds, *with His wounds we are healed*, let me mention that some teachers falsely claim that means that because of His death we are all entitled to physical healing of our bodies any time we are sick or injured. Granted, Matthew does say that Isaiah's phrase *He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows* was fulfilled in the many miracles of **physical** healing Jesus did when he was on earth [8:17], but it's clear both here and also when Peter quotes that last phrase [1 Pet. 2:24] that the healing God is talking about is spiritual, that it refers to the forgiveness of our sins and the healing of our relationship with Him.

I point that out because of the great spiritual danger and disappointment that the wrong interpretation of this verse has caused for many over the years. Philip Yancey tells the story of a young man named Richard who, in seeking evidence for his faith, ran across a healing service on television one day and saw "miracles of healing" right before his eyes. Soon that well known evangelist came to a neighboring state and Richard went to a live service. He says, "The atmosphere was unbelievably charged--soft organ music in the background; the murmuring sound of people praying aloud, some in strange tongues; and every few minutes a happy interruption when someone would stand and claim, 'I'm healed!'" One person especially made an impression, a man from Milwaukee who had been carried into the meeting on a stretcher. When he walked--yes, walked--onstage, we all cheered wildly. He told us he was a physician, and I was even more impressed. He had incurable lung cancer, he said, and was told he had six months to live. But now, tonight, he believed God had healed

him. He was walking for the first time in months. He felt great. Praise God! I wrote down the man's name and practically floated out of that meeting. I had never known such certainty of faith before. My search was over; I had seen proof of a living God in those people on the stage... I wanted contact with the man of faith I had seen at the meeting, so much so that exactly one week later I phoned Directory Assistance in Milwaukee and got the physician's number. When I dialed it, a woman answered the phone. "May I please speak to Dr. S.," I said. Long silence. "Who are you?" she said at last. I figured she was just screening calls from patients or something. I gave my name and told her I admired Dr. S. and had wanted to talk to him ever since the meeting. I had been very moved by his story, I said. Another long silence. Then she spoke in a flat voice, pronouncing each word slowly. "My... husband... is... dead." Just that one sentence, nothing more, and she hung up. I can't tell you how that devastated me. I was wasted... For me, the certainty I had staked my life on had died with that phone call. A flame had flared bright for one fine, shining week and then gone dark, like a dying star. [Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God*, Zondervan, pp. 38-40] Now, I've seen actual miracles of healing occur both immediately and eventually in answer to prayer; I believe in God's ability to heal miraculously. But when you take the Word of God out of context and tell people Jesus' wounds provided healing for you and healing is yours if you just believe it, great danger and disappointment will soon result and it destroys people's faith. Don't fall for it! Well, let's go on to Isaiah's third section which describes:

III. The Manner Of Jesus' Death (7-9) Another sheep illustration. To prove Isaiah's point, I watched a YouTube video called, "How To Shear A Sheep". All the other sheep were bleating and "baaing" and jumping, but once the shearer got that sheep off its feet, it didn't fight at all. It just lay there while he pulled and twisted it all around using his shears. He even grabbed it by its nose to push its head out of the way and sat it up like a dog and laid it on its back. Nothing! He could have cut its throat to make a sacrifice and it would have laid there and bled out. And like that sheep, Jesus:

1. He accepted His suffering and death meekly He didn't argue His innocence or curse His captors or scream in pain. He didn't fight against the soldiers when they taunted Him or kick them while they were driving the nails. How do you think the average prisoner reacted? Jesus went meekly to the cross; He let them do whatever they wanted to Him because He knew this was the Father's will and He knew that it would accomplish our salvation, even though, as Isaiah points out:

2. He was killed unjustly and undeservedly The NLT of verse 8 says, *Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people.* He didn't deserve to die. As Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man!"; that's because there wasn't any! He was a true human being just like us, yet without sin. And yet He was condemned! Even Pilate shouted, "Why? What evil has He done?" It was unjust, unfair. He was killed in the prime of His life, cut short in midstream, leaving no children to bear His name, and the worst of it is that nobody cared, except a handful of disciples! In fact, Isaiah tells us specifically that:

3. He died among the wicked and was buried in a rich man's tomb He was crucified between two thieves as though He was one of them, a criminal just like they were! Listen, you don't get crucified for stealing a loaf of bread! These were bandits who committed armed robbery and had probably hurt and killed people for their money, violent men. And Jesus was counted as one of their number according to verse 12, to die and be buried with them in some mass grave. But it didn't happen that way because a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, who had come to believe in Jesus, took His lifeless body and buried it in his own tomb that only a rich man could afford, carved out of solid rock! Aren't you just amazed by the details that God gave to His people seven centuries before they happened? And then, in his last section, Isaiah tells us something that nobody could understand, that none of Jesus' own disciples would believe, even though He told them repeatedly that it was going to happen. Isaiah tells us of:

IV. The Vindication Of Jesus Through His Resurrection (10-12) You see:

1. this whole thing, this awful suffering and dying of Jesus, was all according to God's will and plan God Himself did this! Through this the LORD accomplished His own ultimate purpose. He made Jesus a once for all forever offering for our guilt, for our sins, in order that:

2. through His sacrifice MANY would be justified The NLT of vs. 11 says, *When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.* That reminds me of Heb. 12:2 which says that, *Jesus ...for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...* Jesus looked ahead to what His suffering would accomplish, to His greatest joy, to the millions upon millions upon millions of His spiritual descendants whose sins would be pardoned and whose spirits would be made righteous so that they could be united with Him and be with Him forever, and for that joy He was satisfied to endure it all! Hallelujah! But Isaiah says clearly that:

3. He would live again after His death He would prolong or lengthen His days. He would add more days of living to the ones that ended with His death. How, by rising from the dead! He would SEE His offspring, His spiritual descendants. How? Dead people don't see anything! He would live again by rising from the dead! In verse 11 several ancient manuscripts say, *After He has suffered He will see LIGHT* and the NIV translates the sense of it, *He shall see the light*

of LIFE! He will rise again and live! He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures! What a surprise ending, certainly one that neither His Jewish enemies nor His beloved disciples expected, yet there it was in Isaiah! And moreover, verse 12 brings us full circle by telling us:

4. this is the reason for His exaltation The NLT gives the plainer sense of it, *I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels.* Because Jesus was willing to suffer and die for the sins of us rebels, God exalted and honored Him like a conquering general. Paul said, *therefore [because He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross], God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* - Phil. 2:8-11. Because of that willingness to suffer and die for us, the Father will exalt Him over all the nations and give Him a Kingdom that cannot be destroyed and make kings bow at His feet!

And that, dear friends, is the Gospel from start to finish, thoroughly explained, right here in Isaiah seven centuries before it happened! I love what Peter says in his first letter: *This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.* - 1 Pet. 1:10-12 NLT. Isaiah didn't write this for himself or his time; he never understood it at all! God told him that he wrote it for those who would come later. He wrote it for YOU and for ME! And now we have heard the Good News of Jesus and we see how it happened exactly as God said it would and we know it's true! What a wonderful privilege we have! I know it's Christmas time and right now we're all wrapped up in the first part of that wonderful story. But L.W. Beckley wrote a poem he called *The Rest Of The Story* that makes Peter's point:

*We are wont to sing of shepherds
And the heavenly glory bright,
Of angels and their message
On that peaceful, holy night.
But so oft we end the story
When 'tis only just begun,
For we fail to give the message
That this Child is God the Son--
Here to give Himself a ransom,
Crucified on Calvary's tree,
Through His blood providing pardon,
Perfect cleansing, full and free.
And the tomb, thank God, is empty;
Jesus sits at God's right hand
Now a loving, mighty Savior;
Spread the news to every land!*

Insights From Isaiah

The Spirit Of The Lord Is Upon Me - Ch. 61

This is our last study in the book of Isaiah and the last section I want to look at with you is Is. 61:1-3. And while this prophecy is not usually associated with Christmas, nevertheless, it tells us a great deal about the purpose of Christ's coming into the world. Read it with me. Because of the great darkness in this world that we mentioned in chapter 9, the world is filled with suffering people. Everywhere you look people are suffering in one way or another. In fact, suffering invades every one of our lives. None of us can escape it. Yet that is not how God intends things to be and He sent Jesus into the world most particularly and specifically to impact those who suffer. So, let's begin in verse 1 by talking about:

I. The Person Who Was Sent Into The World It says...*the Lord has anointed ME.* At first reading and without background, you might naturally assume that Isaiah was talking about himself. He was indeed a prophet whom God had anointed with his Spirit and sent to preach good news to the nation of Israel. But Jesus declared its meaning once and for all at the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth one Sabbath when He was asked to read the Scriptures. Look with me at **Lk. 4:16-21**. He said, "These words of Isaiah are not really about Isaiah; they are about ME! I am the ONE Isaiah was talking about and the ministry that I have right here and now is the ministry Isaiah was talking about! I am the fulfillment of this Scripture!" So these truths from Isaiah are about Jesus who was to come into the world and about the ministry He would have. And by the way, notice that all the persons of the Trinity are here in verse 1 of Isaiah, God the Father, the Spirit and Jesus! Now look what we learn about Him. First of all:

1. He was appointed to a position That word *anointed* is the Hebrew verb *mashach* which means a ceremonial anointing with oil. High priests were anointed. Kings were anointed. It was the symbol of appointment, of chosenness for a high position. And it is also the root of the Hebrew word *meshiach*, *MESSIAH*, which means *Anointed One*, the One chosen and appointed by God. The Greek word in Luke is *chrío* from which we get *Christ* and has the same meaning. Literally it says He has "messiahed" me or "christed" me. He has appointed me the Christ, the Messiah, the Chosen One. For centuries, ever since creation, mankind, and then specifically the Jews, had been waiting for a Promised One to come. To Adam, to Abraham, to Moses, to David, century after century God gave promises of a CHOSEN ONE whom He would send to set the world straight. In Jesus' day every Jewish woman hoped to be the mother of the Messiah. Every Godly Jew hoped and waited for Messiah to come. In fact, the whole future hope of every Israelite was pinned on this one thing: some day MESSIAH will come and set all things right! Their only hope to end their bondage and despair and suffering at the hands of their enemies century after century was that Messiah would come. No wonder they were shocked when Jesus boldly announced, "I'm here! The Hope of all the Ages is standing in front of you." Now the visible sign of that anointing was the Holy Spirit. The oil used in anointing kings and priests in the Old Testament symbolized the Holy Spirit, but Jesus Himself was literally anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism. The Spirit of God descended upon Him in the form of a dove and the Father's voice from heaven said, *This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased*. And John the Baptist said, *I saw and bore witness that this was the Son of God!* So the first thing we know is that Christmas baby in the manger was God's Promised Messiah. Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger was the hope of all the ages and the desire of nations, the Promised One who at last would set all things straight! But next notice in the middle of Luke's vs. 18 that:

2. He was sent on a mission ...*He has sent Me*. The word *sent* is the Greek word *apostello* which indicates one sent on a mission to represent the sender. The Father sent Jesus, His Son, the Chosen Messiah into the world on a mission for Him, just as we send a missionary across the world. It was David Livingstone who said, *God had only one Son and he made that Son a missionary!* Bethlehem's manger was a missionary arriving on His designated field of service! And the mission He was sent on was two-fold. First, we know that He was sent:

a. to be a Savior to sinners His mother was told, *He will save His people from their sins*. **Gal. 4:4** tells us that, *God sent forth His son born of a woman... to redeem those under law*. God sent His Son to REDEEM sinners! The mission of the Messiah was to redeem us. The cross was His primary mission, to provide for the redemption of the world. But He was also sent forth for another purpose, which is the one focused on by Isaiah in our text. He was sent:

b. to be a Herald to sufferers Notice the verbs. Three times it says, *To proclaim, to proclaim, to proclaim*. God sent His Son to be a proclaimer, a herald, an announcer of good news. To whom? The poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed. To God's people who suffer! Christmas is for sufferers; it is for those who hurt. The baby in the manger was sent to declare a message to us who suffer. *On a wall in his bedroom Charles Spurgeon had a plaque with Isaiah 48:10 on it: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." "It is no mean thing to be chosen of God," he wrote. "God's choice makes chosen men choice men... We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice."* [W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers*, p. 223.] God has a special love for those who suffer! He sent Jesus to join them in suffering and to declare His love to them! Now let's go back to Isaiah and look more specifically at:

II. The Purpose For Which He Was Sent Into The World Isaiah says He was sent first of all:

1. to declare good news And not only did He literally preach good news while He walked on earth, His very coming to earth is a declaration of good news! To whom? Well, he mentions four groups of people. First of all, His birth declares good news:

a. to the struggling To the poor who struggle to have enough to eat and to wear. To the depressed who struggle to make it through another day. To the sick whose days are marked with pain. To those who get pushed aside in the crowd, whose voice nobody hears and whose needs nobody cares about. That's what the word *poor* encompasses. To you who are engaged in the daily struggle for existence Christ's coming into the world declares good news: **there is an end!** It will not always be like this. Messiah has come and one day He will set the world straight! One day you will not have to struggle to survive, you will not have to endure this any longer! Secondly, His birth declares good news:

b. to the brokenhearted To those of you whose hearts are crushed, who have lost a loved one, who have suffered a tragedy, who have had to part and say good-bye, who think you just can't go on because your sorrow and mourning is just too great. Christ's birth is a declaration of good news: **there is comfort!** It will not always hurt. Messiah has come and He will comfort you! Thirdly, it is good news:

c. to the bound *Captives* literally refers to prisoners of war, those who have been carried away into slavery. To those of you who are bound in whatever way, who are imprisoned by your miserable circumstances and can't escape or get relief, those who are stuck in a difficult family situation, who are stuck in a menial job you hate but can't

afford to leave. To you Christ's birth says **there is release!** Messiah has come and there will be a day when He will set things straight. Finally, it is good news:

d. to the despairing Luke's quote of Isaiah mentions recovery of sight to the blind. That's because the Hebrew word in Isaiah means "to open" and can be used of opening the eyes of the blind as Jesus did often during His ministry. This news is to those who are in prison and will never get out, to those who are blind and will never see, those who are lame and will never walk, those who are sick or disabled and will never recover. It is to those of you who feel despair, who see no hope for your life or your circumstances; to you Christ's birth brings good news: **there is hope!** Messiah has come and one day you will have release!

Now just how is it that Jesus is going to set all things straight? Is He going to fix all our individual problems immediately so we don't have to go through them? Obviously no, not now. But He was sent for something even greater. He was sent:

2. to declare the great Day that is coming (2) When all the years of God's plan for this world are completed, God has marked a Day on His eternal calendar, a day when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will take charge of the world and all the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever! That Day will be:

a. the time of favor to His children Notice it is figuratively described as a "year". It is one of those thousand year days, a whole millennium which stretches on into eternity. And in that day God will show His favor outwardly to his children. He will change the world. Look with me at **Is. 11:6-10**. Nobody will be sick, nobody will hurt, nobody will despair or be oppressed. Life will not be a struggle but a rest! That will be the effect of Christ's rule. But that Day will also be:

b. the time of vengeance on His enemies And notice this is called only a "day". In one fell swoop, all the enemies of Christ, all those outside of His redeeming grace will be destroyed and removed from the earth. No more oppressors, no more villains, no more men to rise up and shake their fist at God or to cause terror and suffering. No more tyrants and no more terrorists. THAT is what Messiah came into the world to do! That is what that Babe in the Manger came to do, not only to redeem us from our sins but to one day set the world straight and claim it as His glorious kingdom. He came to change the world and His arrival in the manger of Bethlehem is our guarantee that that future DAY is coming. Even though 20 centuries have come and gone, it will come just as surely as His birth came after long centuries of waiting. Now finally, notice that He was sent:

3. to declare the great change that is coming (3) Here is what is going to happen to all of God's people, to us! To those who grieve and who mourn and who suffer, a great change is coming:

a. our appearance will be replaced with beauty In Israel when you were sad or mourning you rubbed ashes on yourself and tore your garments. You appeared sad and downtrodden! Well, many of us who suffer appear downtrodden even without ashes! We show the effects of it! But our worn appearance will be replaced with absolute beauty. All the wrinkles of age and the lines of worry and pain erased from our brows. All the scars of life removed. Our bodies shall be made just like His glorious body! Second, Isaiah says:

b. our sorrow will be replaced with joy All the pain you feel here you will feel no more. Your broken heart will be healed. All the hurt you feel now will be gone and in its place will be eternal joy that never goes away. That's the good news Jesus came to give you! In that Day:

c. our despair will be replaced with praise The hopelessness you know right now will melt away in the presence of Jesus and your heart will well up with an everlasting song of praise to the King. That's the good news Jesus came to give you. And finally:

d. our wavering will be replaced with splendor Our being blown back and forth like willow trees in the wind, the ups and downs of life, the failings and falterings and missteps will be over. We will be towering oaks of righteousness, sturdy trees planted by the Lord and reflecting the splendor of His glory, forever and ever! That's the good news Jesus came to give you!

Oh, Jesus came to bring us the Good News that there is a glorious future for us! And whether you enter into it through the door of death or live to see His return, Messiah has come and for those who choose to follow Him a glorious new existence is coming! Oh be encouraged by that! Martin Luther said, *If we consider the greatness and the glory of the life we shall have when we have risen from the dead, it would not be difficult at all for us to bear the concerns of this world. If I believe the Word, I shall on the Last Day, after the sentence has been pronounced, not only gladly have suffered ordinary temptations, insults, and imprisonment, but I shall also say: "O, that I did not throw myself under the feet of all the godless for the sake of the great glory which I now see revealed and which has come to me through the merit of Christ!"* Or, as Paul put it, *For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that*

cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. - 2 Cor. 4:17-18 NLT. Look at those things and Jesus will strengthen you to endure! But Jesus didn't come for us to hear that news and keep it to ourselves! He told us to go into all the world and proclaim the Good News! And how the world needs to hear it! Bahaj lived in a small village in India and worked hard in his rice paddy field to provide for his wife and children. Until one day in 2008 he had sudden pain in his stomach. He grew worse and couldn't digest his food properly and eventually became thin and frail and unable to work. He spent what money he had going to the hospital for treatments but grew worse. He prayed to his Hindu gods and offered sacrifices but it didn't help. Soon he had to sell his cows and some of his valuables to pay his bills and was plunged ever deeper into poverty. In the process, his family members and friends forsook him, except for his wife and children, and refused to offer support. But one day a pastor named Takul visited his village to encourage the believers there and was told about Bahaj. When he came to Bahaj's house, Bahaj humbly asked him to pray, so he prayed with assurance that day and began visiting him each week and praying for him. In a month God answered those prayers and Bahaj was healed completely. Bahaj saw how much Jesus loved him when nobody else did and he soon received Christ and became part of the church. His village opposed his decision to change his religion but he said, "I will follow my Christ at any cost because He is the one who set me free!" Soon his wife also accepted Christ and also other family members and other friends and today he is no longer in poverty, his children are getting an education and he is a vital part of the church. [Gospel For Asia World Magazine - Oct. 2017] Jesus came to Bahaj in his suffering to set things straight! And there are millions upon millions of others like him out there from the jungles of Indonesia to the streets of Philadelphia, people who are suffering in so many ways without hope. And we, like Pastor Takul, have the news of the One who came specially for those who suffer, the news they need to hear. Let's commit our lives to sharing it!

JEREMIAH

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Gems From Jeremiah God Has A Plan For Our Lives - Ch. 1

With the exception of Daniel, the Old Testament Prophets are some of the most untouched books in the Bible. The major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, wrote long books and their contents are difficult to understand unless you know the background and history of each one. For example, if we studied one chapter of Jeremiah each week, it would take us every Sunday for a full year. And besides that, the content of the messages would be very similar each time because the book records a series of Jeremiah's prophecies and virtually all have the same message! So what I hope to do instead over the next few months is to give you some gems from Jeremiah, to ferret out for you some of the finest pearls of wisdom God has put in the book for us and examine, not just what they meant as they were spoken to the Old Testament people of Judah, but what they mean for us today as well. Now let's begin, as the book does, with:

I. A Brief Introduction To Jeremiah's Life (1-3) Jeremiah was a young man from the tribe of Levi who lived in the territory of Benjamin in the town of Anathoth about 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem. His father Hilkiah was a priest and so he was the Old Testament equivalent of a PK, a Priest's Kid, and that made him also destined to serve as a priest. So, he was beginning in and being trained to serve the Lord as a priest when God called him to be a prophet. Jeremiah's recorded ministry covers the period from 627-582 BC, some 45 years. As you can see from this chart *[Bible Knowledge Commentary Chart of Old Testament History p. 13]*, Israel had been divided into two Kingdoms after the time of Solomon. The northern Kingdom had become idolatrous and God allowed them to be conquered and carried away by Assyria in 722 BC, 100 years earlier. The southern kingdom of Judah was headed down that same evil path, straight toward the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah began his ministry in the middle of Josiah's reign. Josiah was the last godly king Judah had. There followed Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, all of whom were given to idolatry and sin. Three times the Babylonians defeated Judah and carried off captives, in 605, again in 597 and finally in 586, they destroyed Jerusalem and took most of its people captive. Jeremiah was God's last warning to his wayward people. He was sent to call them to repent of their sins before it was too late. Sadly, not only did Judah and her kings NOT listen to his message; many hated and even persecuted him for it. Now in verses (4-5) we have the record of how:

II. God Called Jeremiah To Be A Prophet One day God spoke to Jeremiah out loud and told him that his life's work was going to be that of a *navi*, a prophet, one who would deliver messages from God. But look closely at what God said. Jeremiah was known before he was conceived and before he was born, God had decided on a plan for his life. That same kind of thing is also said about others in the Bible. Samson's mother, for instance, was told that he would be a Nazirite from birth and that he would deliver Israel. John the Baptist was said to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's

womb and had a definitely established role as the forerunner of Jesus before he was ever born. And though God's call on our lives may be to a different task:

1. before we were born, God designed a specific purpose for us You are neither a surprise nor an accident. God planned you! And not only that, He decided before you were ever born how He intended to use you. You might remember **Eph. 2:10** which says, *For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.* Paul's not merely saying that God saved us to do a whole bunch of good things. He's saying that God has good things that He planned to do beforehand and then He created us to actually do those very things! He created Jeremiah to spend his life warning Judah as a prophet. He created Paul to be a missionary to the Gentile peoples of the Roman world. He created Dan and Barbara Lunow to share His Word with the Sough people and transform the entire tribe! He created me to spend most of my life pastoring this one church. And He created YOU to do something very specific that is part of His plan too. He may have made you to be a nurse or an architect or an auto mechanic; He may have appointed you to be a cook or a software programmer or a social worker. But in that role to which He has appointed us in life, we have a deeper purpose. Like Jeremiah:

2. we are to speak on God's behalf, declaring His Word A prophet is not just a delivery boy who hands messages to someone. Rather, he or she is an ambassador, a representative who speaks with the authority of the One who sent him and speaks and acts on His behalf before other people. Look with me at **2 Cor. 5:18-20**. That's what Jeremiah was and that's what we are! We're ambassadors. We represent God. We declare His message to people wherever He has called us, "God has provided a way for you to be reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ. Give your life to Jesus!" Jeremiah was sent to Judah. You are sent to the office or the shop or the hospital where you work, to the school where you study or the neighborhood where you live. God put you there to be His ambassador declaring His message. He planned to do it long ago and now here you are and He is calling you to do what He planned. Then notice that Jeremiah was not appointed a prophet to Judah, but to whom? To the nations. God gave Jeremiah messages for Egypt and Philistia and Moab and Ammon and Edom and Elam and even Babylon itself! Isn't it interesting that in His commission Jesus said that:

3. we are sent to all the peoples, not just to our own *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...* - **Mt. 28:19**. God has a plan to use you to impact, not just your own people who are like you, but individuals from other peoples who are very different from you, who probably have far less knowledge of Him. They may live near you or work with you or go to school with you. They may be immigrants or refugees or international students that you can impact in your daily life. Or maybe God will send you with one of our teams, like the three of us who are going to Greece at the end of May to serve Syrian and Afghan refugees for 2 weeks. Pray for them. Or maybe God will call you to be part of the support team of someone else who He is sending by praying and giving to enable them. But however He chooses to do it, God IS sending each of us to make disciples of other peoples, not just our own, even though most of our ministry might likely be to those who are much like us!

Now this was a daunting task for Jeremiah. He knew the idol-prone nature of the society around him and how hard it would be to stand for God in the midst of it, so it's no wonder that:

III. Jeremiah Was Hesitant To Accept God's Call (6) "I am too young for such a big responsibility and I'm not a speaker. I get all nervous in front of people and forget what to say!" And likewise, when we realize that God has called us to be His ambassadors in the place He has appointed us to:

1. we may feel inadequate and unskilled We look around at others who have this gift and that gift that we don't or we look at the difficulty of the task and see how ill-equipped we are for it. But here's something you need to realize, *Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.* - **1 Cor. 1:26-29 NLT**. God doesn't look for the most gifted and talented and powerful people. He chooses shepherd boys to fight giants and become kings so that He gets the glory for it. He chooses fishermen and tax collectors as missionaries to take His Good News to the world. He delights in choosing ordinary, weak, ill-equipped people to do mighty extraordinary things; so if that's you, don't hesitate; sign on because you're excited to see what God will do with a nobody like you! When I was 19 God offered me the opportunity to pastor a little country church that couldn't get anybody else. I hadn't preached three sermons in my life, I don't think, (though I'd listened to a whole bunch of them!), but I thought about it for all of a minute and said, "Count me in!" Not because I was great or skilled or confident in myself, but because I knew God had called me and if He did, then He would be sure to make good things happen! And He did! But Jeremiah probably hadn't read Corinthians, so instead of explaining the principle, God gave him four promises instead. We don't need to hesitate to step out and do what God is calling us to do because:

2. God promises to be with us as we serve Him In the first place, He promises that:

a. He will guide us (7) I think God is saying to Jeremiah what He said to Moses when he had the same hesitation, *Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.* - **Ex. 4:12**. "I'll show you where

to go and I'll tell you what to say! I'll guide you the whole time!" Don't we have that same promise? Jesus said, *...you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.* - Lk. 21:12-15. "You don't have to worry about it, no matter who I send you to talk to or how opposed they are to you! I'll TELL you what to say. My Spirit lives in you and He will bring to your mind exactly what I want said in that moment!" He will guide us every step of the way, and not only that:

b. He will protect us (8) Jeremiah knew what being a true prophet of God could mean in Judah. He knew that speaking against idolatry could mean that his life would be on the line in later years (and indeed it was!). But God promises to be in control of the circumstances and afford us His protection. He even repeats this more strongly in verse 19. When Jesus prepared to send out His disciples two by two, he warned them of danger and also gave them the promises of **Mt. 10:24-31**, if you'll turn there with me. All of that is meant for us too. We WILL experience opposition and trouble as we share God's message, sometimes even people who want to kill us! We should expect that, but we do not need to be afraid. God is in total control of our lives and our service. He doesn't let a sparrow die without His control and he's got all your hairs numbered. For some of you that's a tall order (for me it's easy!). The point is that He is in absolute control of whatever happens to you so you can rest in that! Nothing will ever happen to you that He doesn't choose! Moreover:

c. He will empower us (9) In the vision Jeremiah had, God touched his mouth, symbolizing that it didn't matter whether he could speak or not. God would give him the power to speak and the words to say. You remember **Acts 1:8**, *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...* The Holy Spirit has been given to us to be our power source, to supernaturally energize us and make what we do effective. At the bottom line, the work is actually God's work. He calls you to it, He guides you in it, He controls the effects of it and He empowers you to do it, so He gets all the credit! Serving the Lord is not something we do; we simply make ourselves available for Him to use. And when we do:

d. He will use us to accomplish His purpose (10) God is saying, "I'm going to declare through you what will happen to a number of nations and what I say through you, I will cause to happen. So in effect, your words will determine the fate of entire nations and I will accomplish My plans for them, positive or negative, through you!" This reminds me of that verse that is part of the Great Commission in **John 20:23**, *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.* As we deliver His message of reconciliation, those who respond are forgiven, but we withhold the possibility of forgiveness from those we don't tell, so in effect the eternal destiny of individuals and of whole peoples actually rests in our hands! In effect, God works out the fate of the entire world through us His messengers and God will carry out that portion of His plan assigned to us individually. As we obey His call, God will use each one of us to impact the world in exactly the way He has planned, so our service is an important thing and also a serious thing! Next:

IV. God Assured Jeremiah further. He went on to confirm Jeremiah's call by giving him two visions. The first is in verse (11). Jeremiah literally saw a branch of an almond tree. I'm sure you're thinking, "What on earth does that have to do with anything?" Well, you have to be Jewish, I guess. The Hebrew name for the almond tree comes from the root "to watch" so the almond tree is literally "the watcher" and it is so named because it is the first tree to awaken and bud in the spring in the land of Israel. God explains what it means in verse (12):

1. He always watches over His Word to perform it God says "I too am a watcher; I am watching over my Word to see that it comes to pass!" What makes the Word of God living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword is the fact that the living God is always watching over it and causing it to come to pass. Whatever you say or do for God as He directs you, you can say and do with confidence! Whenever you tell somebody, "Jesus will save you and change your life" or "God will comfort you" or "He'll provide for your needs" or "He'll carry you through this", whenever you share ANY promise of Scripture, you can count on the fact that God will do it. Corrie Ten Boom used to pray in her Dutch accent, "Lord, You have said it; now You must do it!" She counted on God always doing what His Word says and so can we. In Jeremiah's case the message that he would declare on many occasions throughout his life was revealed in a second vision (13-16). Now Jeremiah sees a seething, steaming cauldron and it is tipping over from the north to the south and pouring out its boiling water on the land. And God says "That's your life's message: I'm going to bring a flood of armies from the north against Judah; disaster is coming because of their idolatry." Jeremiah's life message is to be the prediction of the invasion of Babylon and the coming captivity. For 40+ years he's going to preach and warn of Judah of this coming disaster over and over, but few would listen, until finally God did bring it to pass as Jeremiah said. Of course, you have not been given that message of bad news; rather you have been sent to deliver a message of Good News! Instead of a boiling pot, your vision is an empty cross and an empty tomb! God's true calling on your life, whether you are a pastor or a secretary or a garbage truck driver is to share the message of Jesus the Living Savior in every way that He enables you. That's our life mission, but as Jeremiah's vision ends, God reminds him and us that:

2. we will experience much opposition as we obey Him (17-19) God tells Jeremiah straight out, "Everybody will fight against you. There will be much opposition and danger. Jeremiah, you will have to have the courage to stand alone much of the time, alone against kings, against officials, against other priests, and even against the common people." Jesus told us the same thing, *The world will hate you!* Following Jesus and declaring the Good News pits us against the grain of the world around us. It's like swimming upstream in a river and that can be a very lonely position sometimes, but:

a. we must prepare ourselves and be ready to obey Him in spite of it Like Jeremiah, we are to *gird up our loins*, to tuck our robe up into our belt, to get up out of our sleepy posture and be ready to work, ready to share all that He tells us, no matter who doesn't like it. But He also gives a warning in verse 17:

b. we must not become afraid, lest we misrepresent Him The word *dismayed* or *terrified* in the NIV is literally to fall down prostrate before your enemies, to break down in fear. God says if we break down and become too afraid and terrified to complete our mission, it will so misrepresent who He is to them that He will allow us to be broken down and humbled before them, because we deserve it. But He also promises this:

c. we are invincible until God has finished His purpose through us We're like a city with high, thick walls nobody can break through, like a pillar made of iron that nobody can move, like a wall made of bronze metal that nobody can penetrate. We are absolutely invincible, no matter who is against us, until God has completed all that He plans to accomplish through us! And that is because, according to verse 19:

d. He Himself is with us to deliver us Jesus said when you go and make disciples of all the peoples, *...behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Will you respond to His call? Will you be His ambassador and declare His message? Will you make it your life's purpose to declare the Good News of Jesus to all whom He sends you? If you will, He'll be with you to deliver you, just as He was with Jeremiah. *David Livingstone was the primary missionary explorer who responded to God's call and opened the continent of Africa both to the Gospel and to western influence. When he appeared at the University of Glasgow in 1857 to receive the honorary Doctor of Laws degree after 16 years of exposure to Africa's hardships, he was received with silent respect. The Doctor came down the aisle wasted and gaunt. He stood before them, his brow burned black by scorching African suns, his veins carrying the torture of twenty-seven African fevers, and a shoulder torn by a lion dropping a limp arm by his side. He said that he should soon go back to Africa and in going he should have three objects: "to open fresh fields for British commerce, to suppress the slave trade, and to propagate the gospel of Christ." That great climax fell like the peal of a trumpet on the audience. And then he asked: "Shall I tell you what sustained me in my exiled life, among strangers whose language I could not understand and whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile?" In the moment's pause that followed the question, there was a deathlike silence, and every heart lifted itself in high expectancy. And then there came the unexpected words of Jesus: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* Oh, God has a plan for your life too, maybe not so grand as for Livingstone's, nevertheless a plan to impact the world through your service. He guarantees that there will be some suffering involved, but He promises "I will be with you!" What more could you want? So, are you in?

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Sin: It Is Forsaking Our Savior - Ch. 2

As I told you last time, over the next few months we're going to be studying some gems, some key passages from Jeremiah together. Before we go further into the book, let me give you just a bit more:

I. Introductory Information First of all, I've placed in your outline:

1. a brief outline of the Book of Jeremiah

Ch. 1 *Introduction - Jeremiah's call*

Chs. 2-45 *Prophecies About Judah*

Chs. 46-51 *Prophecies About Other Nations*

Ch. 52 *Conclusion - Historical Appendix* (added to show that Jeremiah's predictions came true!)

The second thing that is important to know is that:

2. the Book is a series of individual messages, that are NOT chronologically arranged It is a series of messages Jeremiah was given to preach. Look at the phrases in verse 1, 3:6, 7:1, 11:1, 13:1 and so on. Really what we have here is Jeremiah's sermon notebook; think of it as series of printed sermons in a loose-leaf binder. But the catch is that they are not in chronological order. Evidently late in his life Jeremiah recorded all these messages God gave him on various occasions on a single scroll arranged by subject or topic. It would be like me putting all my sermons on heaven together, then those on the Holy Spirit, and so on. So these messages come from different times in Jeremiah's 45 year ministry. And the first five messages (through chapter 13) have the common subject of showing the nation of Judah the

true nature of her sin. But looking at that will do us little good unless we are able to apply what God is saying to ourselves. So:

3. Judah pictures for us a backslidden believer deeply involved in sin In order to make use of Jeremiah's words, we must understand that as a nation, Judah is a picture or a type of the believer in Christ. She was reborn in Egypt (brought to faith in the True God), baptized (figuratively) in passing through the Red Sea and carried by God through the wilderness to the land He promised where she could enjoy every good thing He provided, IF she would obey His Word. However, throughout her subsequent history she sinned and rebelled repeatedly against God, particularly through worshipping other gods, so God had to discipline and judge her time after time, and ultimately in the Babylonian captivity. The very same thing is true of us. We are reborn at some point when we recognize that Jesus is our Savior and we cry out to Him. We declare our intent to follow Him through baptism and He carries us through life. However, just like Judah, there are many times in our lives that we rebel against Him, when we deliberately sin and choose to do the very things God has warned us not to do. So, the principles contained in the messages that God gave Jeremiah concerning the sin of Judah can become messages meant directly for us, if we spend the time to look at them. The first five messages in the book, therefore, contain lessons about our sin. And in the first one, given in chapter 2, we can see:

II. The Foolishness Of Our Sin really like a catch phrase I heard that says, "Don't do stupid!" Sin is stupid; it's foolish for so many reasons. Why would you want to do something that hurts you, hurts those you care about, hurts those you involve in it, yada, yada, yada... And one of the biggest reasons its foolish is that it is discarding something that is unbelievably precious to get something that is utterly worthless without thinking about it. It's like trading your finely cut diamond ring for a ring sporting a large hunk of cubic zirconium because it caught your eye. Actually, it's a lot worse than that. Look what Jeremiah says in verses (2-3). God says, "I remember what you were like in your youth, in those days when I first brought you out of Egypt. I remember how devoted you were to me, how you followed after Me in the cloud, and even though I led you out into a barren and trackless wilderness; you came with Me like a young bride-to-be following after her husband." And likewise, if we're really a born again believer:

1. we have experienced the joy of being devoted to God Don't you remember what it was like for you after you first really understood and believed the Gospel or when you first got serious about really following Jesus? I remember what it was like at age 19 when I first really dedicated myself wholly to God and the joy there was in walking with Him. Every day brought new opportunities. I prayed about everything and was so excited to see God answer my prayers. It was like an adventure. And as we followed Him longer, just like Israel:

a. He led us and provided for us through difficult circumstances We experienced His "manna from heaven" time after time. He came through for us, providing and helping us in tough times. I remember when we came here at age 24 back in 1979. We left a church and a denomination in Ohio and didn't know where we would go or who would receive us. All our security was gone. But through a father of a friend passing a resume to dear old Mel Hunsicker who was on the pulpit committee here, God opened the door and brought us to Glenside. When we left Ohio, God had provided \$1200 in love gifts and that carried us through the whole summer. The day we arrived at our home here in September, we didn't even have the money to buy groceries, but the treasurer, Jim Campbell, showed up on our doorstep with our first paycheck in advance, saying, "I thought you could use this!" So many times through the years God has provided for us and guided us and, like Israel:

b. He protected us from what would have harmed us Israel was holy, set apart to Him; she was HIS, the first fruits of all the people in the earth that would belong to Him and He guarded her carefully. Anybody that would have harmed her was headed for disaster. I think of how the Amalekites attacked Israel there in the wilderness before they ever got to Mt. Sinai. Remember how when Moses held up his hands with the staff of God Israel won the battle? Israel soundly defeated Amalek and God told Moses, "Write this down and remember it: I will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven!" [Ex. 17:14]. How many times has God protected us? How many times has he healed us of diseases and broken bones and surgeries? How many times has He kept us from accidents and disasters that could easily have done us great harm? How many of us in this room would be dead right now if not for Him?!

So after all the joy and the provision and the protection that we have experienced walking with Jesus:

2. it is senseless for us to forsake walking with Him and go far away (4-5) It was not long before Israel turned her heart away from the Lord and worshipped the gods of the other nations around her. During the time of the Judges and then throughout her later history as a kingdom, she repeatedly worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth and even Chemosh, the cruel god of the Ammonites who demanded the human sacrifice of children. They went far away from Jehovah who had blessed and protected them in so many ways. But idols can't help you. God mocks their idolatry in (26-28). Why would you turn away from a living, powerful God to worship a piece of tree you've made with your own hands? It makes no sense! God says that:

a. to forsake Him is to pursue worthless things It is to run after empty things, useless things. Things that have no value and can't help you, like the wood and stone idols of the nations. It's the same word that opens Ecclesiastes, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!* When we turn away from God, it is always to chase after vain, worthless things

that have no real value. What did Solomon experiment with chasing after in that book? Wealth, wisdom, women and pleasure, the same things we usually run away from God to pursue. We get involved in business, in making money and forget God. We get into education and learning and adopt the philosophies of this world and forget God. We dive into immorality and seek to gratify our sexual desires or we immerse ourselves in some other form of pleasure, partying, having a good time. But having tried them all, Solomon agreed with God; he said, "It's all empty, worthless! It won't satisfy you or meet your needs! Only God Himself can do that!" The things that turn our heads away from God are all worthless, but what's even worse is that:

b. to forsake Him causes our own lives to become worthless Our lives lose their meaning; we're living for nothing, throwing away our precious days and hours trying to gratify ourselves with things that can't satisfy, when we could be living for the King and accomplishing His purposes in the world and enjoying a life that is truly meaningful! In 1993 Bill Hybels wrote: *"Recently I received a letter from a 43-year-old man with a \$300,000 annual income. He said that in the last 15 years he had owned more than a dozen Corvettes, boats, airplanes, and homes across the country. But unlike the smiling actors in the ads, he was not able to find joy.... One man recently had to choke back tears while he talked to me. All his life he had tried to make it to 'Easy Street.' Every waking moment of his days was spent trying to achieve his dream. It's not that he didn't love his wife and children; on the contrary, he wanted to provide what was best for them. They could wait awhile until he achieved all those wonderful things they deserved. He should have been happy as he spoke with me. He was just one deal away from the big time, a breath away from a vice presidency, one client away from Easy Street. And he had just taken possession of his dream home. The only problem was that it was an empty house. His wife and children had left him, and he was alone with the echoes of his footsteps. The price tag of his dream had cost him everything of value. He found himself spiritually alienated, relationally isolated, emotionally drained, and physically broken. All that was left was a pile of things that mocked him. [Descending into Greatness by Bill Hybels, Zondervan, 1993. Pages 178-179.]* Our idols may be different than Judah's but when we forsake Jesus, we pursue worthless things, our lives become worthless, and thirdly:

c. to forsake Him is to forget all He has done for us (6-7a) They forgot how the Lord had brought them out of bondage and slavery in Egypt and carried them through an awful wilderness where no one could survive for 40 years! And they forgot the plentiful blessings they got when they came into the land of Canaan. But God has done the same thing for us:

(1) He rescued us from a kingdom and a life of darkness - Col. 1:13 says, *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.* We were slaves of sin and Satan, lost, bound for an eternity in hell, without God and without hope in the world, the Bible says. Yet, when we gave our lives to Jesus:

(2) He blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ - Eph. 1:3 says, *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.* We have forgiveness, life that is eternal, a home prepared for us in heaven, the very Spirit of God Himself dwelling in us to guarantee it and provide us with power to live.

How can we just forget all of that and put it out of our minds so we can go run after worthless things? It's foolish, senseless, yet believers do it. WE do it! Jeremiah reiterates this over again as he declares:

II. The Nature Of Our Sin, moving down to verses (11-13). Now before the modern era of digging deep wells and piping it into houses, there were only two ways to get water. One was to be near a natural source of water with a continuing flow like a spring or stream. The other was to build a cistern, a water tank, and collect rainfall, perhaps from the roof, in it to store it for later use. God says, "I am like a fountain, a spring gushing forth fresh life-giving water, an inexhaustible source of supply. But you forsook Me and built your own little cistern to try to get for yourself the water you need, only your cistern is broken. It's cracked and doesn't really hold any water for very long. Why would you do such a thing?"

1. when we sin forsake the living God who is everything we need John tells us that Jesus cried out, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive... - Jn. 7:37-39. God has placed His very Spirit in us to be an inexhaustible life-giving source of everything we need, a source of which we can freely drink. But:

2. when we sin we make for ourselves "gods" who cannot meet our needs The people of Judah might take a log and carve out an idol and fall down and worship it and ask it to meet their needs, but it couldn't! Likewise, we set up for ourselves what we're going to worship, to devote our lives to, and we expect it to meet our needs. But it can't. It may give us some momentary pleasure, but it's a broken cistern. It can't truly satisfy and quench our thirst for very long! Both forsaking Jesus and giving ourselves to something else are great evils; both are not only senseless but terribly wrong. And not only that:

3. when we sin we bring upon ourselves grave consequences Skip down to verse (19) The consequences of choosing to sin will chastise us; God will see to it. *The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.* - **Heb. 12:6.** You can count on that! Just as any good father disciplines his son when he does wrong so that he learns just how painful wrong is, so God uses the often-disastrous consequences that happen when we choose to sin to teach us how painful and wrong sin is and to turn our hearts back to Himself. Listen, to forsake God and all He does for you and give your life to pursuing things that can't ever meet your needs AND bring painful consequences upon yourself for it is just foolish!

Now in the next few verses, God gives us:

III. Some Visual Pictures Of Our Sin He says when we sin:

1. we're like a stubborn ox who refuses to serve his master Many interpreters feel that verse (20a) should read in the second person instead of the first, like the NIV, *Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!'* Imagine an ox who has smashed into a tree and broken the yoke off his shoulders and now refuses to be harnessed. The master has bought him and fed and cared for him and now when the master needs him to work, he refuses. When we sin, we stubbornly refuse to serve the Master who bought us with His own blood and has cared for us all our days. It's not right! Secondly, He says when we sin:

2. we're like a carefully cultivated vine that bears putrid fruit (21) Imagine a gardener who plants and carefully tends and trims a grape vine but despite all His care it produces scrawny, inedible, literally putrid, grapes; it refuses to respond to all that nurturing. Our Gardener has cared for us so very carefully and nurtured us with all the best and when we sin, we yield for Him only bad fruit. It's not right! Thirdly, He says when we sin:

3. we're like an animal in heat that is consumed by desire (23b-25) In the land of Israel, when a young she-camel or a female wild donkey comes into heat, she runs to find a male, any male. Why? Because there is this drive in her to do so and she can't stop it. Judah had this drive in her that sent her running off after the idols of other nations. She couldn't seem to fight or control it and it consumed her. When we sin, we yield to the power of all the passions and drives that are within us; we become consumed by our own desires or, to put it scripturally, we are dragged away by our own lusts, and in that sense we're no better than senseless animals. And finally, He says when we sin:

4. we're like a rebellious child who refuses all correction (30a) What a heartache to love a child and correct that child and discipline that child to teach them the right way, but they keep on repeating the offense, never learning. Think how it would break your heart to see the child you lovingly raised turn as a teen from all your efforts to drugs and the occult, despite all your care. That's how God feels about us when we sin. When I sin, all the training and correction God has lovingly invested in me is wasted!

Dear ones, sin is stupid. It's foolish. It's senseless and selfish and stubborn and beyond that, ungrateful! It's forsaking the Savior who has done everything He could for us. *Shortly after dawn one August morning in 1944, the citizens of the small French village of Plelo were herded into the town square to face a German firing squad. The night before, the Germans had routed a small unit of French underground freedom fighters. Among the villagers lined up in the square was a 15-year-old boy. He didn't really understand why, but he knew that they were all about to die. He thought about the days before the war when he had roamed the green countryside. He thought about how much of life he would miss out on. More than anything, he was afraid of dying. Then, suddenly, the boy heard explosions in the distance. Tanks could be heard approaching the village. Quickly the Nazis ran from the square to defend themselves against a unit of 20 American soldiers led by Corporal Bob Hamsley. One of the fleeing freedom fighters had asked Hamsley to come to the aid of the villagers. Three hours later 50 Germans were dead, and the other 50 were prisoners. Nearly half a century later, in the same square where scores of Frenchmen came so close to death, the town of Plelo held a ceremony to honor Bob Hamsley. The man who tracked Hamsley down and made the arrangements for the ceremony to be held was that 15-year-old boy, now a former mayor of Plelo. He had purposed in his heart to find and honor the man who had saved his life. A savior is not easily forgotten. [From Leadership, Winter 1992. Page 49.]* Dear ones, how can we so easily forget our Savior? Let's purpose in our hearts to honor and serve the One who saved us eternally.

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Sin: It Is Betraying Our Husband - Ch. 3

God goes to great lengths in the Book of Jeremiah, trying to show us just how serious it is to Him when we, His people, sin against Him. In chapter 2 He taught us that when we sin it is forsaking our Savior; it is forgetting the one who saved us from bondage and darkness. Now in chapter 3 He moves on to compare our sin to the unfaithfulness of a husband or wife, which is, I believe, the deepest and most touching analogy He could use. In Jeremiah, as in many other places in the Bible:

I. God Uses Marriage To Picture His Relationship With His People In fact, one whole book, Song of Solomon, is dedicated to spelling out this picture. And:

1. He uses this analogy in both the Old and New Testaments as we'll see in a moment, but let's begin by reading verses (6-11) and today I'm going to use the NIV rather than my normal ESV simply because of the terminology it uses.

a. God pictures Israel and Judah as His two wives The analogy is made really plain in verse (20). You will find this repeatedly in the Old Testament prophets. Israel is said to be God's wife, one that He loved, one that He rescued and brought out of Egypt to become His bride. Now by this point in history the kingdom of Israel had divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, so God speaks of being married to two sisters. He's not promoting polygamy; He's merely using the analogy because His people were now in two separated kingdoms and both belonged to Him. In **Ez. 23** He gives His two wives, Israel and Judah, names, Oholah and Oholibah, and tells the same story He tells here. Israel proved to be an unfaithful wife. She betrayed His love by worshipping the idols of the nations, which is spiritual adultery, giving herself to another man. In verse 8 He says He has already divorced Israel, meaning that He gave her into the hand of Assyria in 722 BC and let her be carried away from her land. But his younger wife, Judah, saw all of this and instead of being warned by it, she followed the example of her older sister. She also sinned and committed adultery against Him by worshipping the idols of the nations, only she was still in the very act and through Jeremiah He was calling out to her, exposing the depth of her sin and pleading with her to return to Him, her rightful husband. Now when we come to the New Testament:

b. Paul pictures the church as Christ's bride Paul told the Corinthians, *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.* - **2 Cor. 11:2**. He pictures the church as a virgin bride engaged or betrothed to Christ, going through the waiting process for Him to come and take her to the wedding feast. The analogy is even more extensive in **Eph. 5:25-27, 30-32**, if you'll turn there with me. Here he says that we are already Christ's wife and that the unity of two becoming one in marriage is a picture of what has happened with us and Christ. We have become one with Him the way husband and wife are one in marriage and the goal is for Him to make His wife clean, pure, holy, and blameless. We're to be a faithful wife who does not sin against her husband just as He is a faithful husband who never sins against us! But the point is not having an academic analogy to explain things; it's personal:

c. we need to think of ourselves as being "married" to God He is not simply our King whom we must obey. He is more than our Master whom we must serve. He is not merely our God whom we must worship. He is our Husband! Our God has joined Himself in a personal relationship with us, a relationship deeper and more intimate than that of a husband or wife on earth. We are His wife! Now, ladies, that may be easier for you to picture; guys, if that seems a bit awkward for you, maybe it would help to think of it like this: everything that our wife is to us, we are to God and He sees us the way that we (hopefully) see our wives. If we can grasp that image, it will completely revolutionize our thinking in several ways and one is that our sin is not just a mistake or an error or breaking a rule:

2. our sin is unfaithfulness or committing adultery against Him You see:

a. we are joined to Him in the most intimate relationship possible Look with me at **1 Cor. 6:15-17**. Think for a moment of how intimate your relationship with your wife or husband is, if you're married. Think of all the things you share between the two of you that are not shared by another human being. No one knows you like your spouse. No one can be any closer to you; it is the closest possible human relationship. The two of you become one flesh. But Paul says that we are joined to the Lord even more deeply; we are one spirit with Him. His very Spirit actually lives inside our body and is joined to our spirit in a permanent union. Our very body is literally part of HIS body. Therefore:

b. sin is betraying our vow of faithfulness to that relationship You know how when you get married, you make a vow and say, "I will keep myself only unto you until death do us part"? We usually focus on the "death" part and trying to pronounce it, but the first part is saying, "I will not give myself to any other man or women except you." You see, to maintain the intimacy of marriage, there MUST be faithfulness. To take that intimate part of life and share it with another person is an absolute betrayal of our spouse. Both passages we read earlier emphasize that we must be chaste, be pure. That means that we must give our allegiance and our intimacy to no one or nothing but Him; we must be faithful. When we say to Jesus, "You are my Lord!", we're vowing that faithfulness to Him. Therefore, going back to Jeremiah:

c. sin impacts God in the way that unfaithfulness impacts us God is obviously angry with His wife, Judah, for her unfaithfulness. He is angry that she would betray His love after all the ways He had loved her and give herself to other lovers. But underneath the anger is pain. He expresses it in verses (19-20). I've been blessed with a wonderfully faithful wife, but I've had enough people come through my office whose spouses have been unfaithful to know that it hurts and it hurts deeply when a spouse is unfaithful. Just try to imagine how you would feel if you came home one day and caught that person whom you love with all your heart being with someone else. It would stab you at the core of your being. Well, that's how God feels when I sin; He has this incredible love for me, a love that sacrificed everything so I could be His. How painful it must be when I choose to violate that love. And it's not

just that He discovers me doing it; He lives in me and the whole time I'm doing it, He's watching me do it! I drag Him right into the midst of it with me! Oh how that must hurt Him!

Now let's go back and look more closely at those verses so that we can see:

II. The Things That Hurt God About Our Unfaithfulness First of all, it hurts God that:

1. we sin in a myriad of ways continually (6) It was not that Judah had been unfaithful once. It was not like there was one particular person who was so attractive to her that it became the supreme temptation and she fell one time. No, she took every opportunity. She turned every high hill and every spreading tree into shrines for the worship of all kinds of gods. She acted not as a mere adulteress but as a prostitute who continually sought out other lovers! We don't just sin once and that's the end of it. We sin in all kinds of ways, all the time. We gossip about somebody at church and we lie to a neighbor and we say something hurtful to someone at work and we choose to buy something for ourselves rather than give to God's work and on and on it goes. We chase after our other little gods of self and money and pleasure in every direction, even as He watches us do it. Secondly, it hurts God that:

2. we seem to never get our fill of sinning and stop (7) It would have been one thing if Judah had been unfaithful for a season and then had enough and stopped and returned to the Lord, her husband. But she didn't; she persisted without stopping and never looked back. It is one thing to forgive one act or even one set of acts but to watch someone go on and on, never satisfied, never stopping and never looking back to realize how much they hurt you, that is painful! Remember the prophet Hosea? God showed him what that was like. *When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD." So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. - Hos. 1:2-3.* But Gomer went back to her old ways and then, *The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."* - 3:1. God showed Hosea by his own marriage how He feels when His people sin. He loves us even when, like Gomer, we keep going back to our sin; we never seem to get enough. Thirdly, it hurts God that:

3. we seem to have no fear of the consequences (8) Neither Israel or Judah had any fear of God's discipline, of the consequences their sin would bring to them. Now you and I both know what God can do to discipline His own. We've read of Israel in the wilderness. We've seen what happened in David's life. We know the story of Ananias and Sapphira. We've seen God's chastening hand on other believers so when we choose to sin, it's like thumbing our nose at God who loves us, mocking His power to chasten us, thinking "He'll never do anything about it." Fourthly, it hurts God that:

4. we may regard our sin as a light and unimportant matter (9) Wouldn't it hurt you if your wife shared herself with any stranger that came along and it didn't even bother her? If there was not one shred of guilt or remorse? Judah treated God's love as a light thing that didn't matter! But don't we also treat sin so lightly at times? Don't we see it as an insignificant matter, even though every little thoughtless sin we commit is what sent Christ to the cross to pay its price! It is no small matter to God. And fifth, it hurts God that:

5. we pretend to love God while we go on sinning (10) She still said "Oh yes, Lord, you are my God and I love you" and then was unfaithful all day long. That would hurt worse than anything, if your spouse still pretended to love you in the midst of being unfaithful and you knew it was just an act. Sometimes our love for God seems like just an act, a pretense. We loudly proclaim "I love God" but persist in the very things He hates. It's hypocritical.

Listen, when we sin it hurts God and hurts Him deeply, yet here is the amazing thing:

III. God Exhorts Us To Return To Him When We Sin You see:

1. to exhort us to return is an act of tremendous grace (1) It's so unnatural that it was not even permitted under the Mosaic law. If a divorced wife went and married another she could never come back. If she was unfaithful, she was stoned without mercy. It is totally unnatural that a husband would want his wife to come back after betraying him in such an awful way, but that's our God. He's a God of grace! A God who gives us what we do not deserve. Three times in this chapter God issues the call through Jeremiah, "Return! Return! Return! I still want you. I still love you. I have never stopped loving you!" Even though we are unfaithful to Him, He is always faithful to us and constantly receives us. And He doesn't reluctantly say, "OK, I guess I'll take you back."

2. when we return to Him He completely restores our relationship in all its fullness. First of all, God is so gracious that:

a. He forgives us completely (12-13) There's 1 Jn. 1:9 in Old Testament language. "Simply confess, admit, acknowledge what you've done and I will no longer be angry with you". It is not a grudging act but an act of love. God is not a husband who keeps bringing up the past unfaithfulness of the wife and harbors bitterness. He gives genuine and full forgiveness. The unfaithfulness is as though it had never been! Second, God is so gracious that:

b. He restores our intimacy with Him (14-17) Now these, of course, are promises that will be fulfilled after Christ's return during the Millennium for Israel. But notice that in the Temple in Jerusalem when Jesus reigns, they won't need an ark because they'll have a throne. They'll have not just the symbol of God's presence but God's presence itself. That speaks to me of intimacy. God does not call us to return to right behavior but withhold Himself. He is not a husband who takes back his errant wife but refuses to be intimate with her again. He restores her to the closest intimacy they've ever had once more. When we return to God He restores us as close as we ever were to Him and, in fact, closer than ever. And finally, He is so gracious that:

c. He enables us to remain faithful (21-22) God will do more than forgive Judah; He will cure her of unfaithfulness! God does more than forgive us, He cures us! He heals us of backsliding. He cleanses us from unrighteousness by empowering and enabling us to remain faithful as we now learn to walk with Him.

A Christian husband had a wife who had become an alcoholic and at long last told him of an affair she had had with his best friend 10 years earlier. She said she experienced such feelings of guilt that the bottle was her means of escape. Of course, anger and resentment began to sweep over him because his wife's drinking had embittered their children and nearly destroyed their home. And, naturally, he was also deeply hurt by the fact that his close friend had betrayed his trust. But then he remembered Jesus' words, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." And as he thought of God's mercy toward him, he prayed for grace to do the Christlike thing. The next time he met the man who had caused him all this heartache, here's what he reports: "With a sob in my soul, I reached out my hand and gripped his, and for the first time in my life I knew what it was to forgive. I felt a tremendous sense of release as the unbearable weight of bitterness was lifted from my heart. This freedom enabled me to renew my love for my wife, and to overcome the barrier that had arisen between us. When I said to her, 'I forgive you and will accept you just as I did when I pledged to love and cherish you unto death,' the healing process began its wonderful work." Dear friends, that is how God forgives us! He forgives us completely, restores us fully and loves us as much as He ever did. How could we even think of betraying such a love?

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Sin: It Is Worshipping Idols - Chs. 7-10

I shared with you earlier that the Book of Jeremiah is like his sermon notebook. His messages from God are arranged by topic and in the early chapters God is teaching us lessons about the nature of sin. In chapter 2 we saw that sin is forsaking the One who saved us. In chapter 3 we saw that sin is betraying God who is our husband; it's committing spiritual adultery. Now look at **7:1-2**. Chapters 7-10 are one long sermon preached by Jeremiah at the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. At this point Josiah, the last godly King of Judah was dead and Jehoiakim was now on the throne. It was during his time that outward idolatry became rampant in Judah once again and in response God sent the Babylonian army to invade the land for the first time. If you'd like to find out what happened to Jeremiah for preaching this message, read chapter 26, which summarizes this message over again in a few verses and then tells the story of how Jeremiah almost died for preaching it, but was delivered at his trial. So, this message definitely was not popular! It is a condemnation of the sin of idolatry which we could agree with and easily dismiss, because we wouldn't even think of worshipping a statue or the sun, and so on. But the point of the message for us today is that when we sin as believers in Jesus and persist in it, we are committing idolatry just as surely as the people of Judah were. Jeremiah's message divides easily into four major sections and this first one focuses on:

I. How God's People Fall Into Idolatry (7:1-8:3) Let's read (**3-4, 8**). Now remember where Jeremiah is standing; he is preaching at the gate of the Temple. King Josiah had cleaned out and refurbished the Temple of the Lord during his reign and had reestablished the proper offering of sacrifices and worship of Jehovah. At that time there was true repentance and desire to know the living God, but by Jehoiakim's time things had degenerated to where people were still going through the motions of Temple worship but their hearts were no longer in it. They were now worshipping other gods even though they still came to the Lord's Temple. So they felt safe because they knew this was God's Temple and that God would never let anything happen to it. They were sure their relationship with God was secure because they had "*the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord*". And this is where sin and idolatry begin in our lives too:

1. we begin to place our confidence in outward forms of religion Of course, doctrinally we believe in eternal security. We know that Jesus saves us once and for all, forever, and if we are truly born again, we cannot lose our salvation. But when our hearts begin to grow a little cold and we cease walking with God as closely as we used to, we still go through the motions. We still go to church, still read the Bible, still give and still do many of the same outward things we always did, even though our heart may not be in it and we may be attracted to other things. Like the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2 that Jesus chided because they had lost their first love. Well, it is not a far step from there until:

2. we are deceived into thinking these outward forms outweigh evil behavior (9-11) That phrase in verse 11 was the very phrase Jesus used in cleansing the Temple and so it calls to mind the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They were always in their beloved Temple going through all the right motions, but they had become hypocrites who preyed on the worshippers to make money. They foreclosed on widows' houses while praying long prayers. They tithed every herb in their gardens but made loopholes to deny their obligation to care for their parents. Yet they felt they were right-

eous because they went through the motions, just like Judah in Jeremiah's day did all these evil things and then came to worship in the Temple, trusting that God would deliver them from the Babylonian army because they had His Temple and they offered sacrifices. You see, because of our security in Christ, it is easy for us to presume upon God's grace and go ahead and sin anyway, confident we won't be lost. We keep up the externals, our religious practices, but now we're willing to watch things we know we shouldn't watch. We say things we know we shouldn't say. We go places we wouldn't go before. One thing leads to another and before long we're like the church at Thyatira in Rev. 2. They had this woman in the church named Jezebel who called herself a prophet but was teaching believers to commit sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols. It's a downhill slope and we find ourselves willing to tolerate or even practice immorality, to cheat on taxes or be dishonest in business, to treat others wrongly and yet we still "go to church" like always. We had a relative that died some time ago who had the foulest mouth you've ever heard, his speech, always laced with sexual innuendos, and yet he was a deacon in his church. When we begin to trust in our outward practices, our heart grows further away, our behavior deteriorates and:

3. we end up offering ourselves to idols that have taken God's place (17-18) The whole family got involved. They still went to God's temple but at home they baked bread for the Queen of Heaven, that is, Ashtoreth, the Canaanite version of the Babylonian fertility goddess Ishtar, whose worship was filled with immorality. **(30-31)** They still went to God's Temple but outside the city they set up altars to Molech, the Ammonite god in whose worship they sacrificed their own children in fire! Isn't it amazing that the goddess our American society seems to be worshipping most clearly today is still sexual immorality! She is pursued everywhere; all restrictions have been cast aside and she is worshipped at every opportunity by many, before marriage by couples, outside of marriage in affairs and even in forms like homosexuality and lesbianism which God says clearly are against nature. And even the people of God who are still part of the church end up participating in her worship in all these ways! And, speaking of sacrificing children, more than 59 million unborn babies have been aborted since Roe vs. Wade was adopted in 1973. That averages out to more than 3,000 every single day and more than a thousand already this morning! Now I realize that many women are forced into abortions they don't want by boyfriends, husbands or parents, and are victims themselves, but by and large we are still worshipping a god that says human life is not sacred and we can't let unwanted babies get in the way of our plans, ambitions or pleasure. By the way, did you notice that the more we worship the first goddess, the more we worship the second?! So, we have people who are "in the church" campaigning for "the right to choose", yet still confident they are OK with God because they go through the motions. Others may worship at the altar of materialism and pursue money or the altar of power and control. Even though we don't carve idols out of trees any more, **11:13** is also true of us. And believers who lose their first love of Jesus always end up worshipping at their shrines.

Now in **(8:4-12)** Jeremiah shows us:

II. How We Stubbornly Persist In Idolatry Once a person gets involved in it, they tend to keep on pursuing it. It's hard for them to stop; it's almost like an addiction. Now Jeremiah pointed out to Judah that:

1. for God's people to do this is completely unnatural (4-7) Having known and experienced the blessings of walking with God, it should be natural to turn back to Him, to turn from pursuing idols. To persist in idolatry requires an act of the will, a stubborn choice to continue. The normal process that occurs in a believer is this: when we sin, the Holy Spirit who lives within us rapidly convicts our heart and we apply 1 Jn. 1:9. We confess our sin, experience forgiveness and return to the Lord with our heart and walk closely with Him once again. But when we choose to ignore that convicting voice of the Holy Spirit time and again, going against the natural process God has put in place:

2. our hearts become desensitized and hardened (12) There is a loss of shame that occurs, a searing of the conscience, a gradual hardening, so that sin is pursued with less and less reluctance and eventually with an open boldness, charging ahead like a horse plunging headlong into battle, God says in (6b). Now most of us have no experience with a war horse, but Job must have. God said to him, *Have you given the horse its strength or clothed its neck with a flowing mane? Did you give it the ability to leap like a locust? Its majestic snorting is terrifying! It paws the earth and rejoices in its strength when it charges out to battle. It laughs at fear and is unafraid. It does not run from the sword. The arrows rattle against it, and the spear and javelin flash. It paws the ground fiercely and rushes forward into battle when the ram's horn blows. It snorts at the sound of the horn. It senses the battle in the distance. It quivers at the captain's commands and the noise of battle.* - 39:19-25. A war horse has been desensitized and hardened to all the things that would naturally cause it to shy and bolt in fear; it is trained to rush headlong into battle and comes to love it and even sense it from afar. It becomes unstoppable. The more ground we give Satan, the more he establishes a stronghold in our life that persists and becomes more and more difficult to tear down until we can't stop ourselves any more and just keep heading deeper and deeper into sin.

Now, because they ignored His many warnings through the prophets (who served as Judah's Holy Spirit, if you will), God pronounced a sentence of discipline upon them to get their attention and show them they should return to Him in **(8:13-9:26)**. And He does the same for us; when we stubbornly grieve His Spirit and persist in our sin:

III. God Causes The Consequences Of Our Idolatry To Fall Upon Us First of all:

1. He removes His provision from us There is a difficulty in the Hebrew text of **(8:13)**, so let me read it to you in the NIV which makes the sense plain, *I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the*

vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them. For Israel that meant crop failure and famine, the elimination of the material blessing God had promised them. We also have a similar promise that God will care for us and meet our needs, so the first thing that happens when we stubbornly backslide is that we are left to fend for ourselves. God will not support us in our sin. Of course, we may do just fine on our own if we make lots of money, but when we have need, God is not going to be there to be called on. We are on our own, like the prodigal son out in the far country, having to make our own way, in the hope that it will turn our eyes toward home, like it did his. But on top of that, God:

2. He sends external circumstances meant to drive us to Him (8:16) The great fear on Judah's horizon in that day was the army of Babylon which was in the process of conquering the mid-eastern world and Judah was next on its list! They were dreading the day when the chariots of Babylon would appear in the north and sweep through the land, but their persistence in the sin of idolatry meant they couldn't call upon the Lord for His protection and deliverance and expect to receive it. So if experiencing lack of provision isn't enough to get our attention, God will use other external circumstances. It could be a tragedy that occurs, a health problem, a financial reversal or job loss, an accident or injury. Sooner or later God will normally face us with some set of circumstances too difficult for us to cope with without Him, so that we will realize our desperate need and turn to Him. But if we still persist and ignore His warnings:

3. He may have to eventually destroy us physically (9:16) God predicted it here, but in just a few years Judah as a nation was destroyed. The Babylonians conquered her twice, in 605 BC and again in 597 and each time she rebelled again, so finally in 587 BC they destroyed the city of Jerusalem, the Temple and many of her people were either killed or taken to Babylon and scattered abroad. Yes, she remained God's people, but as a nation, she was destroyed. I'd like you to turn with me to some sobering verses, **1 John 5:16-17**. John says that for a believer, a brother, there is a sin that leads to death. We may go so far into sin that God may choose to take us home to heaven early to prevent us from further dishonoring His name. You remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5! They began to worship at the altar of greed, wanting to keep all the money they made from selling their land, but they also wanted to appear outwardly generous and be praised in the church for their sacrifice. So they lied! They lied to Peter, they lied to the church and by that they tried to lie to the Holy Spirit who knows the truth! And God had them both drop dead and took them home! Paul told the Corinthians who were dishonoring the Lord's Supper, just going through the motions of being religious without truly honoring the body and blood of the Lord, that because of it many of them were weak or sick and a number of them had fallen asleep, that is, died! (1 Cor. 11:30). Evidently God may bring about our death if we seriously dishonor the Lord's Supper! That's something to think about next time we celebrate it!

Listen, when we sin by going after the false idols we allow into our lives, we can choose to learn our lesson the easy way or the hard way! We can listen to the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit and repent or we can stubbornly persist and force God to teach us our lesson through consequences and maybe even lose our lives. But it's so sad when we choose the hard way because:

IV. Falling Into Idolatry Is Foolish as God shows us in **(Ch. 10)**. The NASB titles this chapter *A Satire On Idolatry* and it truly is. In it, God is making fun of and pointing out how stupid it really is to let anything else take His place in our lives. In the first place:

1. idols are completely worthless (3-5) I think we would all agree that it is pretty ignorant to think of worshipping something that you have to cut down, carve out, dress up, and carry around, something that can't talk, can't walk, and obviously can't do anything to help you. Although over a billion Hindus would disagree! Of course, that's true of physical idols but it is also true of the idols to which we may give our lives. They can't replace God. They can't do what He can. They can't provide for us and protect us and preserve our lives. Nothing on this earth, not immortality, not materialism, nothing can do for me what God does. Why not? Because:

2. our God is the true, living, everlasting God (10-13) He made it all and He controls it all. He gives ample proof of that in nature, though of course, He is greater than all the things in nature! What a joy it is to have the Creator and Sustainer of the universe at the very center of our life and existence and to walk in relationship with Him. By the way, His Name is Jesus! What good sense it makes to walk with Him who created and sustains all things and who has redeemed us! Now after all this, you might still be wandering, "What does all this have to do with me? I am not doing any of those awful things; I love the Lord with all my heart and I'm walking with Him." Well, don't miss the fact that:

3. this is a warning for us John closes his first letter, a letter upon which we rely so much for the assurance of our salvation, by saying, *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* - **1 John 5:21**. You see, God is trying to teach us something about sin. When I sin, it's the first step in the direction of idolatry, I have let something else be more important to me than God and I have given my allegiance to it by my actions. Sin is more than forsaking the Savior who rescued me; it is more than betraying a faithful husband who loves me. Sin is idolatry; it is changing gods; it is living for someone or something other than the true God. It is worshipping the creature rather than the Creator and exchanging our Glory for the image of an ox that eats grass, in the words of Rom. 1.

And it all begins with letting our love for Jesus be replaced by mere outward behavior. Gerard Reed writes, "We want to worship God, but we become obsessed with certain ways to do so--or not to do so. We devise sophisticated strategies, often of great artistic ingenuity, whereby to approach and serve God. Idolatry, rightly understood, simply means focusing on the means (how we worship) rather than the End (the One we worship). My wife Roberta is a fine cook. Just imagine, however, that she decided to demonstrate her love for me by giving herself full-time to cooking. Day after day, all day long, she'd shop for the finest foods in the most exclusive specialty shops. She'd prepare unique and tasty breakfasts and dinners. Her skills as a gourmet cook would shine like a star. In fact, she'd make sure her talents were evident to all. She'd invite numerous guests to join us as every meal--making sure they knew she was giving herself completely to cooking meals for me, showing her love for me. Further imagine that, as time went on, she became so busy preparing and serving the food, entertaining the guests, demonstrating her devotion, that she never sat down and ate with me. In fact, morning, noon, and night, she would say little or nothing to me. Should that happen, it would be obvious that my wife had become obsessed with means (the cooking that demonstrates her good wifely character) rather than ends (maintaining a warm relationship with me, her husband, for whom she was cooking). In truth, the really important thing about mealtime is that it enables us to be together, to talk together, to just look at each other. If my wife reduced our relationship to her activity (cooking), I'd soon tire of the good food and start skipping meals--knowing she'd keep on cooking and entertaining folks because she wanted to impress the world with her devotion to me...." [The Liberating Law: Ten Steps to Freedom by Gerard Reed. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1996. Pages 66-67.] Whenever our relationship with Jesus begins to become mere outward religious performance, we're already starting to slide down the slippery slope of idolatry where it goes is not good. As John said, *Little children, keep yourself from idols!*

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Sin: It Is Breaking Our Covenant - Ch. 11

In this early part of the Book of Jeremiah, he has put together some of his messages from God that teach us the nature of our sin. So far, we have seen that when we sin it is forsaking the One who saved us. It is betraying our husband and committing spiritual adultery. And it is worshipping idols, pursuing another god. Now chapter 11 is the beginning of another message which is commonly known as his message on The Broken Covenant. But before we look at it, it is very important for us to look at:

I. The Setting Of Jeremiah's Message Remember I told you that Jeremiah did not arrange his book chronologically? Well, Bible students have deduced that chapter 11 actually comes from very early in Jeremiah's ministry during the time of King Josiah. Josiah was the most godly of the kings after David and something very important happened in his time, around 621 BC. It is recorded for us in **2 Chron. 34**, if you'll turn there with me. Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, was probably the worst king Judah ever had and Josiah's father, Amon, was just as bad. Both were tremendous idolaters and led Israel to worship other gods. The Temple of Jehovah had fallen first into misuse by building altars in it to other gods until it finally fell into disuse and disrepair. Josiah, however, loved the Lord and ordered a clean-up of His Temple and the re-institution of proper worship. Well, in the process of cleaning out rubble:

1. King Josiah found the Book of the Law in cleansing the Temple (14-18) Hilkiah the priest found the scroll of the Law, the Torah, our books of Genesis through Deuteronomy, which had evidently been lost to the nation. For years and years that scroll lay buried in the rubble and a whole generation had never heard it. Imagine, King Josiah, though he loved the Lord and must have been taught about Him, had never heard the Word of God read before in his life! Well:

2. the King was deeply convicted when he read the book (19-21) Josiah realized just how angry God was with His people because of their sin and idolatry. He read in Leviticus and again in Deuteronomy all the curses that God said He would send upon Israel if she worshipped other gods and disobeyed His commands. He realized that because of the deeds of his fathers that Judah had become the object of God's wrath and destruction was looming before her. And he determined to do something about it. So:

3. the King renewed the covenant with God and the people of Judah (29-33) Josiah made a covenant with God to obey His commands; actually, he was renewing the covenant that God made at Mt. Sinai through Moses. First, he made it his own; he pledged himself to obey it and he made that promise with all his heart and soul. And then he made all the people join him in making that promise, from the least to the greatest of them. And then he enforced it by doing everything he could to remove the idolatrous shrines from his territory and forcing the people to worship only the Lord. It was a great beginning of renewal in the land and Jeremiah was there to support Hezekiah's renewal with his preaching to Judah. This message in chapter 11 comes from that very time and now you'll understand better what Jeremiah is referring to in verses **(1-2)**. *This covenant* is the covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai in the time of Moses, the covenant of the Law that was just found and reaffirmed. And look what Jeremiah was to do in verse **(6)**. He was to support Josiah's efforts by preaching from town to town and in Jerusalem, *Hear the words of this covenant and DO them!* "Your forefathers have broken it over and over and have brought God's wrath upon the nation, but don't YOU do it! Obey God! Keep the covenant!". Now how do we apply this portion of Scripture to ourselves? We are obviously not Israel; it was not our forefathers who stood by Mount Sinai and made a covenant with God. In fact, the New Testament tells us that we are not under

the Law at all. The Old Covenant has been fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ and, indeed, it has been replaced by a New Covenant, a better covenant, an unconditional covenant of grace between God and us where He writes His very law on our hearts, as we'll see in Jeremiah 30-31. But there is another sense in which:

II. God's Covenant With Judah Pictures Our Covenant With Christ Let's read the message God gave Jeremiah to preach about the covenant in verses (3-5, 7-8). The first thing we need to do is to understand what a covenant is. Covenants were commonly made in Old Testament times, sometimes between kingdoms (as what we would call treaties), sometimes for business purposes, and even marriage is referred to as a covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement, a vow or promise or oath that is solemn and sacred. In fact, in the Hebrew language, you don't "make" a covenant; you "cut" a covenant and that is a reminder of the ancient practice where the two parties would kill a sacrificial animal, cut the carcass in half and pass between the pieces, symbolizing that the covenant was as sacred as life itself. We even try to honor this idea by including the idea of "until death parts us" in our marriage covenants. But God's covenant with Israel was an example of a particular type of covenant that was common in the ancient near east, often referred to as a suzerainty treaty, where a powerful king or nation controls a weaker people who pledge loyalty to him. It was the basis of the feudal system in the Middle Ages where a vassal would swear allegiance and pay homage to his king or lord in a special ceremony designed to create a lasting bond between the two. So:

1. a covenant is an oath sworn between a King and His vassal [servant] In (5a) God says He swore an oath to their fathers. He pledged Himself to them and they pledged themselves to Him at Mt. Sinai in Ex. 19:5-8. He said, *...if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, ...you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* And they responded, *...All that the LORD has spoken we will do.* And so the covenant was made. Now you may not have thought about this, but **when we believe, we declare Christ to be our Lord.** You know **Rom. 10:9-10**, *...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* When you believe in Christ's saving work in your heart, you make a confession, a declaration with your mouth, that Jesus is your Lord. We say that word so much that we forget what it means. The Greek lexicon says that a lord is *he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has power of deciding; master, the possessor and disposer of a thing, the owner; one who has control of the person.* When we came to Jesus, we didn't just believe in what He did for us on the cross so we could go to heaven, we made a covenant; we pledged an oath of loyalty and submission to Him. We placed ourselves completely under His control as our King and Master and yielded to Him the right to do whatever He wants with us and to command us as He pleases! Wow, did you realize you signed up for that? *Shortly after joining the Navy, a new recruit asked his officer for a pass so he could attend a wedding. The officer gave him the pass, but informed the young man he would have to be back by 7 PM Sunday. "You don't understand, sir," said the recruit. "I'm in the wedding." The officer shot back, "No, you don't understand, you're in the Navy!"* We're not in the Navy; we're in the Army! Repeatedly the New Testament says we are soldiers of Christ Jesus. He's not merely our sergeant; He's our Commander in Chief and we have pledged our loyalty and humble service to Him at His command! Now secondly:

2. a covenant contains a set of promises that bind both parties The king or lord vows his power and protection to those bound to him and his provision of the things they need from him. In Israel's case:

a. God saved them He brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace (4a) where they were suffering and dying in their bondage. And **He promised to bless them**, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day (5b). In **Lev. 26:3-13** God spelled out all the things He would do for Israel in that land. He would give them rain and crops and fruit on the trees. They would be filled with food and live in peace and be protected from their enemies. And He promised to walk among them and be their God and they would be His people as verse 4 said. Well, as our Lord, **Jesus saved us** out of our bondage to sin which would lead to our death and to an eternity of suffering in hell. He gave His very life to protect ours. And on top of that, God **has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus** according to **Eph. 1:3**. He has chosen us, redeemed us, forgiven us, predestined us to be His children made in the image of His Son to rule with Him in a Kingdom where we shall forever be His treasured inheritance! Just as God was saying to Judah, "Look, I kept my part of the covenant; I have been faithful; I did my part!", so Jesus has done His part for us. He has even sent His very Spirit to live in our hearts and bind us together in personal and permanent union with Him! However, the flip side of the covenant is that:

b. Judah was obligated in return to obey God's commandments In light of all that He had done for her and promised her, she was *...to listen to My voice and do all that I command you*, as (4) says. Those were the terms God laid upon her. And as I said to you a moment ago, **by declaring Jesus Lord we obligate ourselves to obey Him.** You remember that on one occasion He was teaching a great multitude of people who had come to Him and as He concluded His teaching He asked, *Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?* - **Lk. 6:46**. It's a contradiction in terms! If He is our Lord, He is to be obeyed, explicitly! He told the Twelve twice in the Upper Room, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments!* - Jn. 14:15. That's our obligation; it's the covenant we have made with Him and even though it's an obligation we fulfill out of love, still it is what we have vowed to do by declaring Him Lord. Now thirdly:

3. breaking a covenant is sin and carries consequences (8, 10) God says, "Down through the centuries, over and over again, your fathers broke the covenant; they ran after other gods and worshipped them and they broke My commandments. I kept My part of the sacred oath, but they broke their oath." That is a tremendously serious offense, in the case of earthly kings or lords often an offense worthy of death! So, my point of comparison is that **when we sin, we break our covenant of loyalty to Christ**. We become traitors to our Lord, we violate our oath of fealty, we betray the goodness of our King to us for our own selfish purposes! It is the ultimate shame and dishonor! See if you know who I'm talking about: *At age 14 he ran away from home and fought in the French and Indian War. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, he joined the American army as a colonel and in 1775 shared a command with Ethan Allen in the capture of Ticonderoga. Later he led 1000 men into Canada where he fought in the battle of Quebec because His courage in battle won him a promotion to brigadier general. But something went wrong. Thoughts of compromise ate away at his patriotic zeal. Soon the unthinkable happened. He offered his services to the British, and in 1780 devised a plan to surrender West Point to British control. Today, instead of being remembered as a national hero, the name of Benedict Arnold is synonymous with "traitor."* [Today in the Word, June, 1990, p. 10.] He became our national shame and we'd have hung him, if we had caught him. I need only mention the name of Judas. Virtually every time it is mentioned in the New Testament, the words *the betrayer* or something similar follow it. He has become an emblem of shame to the whole world, one who would sell his Master for 30 pieces of silver. Do you see, that's what we become, that's what we're doing, when we knowingly choose to sin? Sin is a shameful betrayal and breaking of our covenant with Jesus. Well, every covenant usually has consequences for covenant breaking built right into it. In Israel's case:

a. God would bring disaster upon them (11a) God spelled out the consequences specifically in the Law. After all God's promises of blessing in **Lev. 26**, He gave the list of curses in **(14-39)**. He says He would send disease and famine upon them; He would let them be defeated and ruled by their enemies and all these things would increase over and over again seven-fold if they did not repent until, at last, He would lay all the cities of the land waste, make it a desolation and scatter them among the nations. And that is exactly what happened in their history in Jeremiah's time and then again finally after Jesus' time in AD 70, when Israel as a nation was destroyed at last and remained so for almost 1900 years! Well, in that I think we can find the lesson of *Heb. 12:6, The Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives*. That word *chastises* is literally *scourges* in the Greek. Pilate scourged Jesus; it's the same word. As we saw last week, sometimes God has to seriously punish His children, to let awful things happen, in order to turn their hearts back to Him, just as He did with Israel. But the other consequence Jeremiah mentions is that:

b. God would not listen to them when they cried for help (11b, 14) God says, "In that day, you'll cry to Me at last, but I won't listen. I won't help you!" Well, if we're sincere, I don't believe that God will ever refuse to listen to us, His children, but **He will refuse to answer our prayers while we disobey**. Peter tells husbands to live with our wives in an understanding way and treat them with honor *...so that your prayers be not hindered - 1 Pet. 3:7*. When we're sinning, our prayers are hindered; God can't answer them freely and help us the way He would if we were keeping our covenant! There are always serious consequences for breaking it!

Now the sad fact is that, in spite of Jeremiah's preaching:

III. The People Of Judah Determinedly Refused To Obey God's Word (9-10) That word *conspiracy* is again the word for deliberate betrayal, for an unlawful alliance. You see, despite all Josiah's zeal and reforms:

1. while complying outwardly, the people of Judah rebelled inwardly and returned immediately to idolatry after Josiah died They did what they planned to do all the way along, to tolerate and go along with the change until the circumstances changed. If you look at **(21)**, they even wanted to kill Jeremiah for going around preaching this message and threatened him directly. The old saying is that you can't legislate morality. Well, you can't legislate a heart into obeying God either. That's why Peter warns us that **we must set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts - 1 Pet. 3:15**. That's where it's got to happen. It is not enough to outwardly say, "Christ is my Lord"; it must be true in our hearts. In there we must make Him who He really is to us. Inside we must bow down with Thomas and say, "My Lord and my God!" all the time, on every occasion, in every situation. But I want to finish with this important note:

2. the conditional Mosaic covenant of law did not annul the Abrahamic covenant of grace which secured Israel's place as God's people forever Way back in **Gen. 12:1-3** God made an unconditional covenant, a one-sided covenant, with Abraham and all his descendants that did not depend on them doing anything. He said, *I will make of you a great nation and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed!* And Paul points out in **Gal. 3:17** that *...the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void....* God vowed to Abraham that his descendants, Israel, will always be God's people, regardless of the fact that they became disobedient, rejected their Messiah and ended up scattered over the whole earth. He has plans to bring them back to Himself in the Tribulation and make them the center of His Millennial Kingdom! He has not cast them away eternally as a nation. And **likewise our eternal salvation is secured by grace, not works**. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. - Eph. 2:8-9*. Please do NOT think I'm saying that our behavior, our obedience, is what keeps us saved. Absolutely not. **Our salvation remains in place even if we disobey. 1 Cor. 3:15** says that even if all a person has done in their life is wood, hay and stubble and it burns up and disappears before the judgment seat of Christ, yet *he*

himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. When we break the covenant we made to obey Christ and persist in it, we may waste our lives and lose everything, yet He will not lose us.

In fact, He forgives us, even when we break our covenant with Him, just as God was willing to forgive His ancient people when they turned to Him. *Theodore Ferris once said that he thought he knew a certain man, a friend of his, pretty well. He knew that man to be powerful, a successful businessman, the kind that makes decisions easily and drives a hard bargain. But one day Ferris was having dinner with the man's son and they were talking about the father and the son revealed something new about his dad. It seems that when the son was in the army, he made a terrible mistake, got himself into trouble, and was given a dishonorable discharge. He said he knew what he had done disgraced his family. He thought his father would be outraged, but he also felt that he had to tell him what had happened. "So I did," said the son. "I wired him and told him what happened. He sent a telegram back and the telegram had only three sentences in it: 'I will stand by you no matter what happens. I will be there in the morning. Remember who you are.'" And Ferris concludes, "That's the way a covenant works. The father's heart was broken but the covenant wasn't."* [Windows to Truth, Jan-Mar 1991. Page 7.] I'm thankful my Heavenly Father will always be there for me no matter what I do, but I don't want to go home to Him in shame. I don't want to disgrace the One who gave His all for me.

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Sin: It Is Destroying Our Usefulness - Ch. 13

Human beings do not always learn by listening to words; sometimes we need to see with our eyes. God knows we often need object lessons and so He sometimes told his prophets to speak to His people by means of symbolic actions. For instance, God had Ezekiel build a clay model of Jerusalem and act out the siege of Jerusalem right in his living room for the people to watch! In chapter 27 God had Jeremiah literally wear a yoke on his neck; in chapter 19 he was told to smash a clay jar. All of these things were graphic visual messages to the people of Judah that God planned to destroy their nation and have them carried away as slaves to Babylon. Now in the winter of 598-597 BC, an 18 yr. old boy named Jehoiachin became king of Judah for a period of 3 months, after his father Jehoiakim died. The Babylonian army was already enroute to quench the rebellion his father had begun and at that time, God gave Jeremiah a symbolic action with which to warn, not only the people of Judah, but the King himself and the Queen mother according to verse 18:

I. Jeremiah Was Told To Buy A Linen Sash (1) The ESV calls it a loincloth, the NIV a belt, the NAS a waistband, and the KJV a girdle. Now it certainly wasn't a piece of women's apparel, nor was it exactly a belt like a soldier would wear to fasten his armor. It is what we would probably call a sash, a piece of cloth, made of linen in this case, that was wrapped around the waist and tied tightly to keep the clothing in place. Its folds formed a pouch where money or other small items could be safely kept and carried about. It was also useful for tucking up the loose bottom of one's robe when running or working and from that comes the expression "to gird up your loins". So God had Jeremiah go and buy a linen sash specifically for this object lesson (1-7). Notice the lesson consisted of four steps. First:

1. he was to wear the sash He purchased it in the market but then put it on and wore it for some unspecified period of time. It was probably nicely embroidered for beauty, as a priest's garments were meant to be, according to Ex. 28:39-40 and so it would have been obvious and noticeable to the people as he wore it, especially when it was brand new. But then notice that:

2. he was not to wash the sash As it became soiled or dirty, he was not to launder it as he would his other clothes, so over time it became dirtier and less noticeable and people might even wonder why he didn't wash it. But then:

3. he was to remove and hide the sash After a while the Lord told him to take off the soiled sash and to take it to a place the NIV calls Perath which is a literal transliteration of the Hebrew letters. The ESV, KJV and most other translations say *Euphrates*. Hebrew has no written vowels so in Hebrew, both words are exactly the same, three consonants, P-R-T. For him to go to the Euphrates River would have meant walking a 700 mile round trip to the north, not once but twice, and that smack into the face of the invading Babylonian army. Perath is more likely the little town of Parah about 3 miles from Jeremiah's home in Anathoth which has both a rocky ravine and a brook. There Jeremiah was to hide the sash in a crevice in the rocks and leave it to be exposed to the elements. Then:

4. he was to retrieve the sash after many days After some time passed, God sent Jeremiah back to Perath to get the sash and display it to the people, but of course:

a. it was now decayed You can imagine that, though it was beautiful before, now it was rotted and deteriorated and moldy and disgusting. And in fact:

b. it had become good for nothing Jeremiah could no longer wear it because it would rip and tear. It was now useless and would have to be discarded, thrown away. Of course, the people would remember its former state when Jeremiah wore it and would see the contrast and in that lies the lesson God was trying to teach:

II. Jeremiah's Sash Pictured The House Of Israel And Judah (8-11) Israel was to be to God just like that girdle was to Jeremiah. They were to be a useful tool to serve his purpose. Look again at verse (11):

1. they occupied a privileged position as His people Of all the peoples of the earth, they alone belonged to Him. In fact, as Jeremiah's sash was bound tightly around his waist:

a. they were bound closely to God God Himself said to Israel, *I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.* - Lev. 26:10-11. His Tabernacle was carried about in the very middle of the people wherever they went in the wilderness; His presence was over them and went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God bound them as closely as possible to Himself and identified Himself with them. It was a tremendous privilege, but God bound them closely to Himself for a purpose; they were to be for Him *a name, a praise and a glory...*:

b. as God displayed them to the nations they were to bring Him glory Look with me at Deut. 4:5-8. They were to obey God's righteous commandments and worship Him in such a way that all the nations around them, all who came into contact with them, would marvel and say, "Wow, look at the way they live! Look how righteous and good their laws are! Look at how their God blesses them and protects them and is so close to them that He answers whenever they call to Him! Surely He is the true God!" We see that happen in a number of places in the Old Testament. For instance, Rahab, the harlot living in Jericho, heard what God did for His people in Egypt and believed. A Moabite named Ruth saw God in her mother-in-law Naomi and trusted in Him. The Queen of Sheba was drawn to God by Solomon's wisdom and Naaman, the leprous Syrian general, came to worship God because of His healing power displayed through Elisha. However, this was not just supposed to be true in isolated incidents but in Israel's whole existence. Through Israel and Judah, the other peoples would come to acknowledge God and worship God. He would display them like a beautifully decorated sash wound around His person that would attract the nations to Him - IF they would be faithful to obey Him and worship Him alone! But sadly, that rarely happened. Instead, like Jeremiah's sash:

2. they became soiled through their great sin (10a) Israel did whatever they wanted instead of what God commanded and they went after the idols of other nations instead of worshipping Him. So instead of people noticing how wonderful and beautiful God's sash was and admiring the One who wore it, all they saw was how dirty and messy it was. I don't mean to advertise for a particular brand of detergent, but I can't help but think of some of the OxyClean commercials you see on TV! I especially like the ones where they hang up nice clean white shirts and blast them with green grass stains and yellow mustard stains and red ketchup stains so badly you'd think they were utterly ruined. If you actually let those dry and wore them, what would people think? That you're a real slob! It would reflect on your character! But magically, OxyClean erases all of that and the shirts become white and shining, so bright that people would notice and be attracted by it and think well of you. Well, because God's people never really repented for long and were never really cleansed of their sin, Judah remained soiled. And verse 10 says it happened because of two factors. First:

a. they were extremely stubborn, refusing to listen God sent her warnings time and again through the prophets. He showed her over and over again in her history in very graphic ways the seriousness of her sin; he let her be conquered by other nations. Yet she was stubborn, she persisted, she refused to be washed. Her habit of not listening to God became so ingrained in her that this is what God says about her in verses (22-23). Can they? No! Judah's stubbornness had progressed to become an unchangeable hardening; they could no longer help themselves and their chief sin was this:

b. they pursued and worshipped other gods, the very gods of the nations around them. How could God use her to display His glory and show the peoples of the earth how unique and wonderful He is, if she was constantly running after other gods and worshipping them and behaving by their rules? Her usefulness to God was at an end, so at last God had to take her off His waist like Jeremiah took off his sash. And the sad message of this object lesson is that:

3. they would ultimately become completely ruined like the sash The stint in the rocks by the brook merely speeded up what was already happening in the decaying process to make the lesson more obvious when they saw how rotten and worthless the sash had become. God was telling them three things through it. First:

a. God would spoil their great pride by allowing them to be conquered (9) Here is the Babylonian army, the greatest military force in the known world of that day, bearing down upon them, but little Judah proudly thinks they are invincible, that their tiny army and their ancient walls can protect them. They still think they are the beautiful sash; they don't see how decayed and weak they have become. LuAnn always tells how when she was a child, her younger brother was kind of little but he had this attitude about him and was always getting into fights and getting beat up - so he'd run to her for protection! He was too proud to see how puny he really was! So God says, "I'll break your pride, Judah" and He did; in but a short time after the invasion, King Jehoiachin saw that he had to surrender, so he humbled himself and gave up. Secondly, through the sash lesson:

b. God says they became completely useless for His purposes (10b) They became *good for nothing*. God could no longer use her for His purpose of getting glory. She could no longer serve the purpose for which He had bound her to Himself. He had no use for her any longer, so thirdly:

c. God says they would be completely taken away into exile (19) Just like the ruined sash was carried away to Perath so Judah was completely removed and carried away to the *Euphrates* (same word, remember?) which flowed right through Babylon. King Jehoiachin was taken captive into exile along with his mother and many hundreds of others a few months later.

Now it would be easy for us to say, "So what?", to learn another interesting story from the Bible, blame Judah for being so bad, and keep on reading. But that's not what God intends for us to do. If we ponder it a bit:

III. Jeremiah's Sash Becomes A Picture For Us too, an object lesson that God wants us to apply to our own lives. You see, instead of Judah:

1. WE are now God's chosen people, His own possession Look with me at **1 Pet. 2:9**. We are now a newly created race of people, one new people composed of some from every ethnic people, the race of those who believe in Jesus Christ who have been chosen to belong to Him and purchased by Him to be His most treasured possession. We're the new sash He's wearing to enhance His beauty! And what are we to be like? We're to be a *holy nation*, a people who live out His righteous character, not because we follow a bunch of written rules but because His very laws are now written on our hearts. We've been made holy at the core of our being and we're to live as a holy people among the nations of the world, so that they look at us and say, "Wow, what a God their God must be!". And not only that, Peter says we're a *royal priesthood*, a whole kingdom of priests who serve God, who represent God before the rest of the people of the world and in turn bring the people before Him. We serve as mediators between God and the rest of the world and what does God intend for us to do? Look at the end of verse 9:

2. God intends for us to declare His excellencies to all people In ancient times there was no printed or electronic media. News had to be carried in person. So when there was important news, official news that everyone must hear, a king or some other authority would send a herald, an official messenger, to stand in a public place and repeatedly announce the news. In medieval Europe towns would have a "Town Crier", who would stand in the marketplace or public square and make official announcements. We are to be the joyful announcers who declare to the world all the virtues of God, how good He is and how loving He is and how powerful He is and the great lengths He went to in order to provide salvation for us. We're the sash declaring His beauty with our mouths, but we also declare it another way. Look down to **1 Pet. 2:12**. Just like Israel, our holy behavior is intended to display and declare His virtues! Jesus put it like this in **Mt. 5:16**, *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*. People see God at work in what we do and how we live and if we live as His holy people, they give Him the credit; they glorify Him! Go back to Jeremiah 13 and look again at verse **(11)**. That's true of us also. We are to be for Him *a Name and a praise and a glory*. That means:

a. through us His reputation grows among the nations A name is a reputation. Through us they hear of Him and form an opinion of who He is and what He is like. Last year we had a young crew of painters out front painting the columns. Across the street our neighbors have a teenage special needs son and they suddenly noticed that he had disappeared and were worried that he had wandered out of the house and down the street somewhere. The father came out frantically yelling and the painters all immediately stopped what they were doing and joined in the search until he was safely found - at home. But the father came over here twice to tell us the story and what wonderful people we had working for us. You see, their loving behavior grew and enhanced OUR reputation with those around us, and that's what OUR Godly behavior does with Jesus' reputation in the world. We're the only Jesus most people will ever see, the only Bible most people will ever read. But as they watch us and listen to us, they think more and more highly of Him until they begin to praise Him:

b. through us His worship grows among the nations We become for Him a praise. People believe and they join us and they worship Him. All over the world that process is going on; worshippers are being drawn to Him through His people, even here. And so:

c. through us His glory is increased He is made more beautiful and glorious and shining in the eyes of the watching universe. The splendor of the King, robed in majesty grows brighter and brighter as our lives declare how great He is!

That's how it's supposed to work, but:

3. sin destroys our usefulness to God Each time we sin, we soil His sash somewhat, we tarnish His image bit, we degrade His reputation in the eyes of others. And as we persist in sinning, in doing what we want instead of what He wants, in running after idols to whom we give control of our lives, we frustrate the very purpose for which He has chosen us as His people and we make ourselves useless as Judah did. He cannot use us to get a name and praise and glory when we are a decaying, rotten sash! We become good for nothing in His plan. Jesus put it another way in **Mt. 5:13**, *You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good*

for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Salt is so common to us; we never think about how valuable it is. But 40 million tons are required each year to fill our needs. Homer called it divine. Plato called it a "substance dear to the gods." Shakespeare mentioned salt 17 times in his plays. In ancient Greece a far-flung trade involving the exchange of salt for slaves gave rise to the expression, "...not worth his salt." Special salt rations were given to Roman soldiers and known as "Solarium Argentums," the forerunner of the English word "salary." Thousands of Napoleon's troops died during his retreat from Moscow because their wounds would not heal--their bodies lacked salt. The human body contains about 4 oz. of salt. Without enough of it, muscles won't contract, blood won't circulate, food won't digest and the heart won't beat a beat. [<http://aksermonillustrations.blogspot.com/search/label/Salt>] Salt pretty much sustains life, so when Jesus said, *You are the salt of the earth*, He was making a pretty serious point. God wants to preserve the life of the peoples of the world through us by us declaring His glory through our words and through our lives. But if we lose our saltiness, if we become involved in sin and persist in it, we become good for nothing as far as His purpose is concerned. And if we continue in it, we can literally waste our entire lives. We can spend a lifetime serving no good purpose for God, bringing Him none of the glory He designed us to produce.

Pastor and author John Piper writes, *For me as a boy, one of the most gripping illustrations my father [who was an evangelist] used was the story of a man converted in old age. The church had prayed for this man for decades. He was hard and resistant. But this time, for some reason, he showed up when my father was preaching. At the end of the service, during a hymn, to everyone's amazement he came and took my father's hand. They sat down together on the front pew of the church as the people were dismissed. God opened his heart to the Gospel of Christ, and he was saved from his sins and given eternal life. But that did not stop him from sobbing and saying, as the tears ran down his wrinkled face—and what an impact it made on me to hear my father say this through his own tears—"I've wasted it! I've wasted it!" This was the story that gripped me more than all the stories of young people who died in car wrecks before they were converted—the story of an old man weeping that he had wasted his life. In those early years God awakened in me a fear and a passion not to waste my life. The thought of coming to my old age and saying through tears, "I've wasted it! I've wasted it!" was a fearful and horrible thought to me.* The title of Piper's book makes the point of Jeremiah's object lesson; it's called "Don't Waste Your Life!"

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Relationship With God: The Potter's House: God's Sovereignty - Ch. 18

When you finish chapter 13 of the Book of Jeremiah, you move into a different section of the book. In those first chapters God has been describing to Judah the nature of her sin and through that we have learned just how serious our sin is to God and what it is like to Him. These next chapters move on to concentrate on the penalties that are going to fall on Judah because of her sin. For our purposes, we are going to seek out in them gems that contain personal lessons for us. As we study these chapters that have to do with God's purpose and plan for Judah as a nation, we want to discover the way He works in our lives as believers in Jesus Christ. Now in chapter 18:

I. God Sent Jeremiah To A Potter's House, a pottery, a potter's shop, where he could go in and watch the potter at his work. And God sent him there to teach him a lesson so that he could understand how God was at work in dealing with Judah. **(1-4)** As Jeremiah watched:

- 1. he saw the potter shaping a clay vessel** You've all seen a pottery wheel, right? The potter took a large lump of clay and as the wheel spun it round and round, he used his hands to shape the clay. He started with a blob but then made it into a U-shape, hollowing out the middle. Then he would draw up the sides and perhaps narrow the neck with a curve and maybe flute the sides, always molding and shaping it closer to what he wanted it to be. But:
- 2. something was wrong with the clay that spoiled what he was making** It did not mold smoothly. Perhaps there was a dry spot in it that was hardened and wouldn't shape or perhaps a small particle of stone or other foreign matter. And so, the shape became marred, spoiled in his hands. So what did he do? Did he throw it away? No:
- 3. he started over and reworked the clay into a different vessel** He picked out any foreign particles, crushed it back into a lump, perhaps wetted it a little more and started the molding process all over again, but now instead of a clay pot, he perhaps began to mold a cup or a bowl or some other object that this particular lump of clay was more suited for. But the point of it the whole thing is in the end of verse 4:
- 4. he did with it what seemed good and right to him** He made it into whatever he wished. It was his clay and he was the molder so he made it into whatever he needed it to be. It was His choice.

Now this was an object lesson that God was giving to Jeremiah concerning his nation of Israel and in it:

II. God Has A Message For Us As A Nation He spelled it out in verses **(5-6)**. The lesson is clear and notice that he begins here talking about Israel but in the next verses extends his message to ALL nations. God says that:

1. He is sovereign: He does with nations whatever He chooses God is like the potter; a nation is like the clay. God is the creator and owner of the clay and He has the perfect and complete right to shape it and to do with it as He sees fit. He can mold it into whatever kind of vessel He wants, a cup or pot or jar. And if He doesn't like the way it's turning out, He can smash it back into a lump and make it into something else. Nations, not even the nation of Israel, do not ultimately determine their own future, God does. Nor can any nation determine that just because they have been prosperous and successful in the past that they will continue to be that way forever. God can choose to remake them at will; He has done it all through history. The once powerful Roman Empire that dominated the world for hundreds of years has been crushed and remolded into modest European nations. Germany has been remolded and reunited, the Soviet Union collapsed, China's doors opened to the world. God is always at work molding and shaping the future of nations, including the USA. In these past 70 years we've known a season of prosperity unequalled in the history of the world, but we have no guarantee that will continue, that God will not remold and reshape us into something very different as He has all the other nations of the world. He is sovereign, but He does not simply do whatever He wants on a whim:

2. He chooses to operate on consistent principles It is an understandable process determined by rules that God has laid down and which He spells out in verses (7-10). Now you must first understand God's purpose in instituting human government and national groupings. When Noah got off the ark, God told him that mankind now had a responsibility to police its own ranks and protect life. He instituted government and it was His means of keeping moral evil in some kind of check so that the world did not return to the pre-flood condition of total moral chaos beyond remedy. Now, a nation may not know God or even realize that He exists, but somehow God has innately planted in the whole human race a rudimentary knowledge of moral good and evil, the value of human life, and so on. That's why Rom. 13 tells us that the government is God's instrument to repress evil and to reward good. So, God's Rule #1 in verses 7-8 is that:

a. any nation that turns away from evil averts its own destruction Ultimately, God cannot allow evil to grow unchecked. He must limit it. So, when a nation rebels against God's purpose and exalts evil rather than good, God may send warnings of various kinds but eventually it will lead to destruction or at least to crushing and remolding. Kim Jong Un, the egotistical leader of North Korea, had better watch his steps and remember what happened to Saddam Hussein of Iraq and to Gadaffi of Libya. His day is coming! But that's not what God wants. He says that whenever the pot is spoiled in His hands and He's about to smash the lump, that if that nation turns from evil like Nineveh did at the preaching of Jonah, it can avert its own destruction! America is not exactly headed in the direction of righteousness. The more prosperous we get, the more we exalt things that are evil, things like abortion and sexual promiscuity and perversion, and the closer we thrust ourselves toward that day when God will say, "Enough of this!" BUT, if we as a nation turn away from our evil path, we can avert our own destruction! Conversely, Rule #2 in verses 9-10 is that:

b. any nation that turns toward evil prevents its own prospering If God has planned to build it and grow it and prosper it, as He has done for us, if it turns toward evil, it becomes clay that has something wrong in it. It becomes spoiled for His purposes and if it continues, He may be forced to reshape it! The more that we as a nation turn toward evil ways, the more we prevent our own growth and prosperity and sow the seeds of our own destruction! These are the rules that God operates by and through explaining them, God gives us a choice of what He will do with us. And so

3. He has a warning for nations (11-12) Through Jeremiah:

a. He warned Judah to turn away from evil but they would not hear He laid out for them that destruction was coming and that they needed to turn away from their worship of other gods and their evil behavior. But they would not listen. They said, "We will do what WE want to do!" and within a few years the army of Babylon came and destroyed them as a nation. And today:

b. we have the example of Judah as our warning! In fact, there's a verse in Isaiah that seems so clearly to be what God is saying to us: *You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding?"* - **Is. 29:16**. Like fools, we as a nation want to mold God into our image or deny who He is or even that He exists! **Will we hear?** Will we heed the warning that God is sounding all across our land by Christian leaders and believers? Or will we stubbornly pursue our own way and force the Potter to smash the lump and remake it some other way?

That remains to be seen but, in the meantime, in this same object lesson:

III. God Has A Personal Message For Us As Individuals as well. And here I must confess a debt of gratitude to G. Campbell Morgan, the great English expositor, for his insights in applying this story to ourselves. You see:

1. like the potter, God is forming us into the image of Christ The potter always has, either in his mind a complete image of the thing that He wants to make or an actual completed object placed near the wheel that he is trying to imitate. So the potter is continually trying to shape the raw lump of clay so that it matches the completed object. He starts

with a blob and then goes through all the stages of molding I described earlier. So as the wheel turns, the pot is continually going from shape to shape, always getting closer and closer to the original. Well, look with me at **2 Cor. 3:18**. That's what God is doing in us. Christ is the finished product, the model, and the Holy Spirit is molding and shaping us in stages, one after the other, each more like His glorious image than the last. Our entire life as a believer is this process of God the Potter slowly transforming us to look like Him. But there is one way in which this analogy falls short. The clay is inanimate; it just lies there and is shaped. However, as human beings:

2. we, the clay, must cooperate with the process - 1 Pet. 1:14 says *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance*. The Greek verb here means to fashion or shape one thing like another. Peter is telling us that we are to resist being shaped like the wrong model! We're to refuse to let the culture around us and the passions of our flesh that used to drive us before we were saved, fashion and shape our lives the way they want. Rather, Paul says, *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.* - **Rom. 12:2**. Let God transform you by renewing your mind; let Him change the way that you think. Let Him replace the lies that you have believed with truth in the very innermost places of your mind so that your thought and then your behavior mirrors more and more of Christ. Ingest His Word and let it shape your thinking; let His Spirit teach you what He wants as you obey and you will be changed. But here's another thought:

3. the turning wheel on which He forms us is often the circumstances of life The wheel is the tool which forces the clay into the potter's hand so that it takes proper shape! And circumstances, the events that occur in our lives, are often the wheel, the tool by which God shapes us! They are changing, shifting, constantly turning, but in each turn the hand of God shapes us a little more and a little more, until in the end we will be taken off the wheel as a finished product. They are the force by which God molds and shapes our lives and how we react to them, how our mind responds to them, determines whether we are made more into the image of Jesus or are spoiled in the Potter's hand. Just like nations, how we respond determines how He will deal with His lump of clay! Now as we conclude, there are:

4. three important lessons I want you to see in this object lesson. First:

a. God has the right to shape us any way He pleases as the potter did in **(4b)**. Turn with me over to **Rom. 9:20-21**. The potter gets to decide the shape and type of the vessel, not the clay. And if there are flaws in you or sins that abide, then God has the perfect right to squeeze you and reshape you as He chooses. We have no right to resist the process or to complain against God and what He chooses to do in our lives! Our lot, as the clay, is to accept what the Potter chooses to do to and with us and cooperate with Him in it! He is sovereign! Now that's a tough statement for many of us to accept, and it would make us feel hopeless and helpless except that we know two more things. You see:

b. we know what God is shaping us to be and that He will do it Back up and look at **Rom. 8:28-29**. The Potter does not simply make us into any crazy old shape for the sake of it. He's working to make us like the perfected model; He's conforming us to the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus. It's not a scary process for us because we know what He's doing! He has shown us our final shape by sending His own Son in the flesh to reveal it to us! So those circumstances that come our way, those difficulties that pressure us and squeeze the us and goad us are the Potter working at His wheel shaping us and it is already in His mind that one day when we are taken off the wheel, we will have our ultimate shape. We will have the same form as Jesus Christ! And one way or another, no matter how much molding it takes, God won't fail to do it! Then the other thing that makes the shaping process bearable is that we know that:

c. God loves and inhabits the lump of clay He is shaping! God is not some potter mechanically churning out pots for his own profit. This Potter loves this lump of clay! This Potter bought this lump of clay at great price; He sacrificed His own Son that He might have this lump of clay to work with. So He's going to treat it with the greatest of care and attention; He's going to fashion it with loving hands, and in the end, He's going to make it the most beautiful vessel it could possibly be so that it will reflect His glory. And to top it off, He lives inside this lump of clay! He is not just externally shaping it with every turn of the wheel but is inside it feeling and experiencing the shaping process with it! So, we can rest assured that our Potter is always forming us with love!

So, the question now becomes simply this: what kind of clay are you? Are you resisting the Potter or cooperating with Him? Are you complaining about your circumstances or learning and growing from them? Does trouble drive you to Jesus or does it push you into sin? Here is a really sad thought. You know that after betraying Jesus, Judas went and hanged himself in a field and the priests later bought that field with his blood money for a place to bury strangers in. Do you remember what kind of field it was? It was a potter's field according to Mt. 27:7-8, a place where wet clay for making pottery was dug from the ground and also a place where the broken vessels that could no longer be used or molded were discarded and left to decompose. How sad is it that one lump of clay which could have been made into the image of Jesus Christ fought the Potter's hand and was dashed to pieces in the Potter's field. Don't fight the Potter! Love Him and yield to Him as He shapes and molds you into the image of His Son!

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Relationship With God:

The Seventy Years: God's Discipline - Chs. 25 and 29

In this section of Jeremiah, we're continuing to find lessons about our relationship with God. Last time in chapter 18 we learned that God is a Potter, that He can mold and shape us according to His will because He is sovereign. Today we are going to learn that God is a good Father who disciplines us, His children. But before we dive into Jeremiah, let me just share:

I. A Word Concerning Discipline, if you turn with me to **Heb. 12:5-8**. Notice that in verse 5 and again in verse 6 that there are two distinct words used. The word *discipline* is *paideia*, child-training, in the Greek and it is a positive term.

1. sometimes discipline is training through enduring hardship Sometimes we let our children struggle to accomplish something instead of doing it for them so that they learn and grow and mature through it. Sometimes we make them wait and save their money to buy something instead of giving it to them in order to teach them an important life habit. Sometimes we make them do things they may not want to do, like going to school (or even church) because we know it's necessary and good for them, even though they perceive it as a difficulty or a burden. So God allows hardships into our lives, difficult and painful things, that are necessary for us to mature and grow. That's the positive side of discipline, but the other words in 5 and 6, *reprove* and *chastise*, are negative words.

2. sometimes discipline is painful correction due to disobedience Sometimes a child deliberately disobeys and does something he or she knows is wrong and it's necessary for us to take corrective action, to punish them, if you will, so that they learn that there are serious consequences for wrong actions. So we take away things, or put them in time out, or even spank them sometimes (yes, contrary to our culture, physical discipline IS commended in Scripture!) So sometimes God has to use painful things to correct and re-orient us when we become rebellious and willfully disobedient as His children.

Now twice in Jeremiah's ministry, recorded in chapters 25 and 29, God revealed to him that He was going to discipline His people, Judah, for their rebellion and specifically that their discipline would be a captivity that would last seventy years. And for us:

II. The Seventy Years Are A Lesson About God's Corrective Discipline (Ch. 25) Verses 1-2 explain that the year in which Jeremiah was given this message was 605 BC, the very year in which Babylon first invaded Judah and carried off some captives to Babylon. Look what he said in **(3-4)**. Jeremiah had been preaching and warning of God's impending discipline already for 23 years and other prophets had done the same. God did not discipline Judah without warning! And there's a lesson:

1. God always warns us before He disciplines us Dennis Miller writes: *Out of parental concern and a desire to teach our young son responsibility, we require him to phone home when he arrives at his friend's house a few blocks away. He began to forget, however, as he grew more confident in his ability to get there without disaster befalling him. The first time he forgot, I called to be sure he had arrived. We told him the next time it happened, he would have to come home. A few days later, however, the telephone again lay silent, and I knew if he was going to learn, he would have to be punished. But I did not want to punish him!! I went to the telephone, regretting that his great time would be spoiled by his lack of contact with his father. As I dialed, I prayed for wisdom. "Treat him like I treat you," the Lord seemed to say. With that, as the telephone rang one time, I hung up. A few seconds later the phone rang, and it was my son. "I'm here, Dad!" "What took you so long to call?" I asked. "We started playing and I forgot. But Dad, I heard the phone ring once and I remembered." How often do we think of God as One who waits to punish us when we step out of line? I wonder how often he rings just once, hoping we will phone home. [Dennis Miller]* God is a good father and He will always warn us and usually warn us repeatedly when we choose to do things He knows aren't good for us. Often these warnings come from the mouths of other people, even other believers who remind us that what we're doing is wrong and sooner or later God is going to have to do something to break us of it. Sometimes the warnings come directly as we read His Word or as we listen to a message. His Spirit within us even convicts us as we choose to do wrong. He is patient with us and puts up with our disobedience, warning us gently, often for a long time, but in the end, if we persist in sin, He must discipline us. However, when He does, we must understand that it is not done on a whim:

2. God's discipline is precisely planned (11) Notice that God predicts not only what He's going to do, but He specifies an exact length of time, not 55 or 83 years, but 70 years. God planned what to do and exactly how long to do it; He did not act like we do when we finally can't stand our child's misbehavior any more and we impatiently lash out in anger. In fact, God had planned long before. If you read **Lev. 26:27-35**, everything God said would happen through Jeremiah, including the captivity, was all laid out for Israel 800 years earlier by Moses at Mt. Sinai! Never think that God just "gets angry" with us! Rest assured that if we are rebellious and God needs to correct us, that He has it all precisely planned out in a way that will accomplish His purpose for us! Now there's a third thing to notice here:

3. God's discipline is suited to our offense God did not just pull the number 70 out of the air; He chose it for a specific reason. **2 Chron. 36:20-22** says that Nebuchadnezzar *...took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia...* and he released the Jews to return. The 70 years was a calculated figure. Do you remember the law said that every 7th year was to be a Sabbath year with no planting or harvesting, so the land would lie fallow and be refreshed? Well, we have no record that Israel ever actually did that once they entered the land. So, God says the land is going to get all its sabbath rests back at once now; multiply 70 times 7 to get 490 years and if you count back in time from this pronouncement, you find yourself way back somewhere in the time of the Judges which is the time when idolatry began to be really rampant in Israel. You see, all along God had been counting and His discipline was exactly geared to the sin that Israel had been committing. God is never too harsh, never too severe, with us. Bad fathers may beat their child for the smallest infraction and cause them to live in fear, but God is a good Father who suits our discipline exactly to fit what we have done wrong. Then notice that:

4. God often uses human instruments to discipline us In verse 11 God also names the king of Babylon as the instrument which He will use to do His disciplining. That's amazing. Here is an ungodly king with his army, bent on world conquest, idolatry and self-gratification, yet in the midst of pursuing his own selfish ends, he becomes a tool in God's hands! A hundred years earlier God used the king of Assyria to discipline the northern Kingdom of Israel and through Isaiah God had predicted, *In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River - the King of Assyria to shave you...* - 7:20. The kings of Assyria and Babylon were a tool to Him like a common razor is to us. God often uses people, even ungodly people, as His instruments to correct and chasten us. It may be a Nathan type who points his finger at us and says, "You are the man!" It may be police or it may be teachers or others who hold authority or it may be our parents or even our church. God so often uses people to stop us in our waywardness and become His instruments to discipline our behavior.

There's a lot more to learn in this chapter, but we need to move on to **chapter 29** so that we can see further that:

III. The Seventy Years Are A Lesson About God's Restoration Verses 1-3 tell us that this chapter is the text of a letter that Jeremiah sent to Babylon after the second deportation of captives from Jerusalem in 597 BC. So essentially it is God writing to those who have been living under His discipline in exile because of their sins and He is writing to them about their restoration (**10-11**). Ah, there's that wonderful verse we love to quote! It is given in the context of restoration! You see:

1. the purpose of discipline is blessing, not punishment! God is not vindictive. He does not discipline His children simply because we deserve to be punished, nor does He enjoy it. He disciplines us to bless us! He does it for our good always, as Heb. 12 says. He disciplines us with a view to giving us a better future than the one our rebellion would bring us. And:

2. the goal of discipline is spiritual change (12-13) God used 70 years of captivity to create spiritual change in Israel, to cause them to really seek Him when they refused to do so before. They kept seeking after idols, seeking after idols. They refused to seek the Lord, but the 70 years in captivity genuinely changed all of that. From that time and ever after, the Jewish people have had an absolute hatred of idolatry. They have never run after idols and worshipped them again! Of course, as the years went by, the devil found other ways besides idolatry to lure their hearts far from Him, the Pharisees of Jesus' day being the best example to note. Yet the principle remains true, as long as you genuinely seek Him with all your heart, you will find Him and if you call upon Him, He will hear you! God brings His discipline into our lives to bring about spiritual change, to turn our hearts toward Him once again. He lets the prodigal son experience life in the pigpen to turn his heart toward home and his father. Now thirdly, notice that:

3. the time of discipline may be long but it is limited 70 years is a long time, an entire lifetime for a person, though not so long for a nation. But it is a time period that is defined. It has a limit; it will end. When God disciplines us, it may last awhile. We would always like to confess our sin and have all the consequences go away immediately. But God's discipline may not be over immediately; it may not cease at the moment we tell God we're sorry. It may continue for some time, perhaps for a long time. However, it is limited. God has a time that He has set and it will last only as long as God needs it to last in order to accomplish His purpose in us. And therefore:

4. we must reconcile ourselves to God's discipline (4-7) This was a hard directive for the Jews in Babylon. They were not to sit pining for home and wait for God to end their captivity. They were to make the best of where they were, to work and build and multiply and worship, to accept the circumstances God had placed them in, to see themselves as having a ministry to represent Him in Babylon and bless it. Many who were carried away captive actually died in Babylon and it was only their children who got to return to Jerusalem; they needed to seek to be used in the circumstances God placed them in, whether they liked it or not. When the time comes that God has brought about difficult circumstances in our lives to discipline us and we repent, but those difficult circumstances remain, we should not get mad

at God and accuse Him. Nor should we sit around and wait for the moment He changes things. We must reconcile ourselves to serve God the best way we can whatever the circumstances we remain in! *Our attitude should be that of a 19 year old servant girl who lived in London a century ago. Her household chores kept her occupied 12 to 15 hours a day. Listen to the first stanza of a poem she wrote:*

*"Lord of all pots and pans and things,
Since I've no time to be
A saint by doing lovely deeds
Or watching late with Thee,
Or dreaming in the dawnlight
Or storming Heaven's gates,
Make me a saint by getting meals
And washing up the plates! [G. Campbell Morgan]*

That's basically the situation the Jews were in in Babylon; they were servants, slaves to the Babylonians and I'm sure their lives were hard. But told them, "Accept the circumstances I've put you in and serve Me in them!" That's what we're to do also, even if we're there because God is disciplining us for our own bad choices. Now before we're through with Jeremiah's 70 years, we have to look at the book of Daniel because there is also another lesson there:

IV. The Seventy Years Are A Lesson About God's Preparation - Dan. 9 Here we find an amazing fact:

1. Jeremiah's letter was read by Daniel in Babylon nearly 70 years later (1-2) Yes, Daniel read Jeremiah's letter! It was still circulating among the Jews near the end of their captivity at the end of the 70 years. And finally, it either got to Daniel or Daniel suddenly grasped it and thought, "Wow, the time is almost up! It's almost God's promised time for us to go home!" Look how God used one prophet to bless and inform another, even so great a man as Daniel, an advisor to great kings, who himself had many visions from God! Sometimes God reveals truth to one person in order to bless another as they share it! At any rate:

2. Jeremiah's letter prepared the way for Judah's return from captivity (3-5, 17-18) Jeremiah's letter impacted Daniel and he began to pray and confess his sin and the sin of his nation and to pray for their return to Jerusalem based on God's promise to restore them. And I'm sure Daniel shared this with others and urged them to pray and seek God based on it. When King Cyrus finally issued the decree for the Jewish exiles to return, there were godly men to lead them and godly men that went back to construct the Temple and rebuild the city. God did use both the discipline of captivity and the word of Jeremiah to prepare the hearts of His people for their restoration to the land. God's discipline and His restoration are all part of His larger plan for us. Whatever He sends into our lives is always preparing us for the ways He has planned to use us in the future. Then finally, God used the prophecy of 70 years in one last way:

3. Jeremiah's 70 years foreshadow Daniel's 70 weeks of years Daniel had been talking to God about the end of the 70 years, but as he was praying, God sent an angel with a message **(24-26)**. Simply put, God said "Daniel I'm going to tell you about 70 'sevens', 70 weeks of years, that is, 70 sabbatical units, 70 blocks of 7 years." In those 70 weeks of years is summarized the history of the Jewish nation. Even though they returned to the land, Israel as a nation would remain under Gentile domination for 70 weeks of years. 69 of those "weeks" led up to the death of Christ on Calvary (you can calculate that if you like). Then God stopped counting. But in the future, after the Rapture of the Church, God is going to count once again for one final week of 7 years which we call the Tribulation period, and then will come the ultimate restoration, the Millennial Kingdom when Christ will reign on earth. I know this is deep, but in the 70 years of discipline and the restoration of Israel to her land, God was picturing the judgment of the entire world and ultimately the restoration of His Kingdom through Jesus Christ.

But to return to where we started, God disciplines us, His children, because He loves us. He does it to restore us to Himself. *Robert Munger writes about an American traveling in Syria years ago who became acquainted with a shepherd. Each morning he noticed the shepherd taking food to a sheep that had a broken leg. As he looked at the animal, he asked the shepherd, "How did the sheep break its leg? Did it meet with an accident, fall into a hole, or did some animal break its leg?" "No," said the shepherd, "I broke this sheep's leg myself." "You broke it yourself?" asked the surprised traveler. "Yes, you see, this is a wayward sheep; it would not stay with the flock, but would lead the other sheep astray. Then it would not let me near it so I had to break this sheep's leg so that it would allow me, day by day, to feed it. In doing this it will get to know me as its shepherd, trust me as its guide, and it will keep with the flock." And Munger comments, "Sometimes, just sometimes, when we insist of going our own stubborn way and leading others astray, the Shepherd of the fold, may have to 'break our leg' too for our own good and for that of others." [Robert Boyd Munger in Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations by Paul Lee Tan]. So don't become resentful when God has to send something into your life to turn your heart back to Him. Heed Solomon's good advice, *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.* - Prov. 3:11-12.*

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Relationship With God:

The New Covenant: Our Transformation - Ch. 31

As we began to see in our last study, Jeremiah is not merely a prophet of doom; he is a prophet of hope. Up to this point in the book, his messages have largely been concerned with Judah's sin and her discipline through the Babylonian captivity. But now Jeremiah's book moves into longer-term predictive prophecies; God shows him what will be far into the future. And one of the most well-known and beautiful passages in the book is found in chapter 31. Let's get a taste of it by reading **(31-34)**. In these verses God makes a pronouncement of something wonderful, something unheard of:

I. God Declares That He Will Make A New Covenant With Israel Now our first question should probably be, "What's a covenant?" We don't use that word any more. It's basic meaning is a solemn agreement, but when the two parties involved in the covenant are God himself and mankind, its meaning is much deeper. In making a covenant, God declares in an irrevocable fashion how He will relate to man. For instance, in Genesis 9 God made a covenant with Noah and all mankind and even with all living creatures after the great flood; He said, *I establish My covenant with you that... never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.* And He put His rainbow in the sky as a physical sign and reminder of the solemn promise He made. A couple weeks ago I was coming out of the building late one evening at dusk and the light seemed eerily bright as I stepped out the door. As I got to my car I turned around and there was a giant rainbow stretching in an arc right over our church building and down the block. Neighbors were standing outside looking at it. Instantly I was reminded of the presence of God and of His covenant promise. In older versions of the Bible the word *covenant* is often translated *testament*. The very Book you hold in your hands is divided into two parts. Genesis through Malachi we call the Old Testament, literally the Old Covenant, because it focuses on the old covenant between man and God, specifically with the nation of Israel. God had a specific way of relating to His people during that era, that is through the covenant of Law He had made with them at Mt. Sinai. But Matthew through Revelation we call the New Testament, that is, the New covenant, because God has now declared that there is a new way that He will relate to mankind, through His Son Jesus. So through Jeremiah, God is declaring here for the first time that He will make a new covenant, a new way of relating to Him and notice the opening phrase in verse **31**, *Behold the days are coming...* So, this covenant:

1. it will be enacted in a future time And notice in verse 33 He says, *...this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days....* After what days? Well, if you start reading back in chapter 30, you discover that God predicts that there is a great time of trouble coming in the future for Israel, a time so bad that there has never been one like it. Jesus talked about that same time of great distress which will happen at the end of the age. We often call it the Tribulation Period or the Great Tribulation. Then God says He will rescue Israel and destroy the nations who have come up against her. We read about this in Revelation and we call it the war of Armageddon, the last great battle. And we know that it ends with Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven, destroying the armies of earth gathered in the Holy Land, and then Jesus sets up His Kingdom on earth to rule and reign with Jerusalem right at the center. These are the days that Jeremiah is talking about; God is saying that in **the Millennial Kingdom** He will make a new way of relating to His people Israel. Now the word *New* means that:

2. it will be a new type of covenant Look again at **(31b-32)** God is saying that this new covenant:

a. it will not be a conditional covenant of law like the one made at Sinai God says, "I took Israel by the hand and brought them out of Egypt". You remember the amazing miracles God did to rescue Israel from Pharaoh's grasp and how He went before them in a pillar of cloud to lead them to Mt. Sinai. And there He said to them, *You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* - Ex. 19:4-6. Notice the condition, *IF you obey...* And then a few verses later He went on to give them the 10 commandments and then all the laws of Exodus and Leviticus. So Israel's being God's people and being His treasured possession and all the other blessings He went on to promise, it was all dependent upon their obedience; it was a covenant dependent on works and they broke it! Time and time again! She was like a wayward wife being unfaithful to her marriage covenant with the husband who loved her. But God says this new covenant He will make with her will not be like that! In other words:

b. it will not be breakable through behavior His covenant with His people in that day will be unconditional. It will not be, "IF you do this or that...", but simply, *I will be your God and you will be My people*, period! Now the reason He can do that is that this new one:

3. it will be an internal covenant (33) The old covenant was external; it was imposed from outside and its problem was the sinful nature that dwelt inside the people was always driving them to break it. Put simply, they were trying to be something they weren't; their inside nature did not match the external laws they were charged to keep. But in the future God says that He:

a. God will transform the hearts of His people He will put His law INSIDE them; He will write it on their hearts. That is to say that He will transform their very **spirits**, the very core of their being. He will change their insides to match the way He wants their outsides to behave! In other words:

b. He will make their hearts righteous so they will WANT to live His way It will not be a forced thing or something they have to try hard at or even use any of their own effort at all. In that day they will BE what they truly ARE. They will BE righteous like Him, because at the core of their beings, they ARE righteous like Him! And:

c. this will be the foundation of their relationship with Him Their transformed hearts made like His own are what will make them His people and Him their God, not their external behavior. Let me ask you this: why are your children your children? Is it because they act the way you tell them to act all the time? No, it's because they have your very DNA built into them! They have your very nature through being born from you. Put it this way, if them being your child depended on their always behaving the way you tell them to behave, would they still be your children or not? Don't answer that! But that's how Israel's relationship to God was; think how much the promise of this new covenant would mean to them! Then look at verse (34). God says in that day:

4. every individual will have a personal relationship with Him They won't have to go through a priest to approach Him. They won't have to stand afar off any longer and watch someone else offer a lamb on their behalf. They would KNOW Him and in Hebrew that word *know* means not to know *about* someone, but to know that person by experience, to be in deep relationship with that person. His people will actually KNOW Him; they will have a relationship with Him and talk with Him and walk with Him on a personal basis and:

a. there will be no exceptions It will not be for the privileged few, for the most spiritual or the most important. It will be for EVERYONE, from the least to the greatest, from the youngest child to the most important ruler or official, no exceptions. ALL, every one of them, will know Him, and not only that, God says:

b. their sins will be completely forgiven and no longer remembered Hebrews tells us that the perpetual sacrifices that Israel offered year after year were a constant reminder of their sins. Over and over, they acknowledged, "We are sinful, we are sinful, God forgive us!" But in that day, not only will they be changed so that they will not desire to sin any more, God will completely forgive every wrong thing they have ever done! And not only will He forgive the guilt of those things, He'll never bring them up again! They are removed as far as the east is from the west! Think what a blessing that promise would be to an Israelite who has worried all his life about making sure each sin is confessed and forgiven! They're all gone, every one of them, forever! And then look at the assurance God closes the promise of the New Covenant with (35-37). He's saying this promise is more certain than the sun that comes up every day, than the moon and stars that shine every night, than the waves of the ocean which roll every day. It is more infinite than the heavens, deeper than the earth itself. In other words:

5. this covenant will be eternal They will be His people FOREVER. Nothing can ever make Him break this covenant with them and terminate it. They will ALWAYS be His people. Nothing can ever separate them from Him! What a glorious promise!

But the sad thing is that nobody ever understood it! When they read it, they saw only a glorious thing that would be some day far in the future, but for now they were stuck in keeping the Old Covenant! Then along came Jesus. He made desperate efforts to help His disciples understand that He didn't come to set up the Kingdom right then, but that He had to die and they just couldn't grasp that. So, in the Upper Room that Thursday night before the cross He put it in a different set of terms for them. He picked up the cup at the end of the Passover meal and look with me at what He said in **Lk. 22:20**. There's that term again; it hadn't been mentioned in Scripture that way since Jeremiah:

II. Jesus Declared That He Established A New Covenant With US He explained that what He was about to do was the basis of an entirely new covenant, a covenant that God was making with those who believe in Jesus, with US. He even gave us the command to repeat this drinking of the cup in order to continually remember this new covenant and what it is based on:

1. it is based on the shedding of His blood on the cross, not on the basis of how they would act and whether they would be good disciples, not on the basis of their going to the Temple to offer the right sacrifices. It is based purely and simply upon the fact that He died for us and the shedding of His blood:

2. it accomplished the remission of all our sins Luke did not write down all that Jesus said. **Mat. 26:28** reads, *...this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*. His blood accomplished what the blood of bulls and goats never could. His blood secured for us that wonderful, once for all, forever forgiveness of every sin we've ever committed that Jeremiah gave a glimpse of. *David Branon uses the illustration of words on a computer screen: "I don't know where they go. One minute the computer screen is full of words that I have typed. Then, with one stroke of a key on my keyboard, I can eliminate them all. Suddenly they are gone. It's not like a wad of paper that I throw away--I can still keep track of that as it goes from wastebasket to garbage truck to landfill. Computer words when*

they are deleted, are gone for good and can't be recalled." Isn't that the way it is with our sins that have been forgiven by God? They're gone! Jesus' blood wiped them all out forever the moment we believed!
Now I'm sure by this point that you all see where I'm going with this message:

III. The Covenant God Promised To Israel One Day far in the future Is Already OURS Right Now! There are not two New Covenants:

1. Jeremiah's New Covenant and Christ's New Covenant are one and the same. How do I know that? Look what the writer of Hebrews says in **Heb. 8:6-13**. Notice in verse 6 he refers to *the covenant Christ mediates...* and then in 8-12 he quotes exactly the verses from Jeremiah we're studying to describe Christ's new covenant. So Jeremiah's words are not just for Israel in that future day when they repent and receive their Messiah at His coming; they are for US who believe right now. This New Covenant is OUR new covenant with God! It is the way that God relates to us through Jesus. And therefore:

2. ALL the privileges of that New Covenant that we mentioned **belong to us!** Just as the people of Israel one day will relate to God in a new way:

a. our relationship with Him is unconditional and unbreakable right now. It is not based on our works. We are God's people because we are included in what Christ did on the cross and nothing that we do can add to that or take away from that. It's a covenant of grace, of privileges that God gives us freely with no strings attached. We don't ever have to worry that we will fail God somehow so that He will cast us away! Rather, as Romans 8 says, nothing in all creation is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus! Hallelujah! And just as the people of Israel will one day will one day have transformed hearts:

b. we experience the internal transformation of our spirit and nature right now! We have been born again. Our old nature died with Christ and in us was birthed a brand new nature that is created just like Jesus in righteousness and true holiness. In other words, God's laws are now written on our new hearts! At the very core of our being we WANT to live God's way, to be pure and holy, so we are living out of what we ARE instead of trying to be something we're NOT! What a difference! And just as these privileges will be for every single Israelite one day:

c. these privileges belong to every one of us who believe right now! We ALL know God personally through Jesus, each one of us. We don't need a priest or a mediator to go to Him. We experience Him directly and walk with Him personally. Now, how much we choose to walk with Him is our choice, but the privilege is universal, from the youngest to the oldest, from the simplest to the wisest, all of us have the great privilege of being transformed and knowing Jesus personally. Nobody has to tell us, "Know the Lord!" because we know Him already. And just as God will forgive all of Israel's sins one day:

d. we have complete forgiveness of all our sins right now. Look ahead with me to **Heb. 10:14-17**. Did you see verse 15? The Holy Spirit bears witness to US that God remembers our sins and iniquities no more! They're gone, every last one of them! We are forgiven once, for all, forever and there is no condemnation at all for us because we are in Christ Jesus. *Ron Lee Davis retells the true story of a priest in the Philippines, a much-loved man of God who carried the burden of a secret sin he had committed many years before. He had repented but still had no peace, no sense of God's forgiveness. In his parish was a woman who deeply loved God and who claimed to have visions in which she spoke with Christ and he with her. The priest, however, was skeptical. To test her he said, "The next time you speak with Christ, I want you to ask him what sin your priest committed while he was in seminary." The woman agreed. A few days later the priest asked, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?" "Yes, he did," she replied. "And did you ask him what sin I committed in seminary?" "Yes." "Well, what did he say?" "He said, 'I don't remember.'" [A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World, Ron Lee Davis] God will never bring our sins up to us again; they are gone forever. And just as God promises that Israel would be His people forever:*

e. He will be our God and we will be His people forever Peter says WE are *brand-new a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...* - 1 Pet. 2:9. And when you come to the end of time and the end of the book and there's a new heaven and a new earth, what do you read? ...*"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."* - **Rev. 21:3**. That's us, beloved! He is our God and we are His people forever and ever, longer than the sun and the moon and the stars, longer than the ocean which is no more in that day. But there we are, still His treasured people forever and ever. Amen!

Dr. W. B. Hinson, respected pastor of East Side Baptist Church in Portland, spoke from his own experience just before he died in 1926. He said, "I remember a year ago when a doctor told me, 'You have an illness from which you won't recover.' I walked out to where I live, 5 miles from Portland, Oregon, and I looked across at that mountain that I love. I looked at the river in which I rejoice, and I looked at the stately trees that are always God's own poetry to my soul. Then in the evening I looked up into the great sky where God was lighting His lamps, and I said, 'I may not see you many more times, but Mountain, I shall be alive when you are gone; and River, I shall be alive when you cease running toward the sea; and

Stars, I shall be alive when you have fallen from your sockets in the great downpulling of the material universe!" Hallelujah! His covenant with us is eternal! As long as He lives, we live, and nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from Him! So be encouraged today! Whatever you face, He is yours and you are His and will be forever! That is His Covenant, His unbreakable binding promise to you!

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Relationship With God:

The Rechabites: Our Obedience - Ch. 35

As we pull out and examine these "gems" from Jeremiah, God keeps teaching us lessons about our relationship with Him. From chapter 18 we learned about God's sovereignty in our lives. From chapters 25 and 29 we learned about God's discipline in our lives. From chapter 31 we learned about our transformation and the assurance we have through the New Covenant God has made with us, His people. Now in chapter 35, through Jeremiah God is going to teach us a lesson about obeying Him. And He's going to do it by holding up to us the example of a group of people called the Rechabites **(1-2)**. Now the first question is obviously:

I. Who Were The Rechabites? The suffix "ites" can be used in several ways. It can refer to all the inhabitants of a particular place. Canaanites are all the people who lived in the land of Canaan before God's people took over the land. Or it can refer to a particular people group. Israelites are the people descended from Israel, that is Jacob, the Jewish race. But in this case the Rechabites:

1. they were an extended family or a clan **descended from** a man named **Rechab**. We read in **1 Chron. 2:55** that the Rechabites were descendants of Moses' father-in-law Jethro; they were a branch of the Kenites and their hometown was Jabez. But it also tells us their clan's occupation; they were scribes! What are scribes? Scribes make copies of the Word of God, study it and teach it! So, this was a clan of people who probably loved the Word of God and sought to please Him. Obedience would be something their entire clan understood well! The other thing we know about them is that:

2. their ancestor Jonadab helped Jehu rid Israel of Baal worship 240 years earlier - 2 Kings 10:15-17 records the story of the time when Jehu was taking over the kingship of the northern kingdom of Israel. Jonadab was his friend and when he went out to meet him, Jehu grasped his hand in partnership, lifted him up into his chariot and took him along to be his partner as he eradicated all Baal-worship from Israel. So Jonadab was certainly a brave lover of God, someone the whole clan remembered, honored and looked up to. Now ordinarily the clan of the Rechabites lived out in the countryside; they were shepherds and herders, but verse 11 tells us:

3. they were temporarily hiding in Jerusalem from the Babylonian army (11) In 598 BC Nebuchadnezzar and his army entered the land to lay siege to Jerusalem and quench Judah's rebellion. The land was overrun by them so the Rechabites moved all their whole clan and belongings inside the walls of Jerusalem for protection and it was easy for Jeremiah to find their leaders and bring them to the Temple and offer them wine to drink as God commanded. Now the reason told Jeremiah to do this was that He wanted to give the leaders of Judah another of His graphic object lessons. He wanted them to see:

II. The Obedience Displayed By The Rechabites Let's read the story **(3-10)**. Jeremiah takes them into this important chamber in the temple, one which was right in the midst of all the important officials and offers them wine to drink, but they refuse to drink it because:

1. they obeyed the commands of their forefather Jonadab He was evidently a very godly man, as I said, and he laid a couple of rules for his family to follow, rules that he evidently thought would be good for them and would help them to live as good godly people. The first rule is in verse **(6)**:

a. he commanded them not to drink wine Now why not? While drunkenness is everywhere condemned, simply drinking wine is not forbidden anywhere in Scripture and it was normal for Israelites and their families to drink wine. Indeed, there are passages which extol having it as sign of the blessing of God and Paul even tells Timothy much later on to use a little wine for his stomach's sake. Jonadab probably got this from the Nazirite vow. Do you remember that? In the Old Testament a person could be specially set apart to God as a Nazirite for a period of time and one of the conditions was that they would drink no wine or use anything gathered from grapevines. Samson was dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth and drinking no wine was part of that, along with not cutting hair. I'm guessing Jonadab saw this rule as an outward sign that would set his children apart and remind them constantly of being fully dedicated to God all their lives. His second rule is in verse **(7)**. In other words:

b. he commanded them to live perpetually as nomads They were not to settle down and become farmers and build houses to live in towns like the rest of the people of Israel. They were to remain shepherds and herdsmen who moved about from place to place and lived in tents as *sojourners*. I'm guessing he wanted them to follow the example of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs of the Jewish nation, who lived all their lives in tents as no-

God blessed them and gave them the wonderful promises of numberless descendants and possession of the land. He wanted his descendants to follow their godly example, hoping that God would bless their dedication to Him in this way.

Of course, neither of these commands Jonadab gave were really scriptural, nor were they a normal practice in Jeremiah's day hundreds of years later, but the clan of the Rechabites:

2. they obeyed his commands without hesitation Here they are being offered wine by Jeremiah, a known prophet who speaks for God Himself, and in the presence of really important religious officials of Judah. Drinking wine together is a sign of hospitality and friendship and peace with one another. And they don't even take a moment to think about it! They answer immediately, *We will not drink wine!* Of course, God knew (and probably even Jeremiah knew) that they wouldn't. He wasn't trying to tempt them to break their rule; He was trying to show everyone watching that they would never break it; they would obey their forefather's commands in spite of any amount of pressure applied to them. Imagine if your great-great grandfather had laid down a rule that you couldn't ever eat any sugar and that you had to live in a portable RV trailer all your life. What would you be saying? "What about me and my rights? This is outdated, look how everyone else lives..." Yet they obeyed Jonadab boldly and without hesitating, no matter what anyone else thought. Of course, they were polite enough to explain why they wouldn't drink, but they also quickly declared that:

3. they obeyed all aspects of his commands They did not drink wine (8). And they lived in tents (10). They didn't just keep one part and not the other. They didn't pick and choose which commands or which parts of them they would keep. They recognized the authority of their forefather and whatever he commanded, they did. All his commands were equally binding on them. And verse 8 also makes it clear that:

4. they ALL obeyed his commands without exception, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, ALL of them, the whole clan. It was not a choice each individual made at some age to accept or reject them. Every last one of them obeyed. And not only that:

5. they had obeyed his commands for several generations It had now been more than 240 years since Jonadab gave those commands. Generations of Rechabites had already lived and died keeping them. It was taught by fathers to their children and by them to theirs and on down the line. That's like my great-great-great-great grandfather giving a command concerning how to live in 1750, before the founding of our nation, and me still following it today!

The level of their obedience was incredible, in fact, exemplary, so in the next part of the chapter we have:

III. The Lesson God Gave Us From The Rechabites (12-16) God speaks through Jeremiah to all the people of Jerusalem. "Look at these Rechabites. See how they obey the authority of a mere man. 240 years later they still won't drink wine, yet you won't obey My authority though I have repeated My commands to you over and over and over again." Judah refused to learn the lesson of obedience, but we should make sure it is not lost on us. First of all:

1. God expects His people to recognize His authority, just as the Rechabites recognized Jonadab's authority. After all, look at who He is (13a, 17a); He is Jehovah, the God of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel. He is not some human being; He is God, the mighty God, the one who's in charge of all things. There is an amazing parallel between the concepts here and the words of Jesus in the Great Commission, if you'll turn to **Mat. 28:18**. The basis for obeying Jesus' great Command or any of His other commands is His authority. He has all authority in heaven and on earth! He is to be obeyed! It is not optional! *Prior to her coronation, Queen Elizabeth sent out to her friends and various Commonwealth dignitaries engraved invitations which read like this: 'We greet you well. Whereas we have appointed the second day of June 1953 for the solemnity of our coronation, these are therefore to will and to command, all excuses set apart, that you make your personal attendance upon us, at the time above mentioned, there to do and to perform such services as shall be required of you.' A queen does not request attendance, she commands it. The striking phrase in that invitation occurs in the very middle: 'All excuses set apart.' When a monarch expresses her will and issues her command, her subjects respond without hesitation or excuses. But we serve One who is far greater, the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords. Compared to Him, Queen Elizabeth is a nobody! Our King, Jesus, has expressed His will and issued His commands; they are to be obeyed and all our excuses must be set aside. [Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay, by Gary Inrig. Moody Press, 1979. Pages 68-69.]* Further, like the Rechabites, God:

2. He expects us to obey His commands without hesitation In **Mt. 28:19** Jesus says, *Therefore go...* "Go because I have commanded it!" When we recognize the authority of who Jesus really is, there is no need to decide in our minds whether we're going to obey or not. It may seem harsh, but He expects us to obey whether we understand why or not, whether we like it or not, whether it embarrasses us or not, and whether it makes us different from others or not. We may grate and chafe at that idea; it sounds like being in the military. But always remember it is our loving Father who gives the commands. He will not command us to do anything wrong or that is not good for us. There is no better way than His way. Then, like the Rechabites, God:

3. He expects us to obey all His commands, not to pick and choose which ones we will keep. All of the commands of the Word of God are of equal importance to us. We cannot pick and choose which ones we want to obey. The

command to forgive others is on a par with the command to give to God as He has provided for us. The command to love our enemies is as important as the command to be separate and not unequally yoked to unbelievers. The command to control our anger is as much from God as the command to not commit adultery. Look again at **Mt. 28:19-20**. There are three commands. We are to make disciples of all peoples (by the way notice the ALL part - not just our own!), we are to baptize them and we are to teach them to do all Jesus has taught us. Which of those is more important? None! But isn't baptism kind of a weird antiquated custom? You get all wet and embarrassed standing up there! Isn't there something we could do in its place, you know, kind of bring it into the modern age? No, Jesus said to baptize those who believe and He expects us to obey ALL His commands! Not only that, but:

4. He expects ALL of us to obey His commands We may tend to think, "That doesn't apply to me. That's for someone else. That's for someone who is more spiritual than I am!" That Great Commission wasn't only for some of the Twelve; it was for all of them. It wasn't even just for the Twelve and not for us. That command was given to all of us who believe. The commands given to us in the New Testament are not just for those who are leaders or elders or pastors or teachers. Jesus said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* - Jn. 14:15. And then listen to what John wrote in his first epistle: *...by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments."* - 2:3; *...whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him* - 3:22; *Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him...* - 3:24; *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."* - 5:2. Do you get it? Obedience is to be the hallmark of our faith! Whatever God says, we do! And:

5. He expects us to pass this obedience on to future generations When people become disciples, whether that's our own children or just new believers, we're to *teach them to observe all He has commanded us*. Paul wrote, *...what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* - 2 Tim. 2:2. God expects us to be diligent to pass our obedience to Him on so that it will be reproduced over many generations to come. Why? Because:

IV. Obedience Has Huge Consequences For God's People Look at vs. (17):

1. the disobedience of Judah brought them disaster As we've seen throughout Jeremiah, God disciplines His people for not obeying Him. The Babylonian army was already surrounding the city and just a few years later they came and totally destroyed it. Disobedience can really wreck your life, your children's lives, your whole family. It can really hurt people you love. It brings disaster. But:

2. the obedience of the Rechabites brought them blessing (18-19) God promises that their family line would continue, that their descendants would always be there to worship and serve God, war and captivity or not. God blesses obedience. In the last part of the Great Commission, Jesus promised, *And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age*. When we obey what He's commanded, He is always with us. What more could we want than that?

Many years ago, the young son of a missionary couple in Zaire was playing in the yard of the compound where they lived. Suddenly the boy heard his father's voice shout from the porch, "Phillip, obey me instantly! Drop on your stomach!" Immediately the boy did what his father commanded, without asking a question. Then his father yelled, "Now crawl toward me as fast as you can!" The boy obeyed. "Stand up and run to me!" Philip responded unquestioningly and ran to his father's arms. As he turned to look at the tree by which he had been playing, he saw a large deadly snake hanging from one of its branches! If Philip had hesitated at the first command of his father, as boys are known to do, by asking, "Why do you want me to do that?", or if he had casually waited a few moments to respond, he would likely have been bitten. But he obeyed immediately, and that simple act of obedience saved his life. [Donald G. Barnhouse] When Jesus commands us to do something, it is always for our benefit and if we develop that same attitude of responding without hesitation, obedience will always prove to ultimately bring great blessing in our lives.

Gems From Jeremiah

Lessons About Our Relationship With God:

The Burnt Scroll: God's Word - Ch. 36

We've been extracting from the Book of Jeremiah a number of "gems" about our relationship with God from various chapters. We learned a lesson about His sovereignty from Jeremiah's visit to the Potter's house. We learned a lesson about His discipline from the letter He had Jeremiah write to the captives in Babylon in chapters 25 and 29. We learned a lesson about our transformation in the New Covenant He promised in chapter 31 and a lesson about obedience from the Rechabites in chapter 35. Today's lesson comes from a story that I heard many years ago as a boy in Sunday School, the story of the King who burned the scroll. The year is 605 BC. Jehoiakim is the king of Judah, but Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army are exacting a heavy tribute from the land at the moment. Shortly they will actually come and invade the city by force and take the first wave of captives to Babylon as hostages to keep Jehoiakim in line. However, God wanted to give Jehoiakim a last warning, so He sent it to him in writing on a scroll written by Jeremiah. But the wonderful thing about

this story is that in it we get to actually see some very important things that we can apply to the Word of God as a whole. First of all:

I. Here We See How The Word Of God Was Given To Us (1-4) This is the story of how the actual book of Jeremiah, which we're reading right now, came to be written down for the first time. And it gives us a visually graphic picture of how God gave us our whole Bible. Leave a hand in Jeremiah and let's turn to **2 Pet. 1:20-21** where God describes for us:

1. the process by which the Word of God was recorded No word of Scripture was merely written by human beings. It is not a humanly generated Book. The writers didn't just say, "I think I'll sit down and write this." or "I'll write what I think". The Scriptures were not produced by the will of man. The authors of the 66 books of our Bible were holy men of God, men who knew and lived close to God, and they were *carried along* by the Holy Spirit, like a ship being driven over the ocean by the wind in its sails. In other words, their minds were not under their own control, but:

a. the Holy Spirit told the authors what to say just the way God spoke to Jeremiah's mind in verse (2). God had been speaking to Jeremiah for a number of years already, giving him messages to declare to the people of Judah. And Jeremiah had been declaring His words to the people, not words that he himself came up with. The prophets, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, they didn't invent their own messages. They spoke as they were directly moved by the Holy Spirit! But then:

b. the Holy Spirit moved and enabled them to write it down accurately God told Jeremiah to write all his messages down. Think about that. Jeremiah had been a prophet for a long time at this point, some 22 years. We already have 35 chapters of his book behind us. Humanly speaking, do you think he could remember every word God had spoken to him and every message he was given to preach? I can barely remember what I preached last week, let alone last year and certainly not 22 years ago! The Holy Spirit had to supernaturally enable him to be able to recall all of those messages to be able to write them down. So, the same Spirit who had given him the words in the first place now brought them back to his mind for him to record. That's what happened with the whole of Scripture. The Spirit of God moved the writers to record what He had told them and to write it down accurately and without error. But of course:

c. the actual writing was done by the men themselves Verse (4) tells us the physical writing in this case was not done by Jeremiah himself, but by his secretary Baruch. However, Baruch did not add or subtract or edit. He simply wrote down exactly what Jeremiah told him as the Holy Spirit brought it back to mind. Paul used the same method in writing many of his letters; for example, Romans 16:22 tells us that Tertius wrote down the letter to the Romans for Paul. And I'm sure the same Holy Spirit was just as active in guarding Baruch's pen or Tertius' pen from error as He was in providing recall to Jeremiah's mind or giving Paul the words to write. Every book in our Bibles has come to us in basically this same process with some variation perhaps in the manner of the various steps. For instance, Genesis through Deuteronomy were written for us by Moses. Well, obviously Moses wasn't alive to see anything that happened in the book of Genesis and he obviously didn't record his own death at the end of Deuteronomy. So where did he get the information he wrote down? Some, no doubt was carefully passed down orally from generation to generation, but the exactness of the speeches of the prayers of the patriarchs, for example, shows clearly that the Holy Spirit HAD to have spoken to Moses and provided him that information. And the Spirit must also have provided a clear mandate to write it all down accurately, which Moses eventually did, perhaps with Joshua's help. And perhaps Joshua even added the ending at the Spirit's prompting before starting to write down his own book, the book of Joshua. The same process was used by Solomon. Proverbs were given to him by God. He later wrote them down. Many of them were collected and set in order, even years later by others, but the Spirit of God superintended the whole process. The Gospel writers never saw Jesus' birth, nor did they write down every word that He said as they walked with Him over 3 1/2 years. In fact, Luke may never have seen Jesus and Mark saw Jesus, perhaps only briefly at the end of Jesus' life. Yet the Holy Spirit gave them the information they needed through the eyewitness testimony of others, perhaps of Mary, and the 11 apostles, but also through Divine recall of everything Jesus said and did. And then the Spirit of God moved them to write it down and superintended the recording of it to be without error. My point is that the Book we hold in our hands (or have on our phones) really IS God's Word, not man's! Now look back to verse 3 where we can see:

2. the purpose for which the Word of God was given (3) God had Jeremiah write this scroll so that all the people of Judah might hear His words all over again and that it might impact them. Likewise:

a. God had His Word written down to continually impact His people He had it written that we might read it and hear it over and over again, accurately, not only during one lifetime, but generation after generation. He intended that it would be permanently recorded in order to impact His people in an ongoing fashion throughout human history. And the type of impact was this:

b. God had His Word written down to restore us to Himself As in Judah's case, it was given to turn His people's hearts back to Him. He wants to produce change in us and keep us from sin. The Word is meant to be a roadblock, to produce such a change of heart that it keeps us from barging headlong into sin or from continuing unaware in it. With all His heart, God wants us to be forgiven and to walk in relationship with Him! He longs to have us walk with

Him in a relationship free from any barriers, with nothing between, completely forgiven, so He gives us His Word to continually cleanse us. As Paul put it in Ephesians 5, He washes us with water by the Word so that He may present us to Himself without spot or wrinkle! *I read the story of a woman in another country who had become a believer. Soon she began attending Bible classes taught by the missionary who had led her to Christ. The teacher became discouraged, however, because the lady seemed to forget everything she was taught. One day the missionary remarked impatiently to her, "Sometimes I wonder what's the use trying to teach you anything. You forget it all anyway. You remind me of a strainer. Everything I pour into your mind runs right through." The student quickly responded, "I may not recall everything, but just as water passes through a strainer and makes it clean, what you have taught me from the Bible helps make me clean. I need that. That's why I keep coming back."* You may not remember a whole lot of what you read, but as you read it, the Spirit of God deals with your heart and cleanses your life so that you can walk in close fellowship with God!

So Jeremiah and Baruch wrote down the very first copy of Jeremiah's writings on a scroll and next, as the story continues:

II. Here We See How People React To The Word of God in verses (5-26). Jeremiah was already banned from speaking at the Temple (because of his unpopular messages, I'm sure) so he sent Baruch to read the scroll to the people. And he sent him there on a fast day some months later, a special day of fasting that was called by the King or by the leaders to gather before God at the Temple and pray for help against the Babylonian army. I'm sure the place was packed. In verse 11, one of the priests, Micaiah, heard it and ran to get the King's top officials and they had Baruch come and read it to them. Look at their reaction in (16-19). Now that is typical of:

1. the reaction of people who believe the Word of God These officials, even though they worked for ungodly King Jehoiakim, evidently believed that Jeremiah was a true prophet of God and that his written scroll was actually the very Word of God to them. People who believe the Word of God always react this way:

a. they show respect for the Word and desire to hear and to obey it These high government officials asked that the scroll be brought and read to them. And they sat through the reading of the whole thing! Would you sit through the reading of all 35 previous chapters of Jeremiah in one sitting? Not unless you believed those words were true and that they applied to you! Notice verse 16 says they were afraid. They believed God's Word was meant for them and that it was about to come true. And they wanted to do something about it! They took it to the king and verse 25 tells us that they urged him to listen to it and not to disregard it. That same desire to know and obey the Word of God should be in each one of us. There ought to be a desire to know it and to read it, to find out what's in there, to hear what God has to say to us. And then there ought to be an attitude of readiness to respond and do what it says. It is absolutely unnatural for a person who claims to know Christ to have no desire to read or to listen to the Word or to resist obeying it. If that is the case, one has to wonder whether the person genuinely believes or not! Moreover, when a person believes the Word of God:

b. they respect the messenger and value him These officials were no fools. They knew the King and how he might react. So they wanted to protect Baruch and Jeremiah. They took the scroll and told them to go hide and not tell ANYONE, even them, where they were. They valued Jeremiah and wanted to protect Him. Anyone who believes the Word, naturally shows respect for the people who teach him or share it with Him. Paul said, *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.* - 1 Tim. 5:17. I don't want to sound self-serving, but all of us, myself included are to highly value those who preach and teach the precious Word of God to us, just as these men did. On the other hand, as we read on, we also see:

2. the reaction of people who refuse to believe the Word of God (20-26) King Jehoiakim and the officials closest to him had a reaction that is typical of many people today:

a. they display open contempt for the Word He listened to the scroll as it was read all right, but verse 23 tells us that as each little section was read, he cut it off the scroll with a scribe's knife and threw it in the fire pot to watch it burn. Over and over, he cut it off and burned it, despite the protest of the believers who were horrified at his utter disregard. He was basically thumbing his nose at God and saying, "Ha, I'll show you what I think of You and what You have to say! I could care less!" That's what so many do today. They say, "The Bible is just a manmade book. It's archaic. It's outdated. It's just so much ancient mythology! Besides, there is no God out there or if there is, He is nothing like the Bible describes Him!" They openly display their contempt of the Bible because of their so-called superior knowledge. But have you ever noticed that the literal persecutors of Christians do the same thing? When radical Muslims or Hindus raid a church or the home of a believer, what do they do? They take the Bibles they find and tear them up or deface them or burn them! In our society we do the same thing only in a little more civilized fashion. Satan's goal is always to destroy the Word of God, one way or the other. And then in verse 26 King Jehoiakim ordered Baruch and Jeremiah to be arrested. That's what people who are filled with contempt for the Word ultimately do:

b. they display anger against the messenger Where it is possible, they arrest them or beat them and threaten and intimidate them in any way possible. You might remember our friends Timurlan and Irina from Kyrgyzstan who were here with us back in 2013. He sent some graphic pictures the other day and wrote, *As a pastor of the "For All Nations" Fellowship and director of "Young Life" Kyrgyzstan, I thought how I should address the situation of break-*

ing into our base in Tokmok on July 16. We think the goal of those people was not to steal but to stop us from sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with children. Those thieves did many ugly things: they wrote on the walls [with spray paint] "We will kill you"; "don't teach our children"; "sect"; "Allah"; "Shaitan" (Satan); "Muhammad"; "Koran". They stole the equipment we used for our ministry: video projector, times-box, etc. They stole money that young people collected for the upcoming camp. However, that won't stop us from doing what the Lord has called us to do and we are keen to continue sharing the Love of Jesus with the young generation of our country! In many countries the anger against those who share the Word of God is far stronger, yet even here it is amazing to see how livid people who have no respect for God's Word become when you try to speak openly about it in the public arena. They display everything from contempt and disdain to openly trying to silence us.

Rest assured that if you believe the Word of God and you share it and try to make it known, you will experience contempt from people. But as the story concludes in **(27-32)**:

III. Here We See The Nature of the Word of God God tells Jeremiah to rewrite the scroll and to add even more to it. By the way, right here is the clue as to why Jeremiah's book is not in chronological order. In this second writing, perhaps God had Jeremiah do some rearranging by topic instead of placing his messages in chronological order and the rest of the book was added later! At any rate, God was making a point:

1. the Word of God is indestructible The Word was not the paper and ink that was thrown into the fire. It is not the physical material book you hold in your lap or the words on your phone screen. It is the spoken word from the mind and mouth of God. It is forever settled in heaven. It can never be lost, never be eradicated. Human beings can burn all the Bibles they want (and many have), yet even if every last physical copy was destroyed (which I doubt God would allow) it would still stand because it exists in the mind and the mouth of Almighty God. It continues forever in effect. And that means:

2. the Word of God is unchangeable Notice that the second scroll had ALL the words of the first one; none were omitted or altered. God did not change His mind! He simply repeated all He had already said. What God says is unalterable. Reacting against it doesn't change it. It is solid; it is dependable; it is sure like a Rock. And finally:

3. the Word of God is infallible It will come to pass, no matter how many people scoff at it or disbelieve it. God said Jehoiakim would have no descendant to sit on the throne. Well, his son Jehoiachin did come to sit on the throne but it was in the middle of the second Babylonian invasion and he only reigned 3 months before being carried as a captive to Babylon and no other descendant of Jehoiakim ever became King. He could not escape God's Word by ignoring it or burning it. Well, then God told him he would die and not be buried; his body would lie exposed. In fact, look back to **22:18-19**. He would have the burial of a donkey, dragged and thrown outside the gates to rot. We're not sure exactly how Jehoiakim died but we know it was at the time the Babylonians were approaching to invade in late 598 BC. Some believe he was assassinated and literally thrown outside the wall in a failed attempt to appease the Babylonians. The historian Josephus says Nebuchadnezzar actually killed him and left his body lay outside the wall. We don't know that for sure, but we do know that God's word is infallible. It never fails; it always comes to pass.

In 1874 the Scriptures were under severe attack by critics, and John W. Haley published a defense entitled Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible. In the preface to his book he wrote this: "Finally, let it be remembered that the Bible is neither dependent upon nor affected by the success or failure of my book. Whatever may become of the latter, whatever may be the verdict passed upon it by an intelligent public, the Bible will stand. In the ages yet to be, when its present assailants and defenders are mouldering in the dust, and when our very names are forgotten, God's Word will be, as it has been during the centuries past, the guide and solace of millions."

Gems From Jeremiah

The Story Of Judah's End

Jeremiah's Imprisonment And Rescue - Ch. 37-38

At Ch. 37 you reach another major division in book of Jeremiah. Chapters 37-44 are the chronological story of the actual fall of the city of Jerusalem to the Babylonian army, written from Jeremiah's point of view as a person who was actually living through it. They are the story of the end of a nation, the nation of Judah. To summarize the entire book of Jeremiah simply, the first 36 chapters have one overarching message: "The Babylonians are coming and they will conquer you!" And the entire rest of the book proves one point: "Prophecy is always fulfilled; What God says will happen happens!" It's like the end of the book is God saying: "See I told you so!" Now as we begin, it's important to understand:

I. The Situation Of Jerusalem (37:1-10) As you know, Jerusalem was the capitol city of the nation of Judah, and as chapter 37 begins:

1. the city was besieged by the Babylonian army (1-5) The King of Judah is Zedekiah. He was installed as King at the age of 21 by King Nebuchadnezzar after the previous king, Jehoiachin, was carried away captive to Babylon in 597 BC along with many others from the city. He was Jehoiachin's uncle and he was put on the throne to keep the country

loyal under Babylonian domination and pay tribute. But after 8 years or so, and despite all the warnings of Jeremiah, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon. He made an alliance with Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt and looked to his army for the strength to stand against Babylon. So, the Babylonian army marched into the land and besieged the city of Jerusalem for some two years. And as they did, verse 5 tells us that:

2. the army of Egypt attacked the Babylonians and drew them away (5) Egypt had marched out to attack the Babylonian armies so they temporarily withdrew from Jerusalem to fight the Egyptians. This places the time setting of this chapter late in the year 588 BC, right in the middle of the siege. Of course, the Jews were overjoyed! It was the miracle they had hoped for! King Zedekiah and his officials thought their plan had succeeded and the day of their deliverance was at hand. Zedekiah evidently sent messengers to Jeremiah as if to ask, "Inquire of the Lord again! Has He not changed His mind? Has He not heard our cries for deliverance?" But:

3. Jeremiah told King Zedekiah's messengers that God's Word stood firm and the Babylonians would return to destroy the city (6-10) Jeremiah quickly reminded them that God's Word does not change; it will come true no matter what our circumstances may seem to tell us! God says even if you were so successful that only wounded men were left to fight them, they would burn this city with fire, because I have decreed it and I don't change my mind!" Whatever God says He will do, He will do, no matter what! Hey, that reminds me of what Peter wrote, *...I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created." ...But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come!! - 2 Pet. 3:3-9.* Jesus said He will come again and He WILL come again, no matter how long the delay seems to be or how impossible it might seem to our minds! Jesus said the Gospel WILL be preached to all the peoples before the end comes and it WILL be done, no matter how impossible the task looks to us! God keeps His Word!

But Jeremiah's unrelenting stance on God's Word made him highly unpopular and it led to trouble. In fact, it led to:

II. The Imprisonment Of Jeremiah It all began very innocently **(11-12)**. Since the Babylonian army wasn't surrounding the city at the moment:

1. he set out to do something good He started to go back home to his town of Anathoth to take care of some business, to settle some property matters there, but **(13)**. One of the sentries arrested him at the city gate and:

a. he was falsely accused of doing something evil He was accused of deserting to the Babylonians. Now it's easy to see why. For years he's been preaching, "The Babylonians will destroy this city"; it would only seem logical that he was trying to slip out and get on the winning side. But he wasn't. He protested his innocence strongly, but both the sentry and:

b. the officials would not listen to him (14-15a) They had been angry at his preaching before, but now they were furious, so they beat him and:

2. he was imprisoned in a dungeon cell for a long time (15-16) He was placed in a dungeon, in an underground vaulted cell, and left there a *long time*, certainly for weeks, perhaps for months. He was silenced, hidden away where no one could hear him and where no one would think of him. He was barely given enough food and water to survive and that might well have been the end of him. But in the spring of 587 BC Babylon defeated the Egyptians and they came back! The siege of Jerusalem resumed and the King now desperately wanted a word from the Lord, so he sent for Jeremiah **(17)**.

a. King Zedekiah once again sought God's Word through him He so desperately hoped that God would change His mind, that Jeremiah would change his message, but in spite of his own awful predicament, he would not. He boldly said, *You are GOING to lose!!! God has said so!* If the messenger of God is a true messenger, you can't beat the message out of him; you can't starve it out of him! That's the mistake that persecutors of Christians make. They think that if they dish out enough suffering that we will deny our Lord, that we will deny our faith, that we will give up believing His Word! And time after time they find faithfulness like that of Jeremiah. *During the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900, the rebels captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted to live and go free, but any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to do it. After kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. [Today in the Word, February, 1989, p. 17]* All through the centuries God's people have been faithful and refused to deny His Word, no matter what the cost! But since he had an audience with the King at last, Jeremiah:

b. he appealed to Zedekiah to get him out of the dungeon (18-20) He reasoned with him, *Where are all your prophets who said the Babylonians wouldn't come?* "You KNOW my words have come true; you KNOW I have spoken from God and I'm not some traitor trying to join the winning side. You know I don't belong here and if you leave me here, I'll starve to death!" So, to his credit, the King extended mercy and instead of going back to the dungeon:

3. he was confined in the courtyard of the guard (21) Now his situation was much improved. In the first place:
a. while there he was fed at the King's order He got a little loaf of bread, a bun, to eat every day as long as it lasted. But more importantly, even though he was confined:

b. while there in the courtyard with the soldiers **he continued to preach Jerusalem's defeat (38:1-4)** Oh were those officials mad! Jeremiah was disheartening their soldiers, urging them to desert to the enemy, weakening the morale of the troops by declaring their defeat! Can you imagine? They wanted him executed and appealed to the King **(5-6)**. The King felt powerless to resist his own generals and so Jeremiah:

4. he was eventually thrown into a cistern to die A cistern is a chamber for the collection of rainwater. In this case it was deep underground, so deep that there was no ladder long enough to climb down into it. They let him down by ropes; they weren't going to haul him back out anyway. But there wasn't really any water in the cistern, only mud, deep, wet, oozing mud. In fact, the historian Josephus says in his book, *When the king had granted them such a permission, they presently came into the prison, and took him, and let him down with a cord into a pit full of mire, that he might be suffocated, and die of himself. So he stood up to the neck in the mire which was all about him, and so continued.* [Josephus, *Antiquities* I. 10. c. 7. sect. 5]. There's no way to test the truth of that statement, but the tradition evidently says that the mud was neck deep such that Jeremiah was bound to become too weak to stand and would suffocate. The cistern was not meant to be a means of confinement; it was meant to be a means of execution!

Now Jeremiah was truly at his lowest point, like Jonah in the belly of the fish, about to die. Some scholars think it was then that Jeremiah first prayed these words that he later wrote in Lamentations: *I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies without cause; they flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me; water closed over my head; I said, 'I am lost.' "I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, 'Do not close your ear to my cry for help!' You came near when I called on you; you said, 'Do not fear!' "You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life. - 3:52-58.* Listen, I want to encourage you this morning! Speaking from the experience of a Nazi concentration camp, Corrie Ten Boom said, "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still!" No matter how deep the pit of circumstances you may be thrown into as you are faithful and follow God, don't give up! He is there and He hears you! You can't get into a more hopeless situation than Jeremiah was in, but God heard him **(7-9)**:

III. Jeremiah Was Rescued By Ebed-Melech His name means "servant of the king", so perhaps we don't even have his name, but merely his job title. He wasn't even a Jew but an Ethiopian, a eunuch in the palace, one of the King's lowly slaves. Yet he evidently believed Jeremiah was a real prophet of God and in spite of his lowly position:

1. he spoke to the King on behalf of Jeremiah He dared to stand up for Jeremiah, knowing that all the important officials wanted to kill him and that the King felt powerless against them. He was taking his life into his hands by calling them wicked and trying to reverse their decision. But God honored his courage and:

a. he was charged to lead a rescue effort (10) He was to find 30 men, not to help hoist Jeremiah out of the pit, but to protect him in the process. And he did it. In defiance of all the generals and officials, at the King's order he carried out his mission, but notice how:

b. he carefully pulled Jeremiah out of the pit (11-13) See how tender he was. He went and got rags so Jeremiah could pad his armpits from the burn of the rope before pulling him up. He was so careful not to hurt Jeremiah and I'm sure he got him all cleaned up and got him some food and water and met his needs, all the while protected by his ring of guards.

Listen, no matter how deep the pit you are in, God's arm is not too short to save! Sometimes He miraculously shuts the lions' mouths so they don't eat you! But more often He does it through the willing hearts and hands of His believing people who love and care about you and are willing to risk themselves to do something about your plight! Recently I heard the story of one young mother that I know who had a friend in her ladies' group who had kidney failure and was on the transplant list. And this young mom with a family of young children to raise gave her friend one of her own kidneys to save her life! Ebed-Melech was that kind of guy too! The family of God is filled with them, people who are willing to give their all to help another! At any rate, now Jeremiah was once again confined to the courtyard of the guard and:

2. King Zedekiah continued to consult Jeremiah (14-18) You can hear in his oath that he does believe that God is real. He just desperately wanted God to change His mind and His plan. Jeremiah pleaded with him, "Just surrender and God promises that you and your family will live!" But if you read further in (19-23) you see that:

a. he refused to obey the Word of the Lord He was just too afraid to do what God told him to do and in (24-29) you see that:

b. he refused to even acknowledge consulting Jeremiah He was still so scared of his own generals and officials that he didn't want them to know they had talked about the battle, but only about sparing Jeremiah's life. He won't stand up and do what is right. He won't risk it. He's not like Ebed Melech at all. So, as we finish, let's:

IV. Contrast A Self-Serving King With A Selfless Servant And as a backdrop to apply it to ourselves, let's look at **Phil. 2:3-4**. You see:

1. Zedekiah protected himself regardless of the fate of another He was controlled by selfish ambition, the need to protect and care for himself. He counted himself more important than Jeremiah or all the people he ruled. He looked merely to his own interests and helped Jeremiah only when it appeared to benefit himself. But:

2. Ebed-Melech risked his own life to protect the life of another He counted Jeremiah as more important than himself and in humility, but with courage, went to the King, putting his own life in danger. He did not merely look to his own interests, but to the needs of others first. And then notice verse **5**. That's what Jesus did! He did nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. He counted us and our need for salvation as more significant than His own need to escape the pain of the cross and He died to save us.

So how faithful to God are you? Are you like Jeremiah who said and did what God told him, no matter what the cost? Are you like Ebed Melech who was willing to risk his life to help someone else because it was the right thing to do before God? Or are you more like Zedekiah who was afraid to obey God and afraid to do what was right for someone else, because he thought about himself above everything and everyone else? *While traveling to China in the late '80's, Eric Fellman met a Chinese couple in Hong Kong. He writes, "A friend took me down a narrow alley to a second-floor flat to meet a man recently released from prison in China. I knew I would be pressed to carry Bibles and literature on my trip. But I was hesitant and tried to mask my fear with rationalizations about legalities and other concerns. A Chinese man in his 60's opened the door. His smile was radiant, but his back was bent almost double. He led us to a sparsely furnished room. A Chinese woman of about the same age came in to serve tea. As she lingered, I couldn't help but notice how they touched and lovingly looked at each other. My staring apparently didn't go unnoticed, for soon they were both giggling. "What is it?" I asked my friend. "Oh nothing," he said with a smile. "They just wanted you to know it was OK--they're newlyweds." I learned they had been engaged in 1949, when he was a student at Nanking Seminary. On the day of their wedding rehearsal, Chinese communists seized the seminary. They took the students to a hard-labor prison. For the next 30 years, the bride-to-be was allowed only one visit per year. Each time, following their brief minutes together, the man would be called to the warden's office. "You may go home with your bride," he said, "if you will renounce Christianity." Year after year, this man replied with just one word; "No." I was stunned. How had he been able to stand the strain for so long, being denied his family, his marriage, and even his health? When I asked, he seemed astonished at my question. He replied, "With all that Jesus has done for me, how could I betray Him?" The next day, I requested that my suitcase be crammed with Bibles and training literature for Chinese Christians. I determined not to lie about the materials, yet lost not one minute of sleep worrying about the consequences. And as God had planned, my suitcases were never inspected. [Eric Fellman, Moody Monthly, January 1986 p. 33].* Let this couple be examples to us as they were to Eric. Let Jeremiah and Ebed Melech be examples to us. Let us determine to be faithful to God and to one another, no matter what the cost!

Gems From Jeremiah

The Story Of Judah's End

Jerusalem's Fall And God's Mercy - Chs. 39-40

Jeremiah 39 contains the story of the fall of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews or the Exile, which is repeated again in detail in chapter 52. From our place in history, it is hard for us to comprehend just how momentous an event this was to God's people. To get a sense of it, turn with me to Psalm 137:1-6. Jerusalem was the Holy City, the city where God dwelt in His Temple, the fairest, most pleasant place in the world to be. Those who survived to be carried away were devastated and angry, as the end of the Psalm shows. Spurgeon wrote, *Let those find fault with it who have never seen their temple burned, their city ruined, their wives ravished, and children slain.... It is one thing to talk of the bitter feeling which moved captive Israelites in Babylon, and quite another thing to be captives ourselves under a savage and remorseless power, which knew not how to show mercy, but delighted in barbarities to the defenseless.* Imagine if the German army had defeated us in WWII, sacked and destroyed America and taken those of us who remained as captives to Europe to live as slaves. That is the magnitude of what happened to the Jewish nation and the import of what we are about to read. But before we do, I'd like you to turn with me to a verse in the New Testament where Paul is actually talking about how God dealt with His people Israel in cutting her off and grafting us, the church, into her roots - **Romans 11:22**. Paul points out the contrast that:

I. God Is Both Severe And Kind He is a stern judge who refuses to overlook evil:

1. He severely disciplines those who rebel against Him as Israel did. The fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews for their hundreds of years of idolatry and rebellion against Him is a just thing. They fully deserved the awful

tragedy that He brought upon them after refusing to heed His warnings time after time and year after year. Those who refuse God's mercy always end up experiencing His judgment, often in this life, yet certainly in their eternal future. Yet at the same time:

2. He is extremely kind to those who trust Him He shows tremendous mercy and grace to those who genuinely love and trust Him, even though they may be in the very midst of the suffering all around them.

And those two extremes are what we're going to see in Jeremiah's record of what happened. If you remember, at the end of chapter 38, Jeremiah was still a prisoner under arrest, confined in the courtyard of the guard. But we read in **(39:1-10)** his account of how the city was taken. And as we look at it, let's remember that:

II. The Fall Of Jerusalem Displays The Severity Of God's Discipline (1-3)

1. the Babylonian army took the city after a nearly 2 year long siege Again, we have no clue what that means. The city streets were crammed with people from all over the land who fled into the city for protection. The gates were barred and the enemy encircled the city. Nothing could get in, so afterwhile food began to run short. Famine set in. There was no more wood for fuel. People began to eat whatever livestock they had inside the walls and eventually they began to starve. There was no taking out of waste or of dead bodies so filth multiplied and under these conditions disease often sets in. Meanwhile the enemy outside has fresh supplies of everything and time is on their side. Unless help comes, a city can only survive a siege for so long. The siege itself was a severe punishment, but eventually the Babylonians broke through the wall at some point and their army rushed into the weakened city, finding little resistance. Their generals set up a tribunal, a headquarters in its midst. And as they did, King Zedekiah fled **(4-7)**:

2. King Zedekiah was captured near Jericho as he fled with his bodyguard and taken to the King of Babylon who was far to the north at Riblah. **His sons and the Jewish leaders** who had opposed Jeremiah so strongly were **killed** in front of him and then he was **blinded** so that would be the last thing he ever saw **and taken to Babylon**. Zedekiah had refused to listen to Jeremiah and surrender; he refused to do what God told him to do, and he paid a horrendous price for it. His punishment was pretty ordinary for the Babylonians, but extremely severe for him personally. Meanwhile back in Jerusalem:

3. the city and Temple were burned and the people carried into exile (8-9) All the houses in Jerusalem were set on fire and so was the Temple, the most precious possession of the Jews. Everything was totally destroyed. The Babylonian army set to work knocking down the walls so there would be no opportunity for future protection and the whole was left as a heap of rubble, much like the pictures we see today of the devastation ISIS has caused in Syria. The people who had not died or been killed were mustered into ranks, put in chains and marched 1200 miles to Babylon on foot. How many died along the way we don't know, but it certainly was a "Trail of Tears".

4. only a remnant of the poorest people were left to occupy the land (10) You can't collect tribute from a barren wilderness, so Nebuzardan, the general in charge of the operation, took some of the poorest people who had nothing and would be the most grateful and gave them fields and vineyards to work so the land would be occupied and produce some revenue for the King.

What a severe judgment for God's people to endure! One is reminded of the words of *Heb. 10:30-31*, *For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* Remember Ananias and Sapphira. Remember Lot's wife and Korah's rebellion against Moses in the wilderness and a host of other incidents where God's people chose disobey Him and suffered dearly for it. He is a God who disciplines His people severely when they stubbornly refuse to listen and rebel against Him. *Many of you have read The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, the famous allegory by C.S. Lewis. In it two girls, Susan and Lucy are getting ready to meet Aslan the lion, who represents Christ. And two talking animals, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, are preparing the children to meet him. "Is he a man?" asked Lucy. "Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond- the-sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great lion."* "Ooh," said Susan, "I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie," said Mrs. Beaver. "And make no mistake, if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." "Then isn't he safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you!" [C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe*]. Mark Buchanan comments, *The One True God is not the god of close parking spaces or the god of sunny days for our beach trip. He's the God of the cross, the God of the weak and the broken, who makes them strong. He's the God of Love, the God of Pain, the God of Suffering, and the God of Recompense. He's the God of Forgiveness, and the God of Vengeance, He's the God of the Shepherd, and the God of the King. He's God of the Rich and the Poor, the Hungry and the Full. He is God. He is not Safe. But He's Good. [Your God Is Too Safe - Mark Buchanan].* And as we continue in Jeremiah 39 you can see that:

III. God's Care For Those Who Remained In Jerusalem Displays His Great Kindness

First of all you can see:

1. God's gracious care for Jeremiah (11-12) It is amazing that somehow, some way:

a. God gave Jeremiah favor in the eyes of the King of Babylon Word of Jeremiah's prophecies that Babylon would win, word of his urging the King to surrender and the people to go out and give themselves up to the Babylonians got all the way to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah and when the city was taken, Nebuchadnezzar himself ordered the captain of his guard to seek him out and treat him well and give him freedom. So:

b. Jeremiah was released to live in the land (13-14) Now this is the short summary of Jeremiah's release. In (40:1) we read that:

(1) he was actually rescued from among the captives It seems that Jeremiah had been herded along with all the hundreds of others being taken captive and was actually in the town of Ramah where they were being assembled and prepared for the long march. Nebuzardan had to actually search for him there and find him so that he could free him. But when he found him, look what the captain said **(2-3)**. Isn't that amazing?

(2) his faith and his God were recognized by his captors Even though they had their own false gods, they were willing to acknowledge what the Jews themselves would not admit, that their God, Jehovah, was punishing His people for their disobedience and that this disaster was His doing! God got glory to Himself; He got a reputation in the eyes of the Babylonians to some degree through Jeremiah's preaching and his words coming true! And one day (in Daniel 4) King Nebuchadnezzar himself would actually worship and glorify the God of Israel and decree that his people should do so! This is the first tiny step in God's declaration of Himself to the Babylonian Empire! See how God can use our faithfulness to get glory even among our enemies! At any rate, Jeremiah:

(3) he was given the choice of where to live and be cared for (4-5) He could go along to Babylon with the promise of being cared for or he could stay in the land and be cared for by the new governor or he could go wherever he wanted. What a mercy from God after being opposed and imprisoned in a dungeon and thrown into a pit to die and nearly losing his life! What grace that, when he was nearly taken in chains as a slave, God rescued Him and set him free and provided for him! And He even gave him the choice of what to do next! God is good - all the time! Jeremiah didn't hesitate:

(4) he chose to remain in the land with the remnant of the people (6) His heart was with the poor of the land who were left and he chose to stay among them to continue to give them God's guidance. Now if we back up for just a moment, you can also see:

2. God's gracious care for Ebed Melech, Jeremiah's rescuer You remember from last time how Ebed Melech, the servant of King Zedekiah of Judah risked his life to speak for Jeremiah and how he pulled him out of the mud in the cistern and saved his life? Well, flashing back, at that time God gave Jeremiah this message **(39:15-18)**. God made him two promises. First:

a. he saw all God's words come true in the fall of the city before his very eyes. God confirmed to him that Jeremiah was a true prophet and that he had done right in rescuing him. But second:

b. though he was the King's servant, God preserved his life All the rest of Zedekiah's generals and nobles and important people in the realm were taken to Riblah and executed! But God promised Ebed Melech that he would be spared and he was; God singled him out and gave him his life as the reward of his godly deed. *Heb. 6:10, For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.* God does not forget the love you've shown for Him by serving others. Not one bit of it. He does not let it get swept away in the myriad of negative circumstances and events which deluge your life. He remembers it and He will not neglect to reward it! He is good - all the time! Now finally, in **(40:7-16)** we can see:

3. God's gracious care for the remnant of Israel who remained in the land. First of all, instead of leaving a harsh Babylonian official to rule the conquered land:

a. He gave them a godly governor, Gedaliah (7) Now let's pause a second to ask, just who was this Gedaliah? He is a Jew, not a Babylonian, and his father's name was Ahikam, son of Shaphan. Well, look back to **Jer. 26:24**. More than a decade earlier Jeremiah had been arrested under King Jehoiakim for his preaching. The King had actually executed another prophet named Uriah and would have let the people execute Jeremiah, but Gedaliah's father, Ahikam, stood with him and rescued him from death! He was evidently a man who believed and loved God and his son Gedaliah, from the little bit we see of him, seems to be cut from the same cloth. He appears to have loved the people and:

b. He gave them the opportunity for a peaceful life (8-9) These remaining army captains who had been stranded out in the field with their bands came to him and he promised to be an advocate for them and to help them lead a peaceful life if they would cooperate and serve their conquerors along with the poor people who were left in the land. In fact:

c. He gave them bountiful provision on which to survive (10-12) All the Jews who had fled from the land as the Babylonian army invaded recognized that they could have a normal life again and came back and they took over the harvesting of all the crops that had been left deserted in the fields. For a few brief months it became for them a time of plenty and abundance. God was so kind to the remnant who remained, who had suffered much over the last few years. He brought them out of the suffering of war and instead of having to eke out a bare living, He brought them directly into a time of unexpected abundance. God is good - all the time! Even though He allows times of suffering in our lives, He so often brings us out into pleasant places where we can experience the joy of living once again. But in the midst of God's goodness to His remnant, the Evil One was still working to destroy them. There was a plot afoot to assassinate God's appointed governor. Yet even then:

d. He gave Gedaliah a warning to preserve his life (13-16) All the army captains warned him that the King of the Ammonites had paid off one of them, Ishmael, to kill him. They knew that if the Jews killed the appointed governor, that would be the last straw for the Babylonians. They would come and wipe out every last Jew! But Gedaliah was godly; he wanted to believe the best of Ishmael and he would not condone murder. God graciously warned him in order to rescue him, but in his naiveté, he could not see the truth - but that's a story for the next chapter. God is still good - all the time! He so often warns us of disaster if we will listen.

Yes, God severely disciplines those who rebel and disobey, but He is SO kind and good and merciful to those who love and serve Him even in the midst of the horrible circumstances they may have to endure! I leave you with the words of Corrie Ten Boom who survived the awful cruelty of a German concentration camp. She writes, *Often I have heard people say, "How good God is! We prayed that it would not rain for our church picnic, and look at the lovely weather!" Yes, God is good when He sends good weather. But God was also good when He allowed my sister, Betsie, to starve to death before my eyes in a German concentration camp. I remember one occasion when I was very discouraged there. Everything around us was dark, and there was darkness in my heart. I remember telling Betsie that I thought God had forgotten us. "No, Corrie," said Betsie, "He has not forgotten us. Remember His Word: 'For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.'" Corrie concludes, "There is an ocean of God's love available--there is plenty for everyone. May God grant you never to doubt that victorious love--whatever the circumstances."*

Gems From Jeremiah

The Story Of Judah's End

Judah's Test And Stubbornness - Chs. 41-44

Today we come to the end of our study of the gems from Jeremiah's writings. In chapters 37-44 he is narrating the story of the end of the nation of Judah as one who is living through it. As we enter chapter 41, the city of Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonian army and been destroyed. Its king, Zedekiah, had been captured, tortured and taken to Babylon along with thousands of captives. Jeremiah had been released to live among the remaining poor people who were left in the land. A godly Jew, Gedaliah, had been appointed governor over the land and for a brief time many Jews who had scattered returned to the land and harvested all the summer crops in peace. But then there arose:

I. The Situation Which Tested The Remnant Of God's People - Ch. 41 In verses (1-10) we are told that:

1. Ishmael assassinated Gedaliah, Babylon's appointed governor One of the remaining army captains, Ishmael, had been bribed by the King of Ammon to betray and kill Gedaliah. The object was to anger Babylon further and goad them into completely wiping out the Jews. If you remember, Gedaliah had been warned about this in the last chapter but refused to believe it. So as they ate together, Ishmael was easily able to murder him, and not only him, but all the Jews and the Babylonian soldiers who were with him and under his charge. The next day he murdered 70 more Jews before setting out to flee across the Jordan River to Ammon, carrying the rest of the inhabitants of Mizpah with him as captives. But they didn't get very far. In (11-15):

2. Johanan (one of the remaining army captains) and his men pursued him and rescued the captives. They soon caught up with him. The captive Jews are freed but now this tiny remnant of Judah is caught in a terrible dilemma (16-18). They were terrified that the King of Babylon would come and wipe them out completely because in his eyes, "they" Jews had killed the governor he appointed in yet another act of rebellion, even though they were actually the victims of the situation and not the perpetrators. So:

3. this remnant paused in fear, ready to flee to Egypt The only hope they could see was to flee as quickly as possible out of the territory controlled by Babylon and go someplace where he couldn't reach them. And Egypt, the next strongest military power in the area, seemed to be their only choice. But in spite of their fear, they paused near Bethlehem long enough to do something we all need to do when we find ourselves in difficult situations, to seek the will of God!

I know that the situation of being victims of war doesn't relate very much to our lives, but we also experience difficult and life changing events that leave us in a quandary. Hurricane Harvey has left many thousands of people homeless, without

a livable house to go back to, many without a job. And among them are many believers, I'm sure. What do they do now? Do they stay and try to rebuild or try to move away and start over? If so, where and how? A spouse dies, an accident happens, a job is lost. What do I do now? How do I survive? Even in ordinary situations like where should I work or live or how should I spend money, Peter warns us that we should *spend the rest of [our] time on earth concerned about the will of God and not human desires*. - 1 Pet. 4:2 NET. We all face situations where we need to make decisions, sometimes important decisions that affect the rest of our lives, and we can't afford to trust our own judgment. We need to know God's will! Col. 4:12 tells us that Epaphras was praying fervently for the Colossians to *...stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God*. That's what we need to know and that's what we need to seek and as we do, God WILL reveal it to us. But when He does, we face the same test this remnant of Jews did:

II. The Test: Whether They Would Obey God's Revealed Will Or Not - Ch. 42 Jeremiah, God's prophet, was evidently among those who had been forcibly carried off captive and then rescued. So now in camp near Bethlehem:

1. they pled with Jeremiah to seek God's will for them (1-4) It seems, at the moment, that this remnant are actually godly folks who want to serve God and do His will. They wanted to know whether what they were planning to do was actually HIS plan or not. That should certainly be OUR desire before we act! They were fortunate to have a live prophet among them through whom they could directly inquire of God. We have God's eternal written Word to guide us and His very Spirit living inside us to reveal His thoughts as we pray. So when we need to know His will, we must diligently search the Scripture and apply its principles and seek Him fervently in prayer, just as sincerely as the Jews pled with Jeremiah. They were seemingly so sincere that:

2. they solemnly vowed to do God's will no matter what (5-6) That's actually a prerequisite. Don't bother coming to God to ask Him what to do if you aren't committed to do what He tells you! And we need to be sincere about it, no matter WHAT He tells us! They were so sincere that they made it an actual vow before God, which was a really serious deal to them (as it should be to us!) When you want God's wisdom, you can't be double-minded, James tells us. You can't be unstable like a wave tossing this way and that. You can't be thinking, "Maybe I'll follow it and maybe I won't." James says, *...that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord - 1:7*. Well, sure enough:

3. God revealed His will to them (7-12) God took them at their word and honored their sincere plea. He told them what to do: **stay in the land!** Listen, when we want to know His will, when we want to have His wisdom and not our own, we have a promise from God that you know well. Look with me at **James 1:5**. God will never reproach you for asking; He will never resent you bothering Him. He will never make it hard and difficult on purpose. If you ask Him sincerely in faith, He will give you His wisdom and He will give it generously! He has promised to do it and God cannot lie! But do notice that:

a. they had to wait to receive His answer Waiting 10 days was a test in itself. They were already afraid and the longer they waited, the more time there was for word to get to the King of Babylon and for his soldiers to show up after them. Very often, God does not make His will clear to us immediately. Sometimes we just have to wait for it and sit in our uncertainty and fear, trusting Him to care for us until He reveals our next step. Be patient and wait for the Lord, He WILL show you. But in Judah's case:

b. they did not get the answer they really wanted to hear "Stay here and face the Babylonians." Now remember they were already on the way to Egypt. It's obvious what they thought was the best thing to do. But God said, "No, you've got to stay here and face the very thing you're afraid of!" Isn't that just like the Lord? So many times, we come to Him with an answer already in mind. We know what WE would like to do; what WE want. We ask God for wisdom, but we secretly hope He won't make us face the more difficult alternative, yet often He does, not to be cruel, but so we will trust Him and He will get glory! But God knew them well and He:

4. God warned them not to disobey His guidance in (13-18). He said, "If you go to Egypt... verse (16). "The very things you fear here will follow you there! You will all die. None of you will be left!" When God reveals His will, choosing to do your own is deliberate disobedience and it always brings dire consequences. When God reveals His will, we always face a test: will we obey it or not? If we obey, He will bless us and use us, even if we have to endure painful things. If we disobey, the chips are left to fall on us and that can be disastrous. *Dr. B.J. Miller once said, "It is a great deal easier to do that which God gives us to do, no matter how hard it is, than to face the responsibilities of not doing it."* [Today In The Word, November, 1989, p.11] Well:

5. Jeremiah himself knew that, like us so many times, **they truly wanted God to approve THEIR plan** instead of being genuinely willing to follow His. So in verses (19-22) he pleads with them, "Don't go! I've warned you from God! Don't do it! But I know that you will go anyway because your hearts are set on it, so know that you will certainly die." And sure enough, look at:

III. Their Response: They Went To Egypt - Ch. 43 Read (1-7). In spite of the serious warning:

1. they stubbornly refused to obey God's instructions Their leaders dragged them all the way to northern Egypt on the edge of the Nile delta. And they dragged Jeremiah and his secretary Baruch with them by force! Now why did they make such a wrong choice? Because:

a. their fear overruled their commitment to the Lord Fear of the Babylonians by this point had risen to a fever pitch and it became the driving factor in their lives. Their fear of the sword was stronger than their faith in God. So many times, our decisions are driven by fear, fear of what we deeply believe is going to happen. We're afraid we won't survive. We're afraid we'll lose everything. We're afraid we won't have income or that we'll suffer in some other way. *Dr. E. Stanley Jones said, "I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath--these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely--these are my native air... We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality."* And because fear ruled these Jews:

b. they rationalized away their own unwillingness to obey They said, "Jeremiah, you're lying. God didn't really say that!" They blamed Baruch and said, "He's a traitor; he influenced you to say that because he wants to see us all killed!" Blame somebody else, that's always a good excuse! When we don't really want to obey God, we make all kinds of good excuses why we can't do it! We rationalize and put up all kinds of reasons why the very thing God wants us to do can't be His will, instead of admitting that the truth that we are simply unwilling to obey Him! But after they arrived in Egypt.

2. God declared through Jeremiah that the punishment they feared would follow them in verses (8-13), that Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon would invade Egypt and set his throne on the very stones at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace. Of course, that very thing happened around 568 BC, probably about 15 years later. Nebuchadnezzar did come and conquer Egypt and punish them severely. So often the very thing we're afraid of and trying to avoid by disobeying happens to us anyway in some other form or at some other time! But the deeper problem is that when we disobey, what happened to the Jews happens to us:

IV. Their Disobedience Degenerated Into Obstinate Apostasy We don't have time to look further into **Chapter 44**, but let me just summarize it in two points. Once they were living in Egypt:

1. they pursued the sin of idolatry (8) They fell into the idolatry of Egypt. They sacrificed to the Queen of Heaven, the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. That's where disobedience leads. When we disobey God's will, we end up disobeying more and more, sinking deeper and deeper. In fact, the Jews sank lower and lower until their thinking was so badly jaded that:

2. they attributed their former prosperity to idolatry and blamed God for their exile (17-18) They actually came to feel the reason they were suffering in exile in Egypt was because they had STOPPED worshipping idols rather than BECAUSE they were doing it in the first place. They blamed following the Lord as the root of all their troubles! They became totally apostate and forsook the Lord completely and ultimately perished because of it.

Chronologically, this was Jeremiah's last message to Judah; He probably died there in Egypt with them. But what a stubborn people, those Jews! Yet what a stubborn person I am, too. The decision to seek God's will and obey Him is not something you make once for life. It's something you make over again every time there is a test, every time there is a decision to be made, every time you seek God's will and He says "Do this!" So many times, we let our desires or our fears overwhelm us and we follow our own way instead of His. I've shared my testimony with you many times but when I was 19 and a freshman in college, God made it pretty clear to me that He wanted me to be a pastor, however, I didn't want to do His will. I wanted to do my will. I didn't like crowds of people and being up in front of them; I liked being out in nature and being by myself. So, I basically offered to do anything else instead and tried to ignore what He was telling me. In God's mercy nothing dramatically bad happened to me; He just made everything I liked turn sour. I worked in a machine shop and at work I was miserable. I started an ecology course in college which I should have loved, but I was miserable. I spent time in the outdoors which I love to do and I was miserable. Everything in life seemed pointless and useless until one night I got down on my knees and prayed sincerely, "Lord, I will do WHATEVER you want; I WILL be a pastor, whatever that means!" It was like a 10 ton boulder was lifted from my shoulders! The joy of the Lord flooded back into me and though I was terribly uncertain about the next steps and how to go about it all, I knew that I knew that God was with me and would take care of it all! Listen, our God is a God of second chances and even if you're already suffering from your bad choices, you can reverse your choice right now and start obeying Him, no matter what your past choices have been! Choose to do the will of God with all your heart!

JEREMIAH: BIBLE SCHOOL COURSE

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH

I. THE TIMES OF JEREMIAH - Jeremiah's ministry covered more than 50 years, the period 627-582 BC. He prophesied to Judah just prior to and during the fall of Judah to Babylon. Place it in Old Testament History (chart of Old Testament Overview).

KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS - a time when three world powers struggled

- 722 BC - Assyria conquers Israel and deports population Assyria attempts to conquer Judah and fails. Manasseh's 55 yr. reign leads Israel into deplorable idolatry.
- 640 BC - Josiah begins to reign in Judah - last hope for spiritual renewal
- 627 BC - Jeremiah begins his ministry
- 626 BC - Babylonian Empire begins to form
- 609 BC - Babylon defeats Assyria, Josiah dies, Egypt controls Judah, Egypt allies with Assyria against Babylon. Josiah fears Egyptian rule and tries to head off Egyptian army, dies at Carchemish. Pharaoh Neco makes Jehoiakim king.
- 605 BC - Babylonian captivity begins, first deportation. Babylon defeated Egypt at last and took hostages from conquered territories (Daniel too). But after some years of service Jehoiakim rebelled, counting on Egypt for help. He died during Babylonian attack.
- 597 BC - Jehoiachin surrenders, second deportation. Reigned only 3 months, taken to Babylon with 10,000 of leaders of Jerusalem including Ezekiel. Zedekiah appointed king but he eventually rebelled.
- 586 BC - Zedekiah defeated, Jerusalem falls and is destroyed. Third deportation. Gedaliah appointed governor but assassinated, remnant flees to Egypt.

THE RULERS OF JUDAH DURING JEREMIAH'S MINISTRY

Josiah	31 years	640-609 BC
Jehoahaz (Shallum)	3 mos.	609 BC
Jehoiakim	11 years	609-598 BC
Jehoiachin	3 mos.	598-597 BC
Zedekiah	11 years	597-586 BC
Gedaliah		586-? BC

II. THE MINISTRY OF JEREMIAH - Jeremiah was evidently of the tribe of Levi and one of descendants of Aaron. His father Hilkiah was a priest (1:1) and his home town was Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin, approximately 3 miles NE of Jerusalem. He was called to a prophetic ministry as a young man (1:7) and became God's chief spokesman for the last 50 years of Judah's existence. His early ministry was contemporary with Zephaniah and Habakkuk, his later with Daniel and Ezekiel who ministered in Babylon. His prophecies were known to Daniel and regarded as Scriptures (Dan. 9:1-2) and influenced his ministry. The central theme of his prophecies is the announcement of the impending Babylonian captivity. Two characteristics to remember about him:

1. he had a heart for the people of God - 8:18-9:1 He is sometimes known as the weeping prophet. He never lost his compassion for his people, now matter how they persisted in sin.

2. he suffered for the ministry of God - Time and again in the record we see how his message was ignored, how he was opposed, mistreated, imprisoned, and nearly killed for proclaiming God's Word. Yet he never quit, **20:8-9**. He was driven on by a Divine compulsion to the end.

III. THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH - Some facts to help understand it:

1. it is a series of prophecies, not a narrative story. So you can view it like a a string of beads, a series of individual units connected together. All told it covers 50 years worth of time but we have only glimpses from here and there through those years.

2. it is not arranged chronologically The next bead acquired does not always follow the last. Evidently, late in his life Jeremiah took the beads and arranged them on one scroll, but not in the order in which they occurred. Each segment has to be dated by its internal references.

3. it is arranged logically A string of beads is arranged logically, small to big to small, to present the best display when worn. Jeremiah put his prophecies together to make the most sense to the reader by their subject material. You will see this from the outlines later.

IV. THE OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH

- I. Introduction - Jeremiah's Call ch. 1
- II. Prophecies About Judah chs. 2-45
- III. Prophecies About Other Nations chs. 46-51
- IV. Conclusion - Historical Appendix ch. 52

DETAILED OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH

I. The Call of Jeremiah: 1

II. Prophecies About Judah: 2-45

- 1. the list of Judah's sins: 2-13
 - a. 2:1-3:5 - abandonment
 - b. 3:6-6:30 - harlotry
 - c. 7-10 - idolatry
 - d. 11-12 - covenant-breaking
 - e. 13 - uselessness
- 2. the portrait of Judah's people: 14-20
 - a. 14a - a drought-ridden people
 - b. 15a - a destroyed people
 - c. 16:1-17:18 - a depraved people
 - d. 17:19-27 - a disobedient people
 - e. 18-19 - a dashed people
 - f. 20a - a deaf people
- 3. the messages concerning Judah's leaders: 21-24
 - a. 21:1-22:9 - Zedekiah
 - b. 22:10-12 - Shallum
 - c. 22:13-19 - Jehoiakim
 - d. 22:20-30 - Jehoiachin
 - e. 23:1-8 - Messiah
 - f. 23:9-40 - the false prophets
 - g. 24 - the captives
- 4. the prophecy of Judah's captivity: 25-29
 - a. 25 - the length of it
 - b. 26 - the confirmation of it
 - c. 27-28 - the certainty of it
 - d. 29 - their behavior in it
- 5. the promise of Israel's restoration: 30-33
 - a. 30-31 - the promise given
 - b. 32-33 - the promise guaranteed
- 6. the obstinacy of Judah's disobedience: 34-36
- 7. the record of Judah's fall: 37-45
 - a. 37-38 - Jeremiah imprisoned
 - b. 39 - Jeremiah released
 - c. 40-42 - Jeremiah among the remnant
 - d. 43-44 - Jeremiah in Egypt
 - e. 45 - Jeremiah and Baruch

III. Prophecies About Other Nations: 46-51

- 1. Egypt (46)
- 2. Philistia (47)
- 3. Moab (48)

4. Ammon (49:1-6)
5. Edom (49:7-22)
6. Damascus (49:23-27)
7. Kedar and Hazor (49:28-33)
8. Elam (49:34-39)
9. Babylon (50-51)

IV. Conclusion - Historical Appendix: 52

I. The Call of Jeremiah - Ch. 1

1. his circumstances (1-3) - mentioned above

2. his call (4-10) God spoke to him and told him directly that He was going to use him as a prophet. He said a very important thing in vs. 5: God knew him before he ever existed and before he was born and chose him for this ministry. Sobering thought: God has laid out a plan of life service for you! (Note: His election is based on His foreknowledge). Jeremiah's reaction is that he is too young and has no oratorical ability. God makes clear 3 things:

- a. he would have God's direction - God would tell him where to go and what to say; it was not a matter of invention but of obedience!
- b. he would have God's protection - God read his thoughts; he knew what his people did to prophets; God promised to rescue him
- c. he would have God's inspiration - God touches his mouth to symbolize that his words will come from God and have the authority of God Himself and declare the very fate of nations and will come true.

3. his confirmation (11-16) God now gives him 2 visions to confirm his call:

- a. the almond branch - Hebrew name for almond tree is from root "to watch," so almond is "the watcher". Named because it is the first tree in Palestine to awaken and bud in the spring. God says, "I too am a watcher, watching to see that My Word comes to pass." That is what makes the Word living and powerful and dependable: God Himself makes it happen.
- b. the boiling pot - A kettle on a fire boiling and tilting toward the south about to spill. Means God is about to bring disaster on Judah by nations from the north ie. Babylon. Note: Babylon lies east but armies always followed trade routes from Euphrates River and so swept in from the north.

4. his challenge (17-19) His ministry is to be one where he stands alone against the leaders of the whole land and they will fight against him. They did! But God repeated promise that He would be with him and rescue him. So he is to get ready and go! Rest of the book is the record of his going!

II. Prophecies About Judah - Chs. 2-45

1. the list of Judah's sins: 2-13 What we have here is a series of pronouncements of judgment upon Judah as God's people for her sins. Each one looks at a different aspect of her sin and so we learn what sin in a believer's life really is.

a. 2:1-3:5 - abandonment

(1) God's indictment of Judah (1-19) God reminds her of all He had done for her in bringing her up out of Egypt, leading her through the desert, and bringing her into the fruitful land of Canaan. In spite of this she had rebelled against Him and sought after other gods. Her sin is detailed in 13:

- forsaking a flowing spring (Jehovah)
- making for themselves a cracked cistern (idols)

(2) God's pictures of Judah: (20-30)

- a stubborn ox (20) who refuses to serve its owner
- a corrupt vine (21) that does not bring forth fruit it was carefully cultivated to bear by its Gardener.
- a lust-filled donkey (23-25) who has an innate driving obsession with foreign gods
- a disgraced thief (26-28) who is ashamed at being caught. She is ashamed because now she is in trouble and her idols aren't helping her.
- a rebellious child (29-30) who refuses the carefully administered direction of a parent

(3) the calamities coming upon Judah (31-3:5) Why the calamities come (35): unwillingness to confess sin, pretending like there is nothing wrong; that's why God judges! 3:4-5 Not that she didn't pray; she had all the right words but kept on practicing sin! 2 calamities:

- failure of alliance with Egypt (2:36-37)
- withholding of spring rains (3:3)

b. 3:6-6:30 harlotry

(1) the twin harlots (3:1-4:2) The Lord here pictures the idolatry of the people with its centers of worship on every hill and under every large tree as adultery, giving themselves to others not their Husband. When we sin we acknowledge and obey another master (Satan ultimately) and yield to him that which belongs only to the Lord. The Lord here says this is true of both the northern kingdom of Israel and of the southern Kingdom of Judah.

- Israel's divorce (3:6-8a) God broke His relationship with the northern Kingdom of Israel = divorced her and handed her over to Assyria in 722.
- Judah's imitation (3:8b-10) Judah saw how faithless Israel had become and what God had done to her but did not really repent of her sin. She returned only in pretense (Josiah's revival now going on). Her sin was worse than Israel's because she had an object lesson (11).
- Israel's invitation (3:11-4:2) God invites the scattered northern Kingdom folks to return to Him as a wayward wife to her husband. Indeed He is eager to have her return and promises kingdom blessings if she does. Indeed Israel will share with Judah in the Millennium and there will be 12 tribes once again.

(2) the announcement of judgment (4:3-31) These serious sins will be punished if there is no repentance (4). A graphic description of the impending Babylonian invasion follows with Nebuchadnezzar represented as a lion (7) and the ensuing panic and destruction in the land. In Jeremiah's anguish and mourning he sees what seems like a graphic vision of the invasion and the anguish of Judah when it will happen (19-21). Note the agony sin brings when it goes all the way. It looks like pleasure but in end brings forth death. V. 10 is hard to interpret. Cp. 14:13-15. It is not God who is deceiving the people by promising peace but the false prophets who have repeatedly spoken in His Name. Also 23:16-18. God has allowed the people of Judah to fall under strong delusion by these prophets and believe the lie. Jeremiah is marvelling at how completely God has allowed them to be deceived in light of the real truth, not accusing God.

(3) the reasons for judgment (5:1-31) a catalog of the multitude of Judah's sins

- unified rebellion (1-6) not one righteous man can be found either among the common people or leaders
- unfaithfulness (7-11) in multiplied idolatry
- unbelief (12-19) of God's message and prophets
- unfearing (20-25) of God, no respect for Him or His commands
- uncaring (26-31) about others and what happens to them

(4) the certainty of judgment (6:1-30)

- it will begin with a siege of Jerusalem (1-8)
- it will be all-inclusive (9-15) all will share it alike
- it will be unavoidable (16-20) by sacrifices and incense
- it will be terrible (21-30) intense fear and suffering

c. 7-10 - idolatry This message was given at the Temple Gate probably during reign of Jehoiakim when idolatry had publicly taken over and deals with the false religion the people had fallen into.

(1) the start of idolatry (7:1-8:3) Jews thought that because the Temple of the Lord was in Jerusalem they were safe; God would never allow them to be destroyed (4,8-10). Therefore they felt secure in ignoring the Law and committing injustice and eventually in worshipping idols like the Queen of Heaven (Ashtoreth, Ishtar? v. 18) and Molech (31). Religious actions are not enough; there must be obedience (22-23).

(2) the stubbornness of idolatry (8:4-12) No one repents of wickedness (6); no one is ashamed of their sin (12). They persist in it to a degree that is simply unnatural!

(3) the sentence of idolatry (8:13-9:26) God pronounces His sentence on these idolaters which includes famine, the Babylonian invasion, and being scattered abroad. This section also includes a lament of Jeremiah (8:18-9:2) where he weeps over his people and the sentence pronounced on them. It includes the famous cry for the Balm of Gilead. Yes, there was balm in Gilead; the Physician was there but Judah would not avail herself of His healing!

(4) the stupidity of idolatry (10) Scofield heading calls it a satire. It is. God is making fun of how stupid idolatry is that a man has to cut down a tree and shape it and plate it with gold and then dress it in order to fall down and worship it as a god! Compared to worshipping the true God who has power and made and sustains the earth. Jeremiah's second lament (10:19-25) is really a prayer and has some beautiful personal notes in it eg. v. 23, 25

d. 11-12 - covenant-breaking This message seems to fit earlier in Jeremiah's ministry in the reign of Josiah in 621 BC when the copy of the Law was discovered in the Temple (2 Chron. 34:14-33). It uses that discovery to emphasize that sin is the breaking of the covenant with God.

(1) the covenant violated (11:1-11) Jeremiah is to remind the people that the terms of the covenant were obedience and that Israel broke that covenant so that God's end of the bargain is to carry out the curse of the covenant as they had agreed.

(2) the consequences explained (11:12-12:17) God is going to send destruction according to the rules laid down in the covenant:

- upon those who tried to avert it by sacrifice (11:12-17)
- upon those who tried to avert it by killing Jeremiah (11:18-12:6) A plot was formed by the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's home town to silence his message by death (21). Jeremiah was amazed at how he was being set up and prays against them that God may slaughter them. God's response is to tell Jeremiah to hang on that it will get worse yet (12:5)!
- upon the people God loved but had to give up (12:7-13)
- upon those neighboring nations too eager to execute it (12:14-17)

e. 13 - uselessness - This prophecy probably belongs to time of Jehoiachin (refers to the king and queen mother in v. 18). The nation was so committed to sin that it could no longer change (23)

(1) the cause of uselessness (1-11) Sin had rendered Judah completely useless to God. Illustrated by the object lesson of the ruined belt hidden at Perath (NIV more likely than Euphrates, close location), rotted by the weather and now unable to serve its intended purpose.

(2) the result of uselessness (12-27) The useless object is discarded; so Judah will be cast into exile in Babylon.

2. the portrait of Judah's people: 14-20 This series of 6 prophecies are dated together in a group and appear to have been given just before the first deportation to Babylon in 605. Together they paint a picture of the low spiritual and moral state to which Judah had fallen. May also form a picture of a believer given over to a life of sin.

a. 14 - a drought-ridden people - Evidently God had sent a drought of severe proportions on the land over a lengthy period.

(1) their plight (1-6) - describes how severe it is

(2) their pleading (7-12) - they appear to make a confession of sin to the Lord but God's answer is that their deeds don't match their confession and He is determined to punish them. He even tells Jeremiah not to pray for them (11).

(3) their prophecies (13-18) - False prophets have been saying the drought will end and Judah will live on in peace. God answers that destruction is sure and that priest and prophet alike will go into captivity.

(4) Jeremiah's plea (19-22) - Jeremiah prays for his people and confesses sin on their behalf. He appeals to the Name of God and to the covenant. God's reply is in ch. 15.

b. 15a - a destroyed people - God is determined to destroy Judah for her sins. It is so certain that even if Moses and Samuel interceded it would happen. There is a point of no return for God's people; a "sin unto death!"

(1) destruction of the people (1-4) God lists His methods and means

(2) destruction of Jerusalem (5-9)

(3) Jeremiah's complaint (10-18) Jeremiah begins to complain to God because of all the opposition he has suffered for proclaiming God's Word. He asks for vengeance on his persecutors and bemoans the lonely position God has put him in. There is great danger of being drug down when around others in sin, even if you try to turn them back from it!

(4) Jeremiah's rebuke (19-21) God has to correct Jeremiah and tell him to repent and stick to His words and then promises to rescue and save him once again.

c. 16:1-17:18 - a depraved people - Judah had sunk so low that she was set in her sin; it was engraved on her heart (17:1), part of her very nature. Leads to famous 17:9 statement about all of us!

(1) Jeremiah's restriction (16:1-9) Designed as object lessons to teach people what lay ahead. They had become so depraved that God would cause them to act in utterly unnatural ways.

- no marriage (2) - death will come to young and old
- no mourning (5) - they will not be buried nor mourned

- no feasting (8) - all happiness will disappear

(2) God's description (16:10-17:13) of the people and what He would do to them. V.12 is a good description and characterizes what the sinning believer is really doing!

(3) Jeremiah's lamentation (17:14-18) - He contrasts his faithfulness with his persecutors and asks God to hurry up and do what He said He would do!

d. 17:19-27 - a disobedient people - A message to be given at the Gate of the people (the eastern Gate by the Temple area?) and then at all the other gates of Jerusalem. They have been disobedient by breaking the Sabbath Law of God, carrying their loads in and out of the gates. If it is not stopped judgment will come.

e. 18-19 - a dashed people - Cluster of 3 messages using the symbolism of clay pottery:

(1) message at the potter's house (18) - Jeremiah goes down to a potter's house and watches him mold clay on a potter's wheel. Then God gives a message:

- the Potter's right to remake a vessel (1-10) God is the Potter and Judah the clay. He is going to remold her. Also here are His general principles for dealing with all nations (7-10)
- the Potter's intent to destroy Judah (11-17)
- the people's attempt to destroy Jeremiah (18-23) They plan to kill him but he prays against them.

(2) message at the Potsherd Gate (19:1-13) The community dump where garbage and broken vessels (potsherds) were thrown. Jeremiah bought a pot and broke it before the elders to show how God is going to dash Judah and Jerusalem to pieces.

(3) message in the Temple Court (19:14-15) He repeated the same message to all the people.

f. 20a - a deaf people - Pashhur, the chief officer of the Temple didn't like Jeremiah's message, refused to listen. He had Jeremiah beaten and put into the stocks overnight. Pashhur's response typified that of all the people, too deaf to hear God's truth.

(1) Jeremiah prophesies against Pashhur (1-6) He will go into exile and die there; will experience Terror on every Side!

(2) Jeremiah complains to God (7-18) Here you can see the real discouragement in Jeremiah's heart during his very difficult ministry. He felt like God had deceived him (7) because the only visible result of his constant message of "Terror on Every Side" was terror for him by people lying in wait to kill him (10)! He bewails the day of his birth and wishes he had never been born. Yet he can't stop preaching (9) because God compels him and even in the midst of it acknowledges his true faith (11). God is big enough to take our complaints!

3. the messages concerning Judah's leaders: 21-24 Series of brief prophecies linked together. Each was given at some point during the reign of each of the wicked kings of Judah. No wonder the nation was in sin when you consider the rulers they had! Then he goes on from the false kings to talk about God's true king and then about the false prophets and finally about those already in captivity. Note how God announces in advance the fate of each of the kings and each was fulfilled:

a. 21:1-22:9 - Zedekiah - would go captive to Babylon and die there. The passage has 3 announcements:

- (1) to Zedekiah (1-7): defeat and death!
- (2) to the people (8-10): desert! (to the Babylonians!)
- (3) to Zedekiah (11-22:9): deserved! because of the injustice he'd done!

b. 22:10-12 - Shallum - would not return from captivity in Egypt but die there (He had been deposed by Pharaoh Neco in 609)

c. 22:13-19 - Jehoiakim - would die and be buried like an animal (ie. dragged outside the city and left lie instead of being mourned). He died while Nebuchadnezzar was advancing against the city.

d. 22:20-30 - Jehoiachin - would go captive to Babylon and none of his physical descendants would sit on the throne (30). He surrendered after ruling 3 months and was carried to Babylon and lived out his life there. Never did have a son rule. This is important to genealogies of Christ in Mt. 1 and Lk. 3. Physically Christ came from Mary's line through Nathan. Joseph was of Solomon's line through Jehoiachin. Through him would come the right to rule but also the curse on any of Jehoiachin's descendants to not rule. The virgin birth avoided this curse.

e. 23:1-8 - Messiah - In contrast to these false kings, God will raise up a true king to reign over restored Israel (the Millennium), the Messiah, Jehovah-Tsidkenu "The Lord our Righteousness" - How unlike the unrighteousness of these men. Contrast Zedekiah "Jehovah is my righteousness" who never lived out his name!

f. 23:9-40 - the false prophets - Judah had also been aided in her downfall by many false prophets who claimed to speak God's word but were not really doing so.

(1) the sins of the false prophets (9-14) - they had a wicked lifestyle of immorality.

(2) the fate of the false prophets (15) - to suffer in the siege they had denied would happen!

(3) the warning against false prophets (16-24) - God hadn't sent them; their message was false and the people weren't to listen to it.

(4) the warning against becoming a false prophet (25-40) God had only one word and it was given through Jeremiah, "I will forsake you". They were not even to use the phrase "the oracle (or burden) of the Lord". That should give warning to some so-called modern day prophets who say "the Lord told me..."! If it isn't in the book, God didn't say it!

g. 24 - the captives - This prophecy comes early in Zedekiah's reign after Jehoiachin and 10,000 of leaders were taken to Babylon. Vision of 2 baskets of figs: 1 has good figs, the other rotten ones. Point: all the good figs had been taken to Babylon; the rotten ones were left. The good would be returned in due time (ultimately in the Millennium) but the rotten are cast out once and for all.

4. the prophecy of Judah's captivity: 25-29 This group of prophecies was given at various times but are put together because each has to do with some aspect of the captivity in Babylon. Here we may find some lessons about what happens when a believer persists in sin and God has to discipline him!

a. 25 - the length of it - to last 70 years This chapter is important because it was read by Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 9:2) and understood by him and God then added to it the prophecy of the 70 weeks which dates Messiah's coming. God's discipline has a duration; He only disciplines as long as He knows it will take to produce change!

(1) the years of warning (1-7) Jeremiah's 23 years of ministry up to this point along with others had warned the nation but they would not listen.

(2) the years of captivity (8-11) 70 years Why this number? 2 Chron. 36:21. This was how many sabbatical years the land had missed!

(3) the years of wrath (12-38) God would use Babylon as an instrument of His wrath on other nations as well but in the end would pour his wrath on her as well.

b. 26 - the confirmation of it - This message came earlier, in the reign of Jehoiakim (609-608 approximately.) It confirms the later predictions before and after.

(1) message in the Temple court (1-6) - Jeremiah was sent to the courtyard of the Temple to speak a message. Content: if you do not repent, this Temple will be as desolate as the old Tabernacle that stood at Shiloh. Consequently:

(2) priests and prophets seek Jeremiah's death (7-9) They siezed him and accused him of being a false prophet. He was speaking in the Lord's name and they could not imagine that the Lord would speak the destruction of His own house.

(3) princes deliver Jeremiah (10-24) The charges demanded a trial so he was tried at the gate before the "princes" (king's high officials). He defended himself saying that the Lord did indeed send him to prophesy and repeated his admonition to repent. Some elders rose to his defense because they remember the ministry of Micah nearly 70 years earlier in Hezekiah's time (quoting Micah 3:12) who had also predicted the leveling of the city and temple. Hezekiah had repented and the disaster passed. Another prophet of whom we know nothing (God's unsung heroes!), Uriah, had also said the same thing and Jehoiakim had him killed. But somehow Jeremiah was delivered.

c. 27-28 - the certainty of it - These chapters are later from the time of Zedekiah (margin: textual problem, internal evidence points to Zedekiah not Jehoiakim) God used an object lesson to show everyone just how certain the captivity was. Jeremiah was told to make himself a yoke to wear, the type used to hitch oxen together. Yoke is a sign of service and submission to the master. Now this sign was to be a message to various people and groups:

(1) the yoke sign to neighboring lands (1-11) Envoys from the surrounding nations had come to meet with Zedekiah, no doubt to discuss the possibility of uniting together in revolt against Babylon. God said these

nations would all have to bow under the yoke of service to Babylon or be destroyed! He had handed them over to the King of Babylon.

(2) the yoke sign to Zedekiah (12-15) He gave the same message to Zedekiah. Urged him to bow under Babylon's yoke instead of rebelling. He didn't listen!

(3) the yoke sign to the people (16-22) He urged the same thing upon all the people in general and urged them not to listen to those who said that the Temple articles taken to Babylon in Jehoiachin's time would soon be restored. As Jeremiah went about day to day with a yoke on his shoulders it was reminder of God's Word.

(4) the yoke and Hananiah (ch. 28) After some time (in Aug.-Sept. 593) a prophet named Hananiah opposed Jeremiah and made a conflicting prophecy. He took Jeremiah's yoke off and broke it and predicted that within 2 years the yoke of Babylon would be broken and the nation freed. In turn the Lord gave Jeremiah a message for Hananiah. The wooden yoke would be replaced by an iron yoke (ie. Babylon's dominion would be stronger than before) and Hananiah himself would die that very year. 2 months later he died! See who was right! God killed a man to show how certain His Word was!

d. 29 - their behavior in it - This chapter is two letters that Jeremiah sent to the Jews in Babylon who had been taken in the second deportation (597).

(1) the recipients (1-3)

(2) behavior in captivity (4-9) They were to settle in and build houses and raise families ie. the captivity would be long-term so tie yourselves to Babylon and prosper; don't sit and pine for Judah and lose opportunity!

(3) promise of return (10-14) After the 70 years of captivity there would be a general turning to God and He would bring them back to the land.

(4) denouncement of false prophets (15-30) Evidently some false prophets among the Jews in Babylon were trying to persuade them not to listen to Jeremiah's message. He prophesied against them. and then sent a second letter against Shemaiah in particular.

- Ahab and Zedekiah (20-23)

- Shemaiah (24-32)

5. the promise of Israel's restoration: 30-33 Up to this point in the book, Jeremiah has been concerned with Judah's sin and the impending judgment of the captivity which was about to fall. Now before telling the actual story of how that happened, he gives hope by inserting a collection of prophecies that detail the promise of Israel's restoration.

a. 30-31 - the promise given - Here we also get into long-term predictive prophecy. Remember the principle of foreshortening found in Old Testament prophecy (eg. Viewing a mountain range, distance appears foreshortened) Often a prophet skips from a near-view event to a far-view event in one verse without a concept of the gap in between. So now Jeremiah moves to end times. Jeremiah predicts 5 new things:

(1) a new deliverance (30:1-17) This is the "time of Jacob's trouble" (v. 7) ie. the Great Tribulation, last 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation period. The present distress and judgment of captivity was only a picture of how awful Israel will be treated during the Tribulation. She will be hated by all nations and in sore distress. But she will be delivered and they destroyed!

(2) a new nation (30:18-24) In part fulfilled by the return from captivity but ultimately in the Millennium. Cities are rebuilt, numbers multiplied, independently ruled and in relationship with God as His people just as He originally intended!

(3) a new relationship (31:1-14) Look at the Lord's everlasting love for Israel (and for us). Despite all her rebellion, He still loves her and will take her unto himself, be her Father, her Shepherd. She will be filled with joy at this.

(4) a new attitude (31:15-26) V. 15 is well-known because it is quoted by Matthew about the slaughter of the infants (2:17-18). Meaning: Ramah is 5 miles north of Jerusalem, Rachel was the mother of Joseph and therefore of Ephraim and Manasseh. So Jeremiah was probably picturing the sorrow of women in 722 as children of northern Kingdom were deported. Ramah was also the departure point for the second deportation so it could have had an immediate reference. That sorrow anticipated the sorrow of the mothers of Christ's time at the slaughter of the infants. But at any rate Israel's sorrow at the captivity will be replaced with humility and repentance and finally with joy!

(5) a new covenant (31:27-40) This is a millennial covenant to be made with Israel. It's main features include:

- internal knowledge of God (33-34)
- complete forgiveness of sins (34b)
- permanent status before God (35-36)

This is how it will be with them in that day. But Heb. 8 and 10 quote this passage and apply it to us right now in the church. Indeed Jesus said that in the giving of His blood he was creating a new covenant for the remission of sins. Apparently the church shares in the spiritual side of the blessings of the new covenant named above now. We have those things through the blood of Christ in our personal lives. We wait to see them fulfilled nationally and worldwide after Christ's return.

b. 32-33 the promise guaranteed - These chapters occur sometime in 587 while Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians. In this setting God guarantees His promise of restoration.

(1) Jeremiah's prison (32:1-5) Jeremiah had angered Zedekiah by prophesying that he would lose to Babylon and Zedekiah had ordered him confined in the palace courtyard.

(2) Jeremiah's purchase (32:6-15) His cousin Hanamel came to him to ask him to buy his field at Anathoth. He probably needed money for food in the siege. Humanly it's a silly purchase because Babylonians already occupied it and any deed would mean nothing to them! But Jeremiah bought it and had the deed properly witnessed and stored as a sign to all: Judah will be restored and own and buy and sell again one day!

(3) Jeremiah's prayer (32:26-44) Jeremiah was perplexed at what God had told him to do (perhaps lamented good money going down the drain!). He expressed it to God and God reminds him of something we shouldn't forget either (27). He says He is going to destroy the land and just as surely will restore it!

(4) the promise of restoration (33:1-13) Later another message comes. Even though the destruction will be horrible and the siege will succeed, no matter how desolate and deserted it gets, God will restore it and fill it with inhabitants!

(5) the time of restoration (33:14-18) Here again we slip into the far view and look to the Millennial restoration. The days are coming, exact time uncertain but nonetheless sure, when Christ will come, the Branch of David's line and in the days when He comes it will all be accomplished.

(6) the certainty of restoration (33:19-26) It is as sure as day and night! An answer to scoffers who might say "the Lord has forgotten His promise; it has never been fulfilled!" That millennial Kingdom will come as sure as there is a night tonight and a dawn tomorrow. If you ever get up and there is no new day then you can forget God's promises!

6. the obstinacy of Judah's disobedience: 34-36 These 3 chapters are from differing time periods but are grouped together because they point out how obstinate and unreasonable Judah was in her disobedience to God.

a. she rejected God's opportunity (ch. 34) At this time Jerusalem is actually under siege by the Babylonian army. God through Jeremiah sent:

(1) a message to Zedekiah (34:1-7) The siege would end in defeat; he would go to Babylon but nevertheless die there peacefully.

(2) a message concerning the slaves (34:8-22) Evidently one of the sinful practices that had been going on was the enslaving of fellow Jews. Remember the slave law: every seventh year Hebrew servants were to go free. The rich had kept the poor enslaved and never let them go. But then probably during the siege in a desperate attempt to win God's favor, they proclaimed release and let them go. And indeed v. 21 indicates the Babylonians had temporarily withdrawn. They made an attempt to do a right thing but it was short-lived. They couldn't live without their servants and went out and took them back. So God pronounced her "freedom" to be taken by the Babylonians. Her last opportunity and she rejected it!

b. she rejected God's authority (ch. 35) This chapter occurred earlier in Jehoiakim's time. God used a particular family clan, the Recabites to illustrate a truth.

(1) obeying an earthly father (35:1-11) Recabites were a family of nomads descended from Jonadab son of Recab who had helped Jehu eliminate Baal worship in Israel (compare 2 Kings 10:15-27). They lived in the Negev but were forced into Jerusalem by the Babylonian army. God told Jeremiah to try to get the Recabites to drink wine. They refused it and reason was that their father Jonadab had laid down a rule and manner of life for them and they had followed it for several generations!

(2) obeying a Heavenly Father (35:12-19) What an object lesson (v.14). Judah had not obeyed her Father like that! Instead she rejected the Father's authority even though He laid down rules for their own good. And so God would bring judgment on them but the Recabites would be preserved and blessed.

c. she rejected God's Word (ch. 36) This chapter is also in Jehoiakim's reign (605 or 604). It shows how the king of Judah utterly rejected God's Word.

(1) the Word recorded (36:1-18) God told Jeremiah to write down a compilation of his prophecies against Judah. Probably the initial version of book of Jeremiah. So he dictated and scribe Baruch wrote it on a scroll. Baruch read it aloud to the people on a fast day at the Temple. The palace officials were told of it and were evidently touched by its content. They told Baruch and Jeremiah to hide and took it to the king.

(2) the Word rejected (36:19-26) The king showed utter contempt for the Word of God. As it was read he cut pieces off and threw them in the fire even though his officials urged him not to! Then he ordered Jeremiah and Baruch arrested but they were hidden. What utter rebellion against God!

(3) the Word replaced (36:27-32) So God had Jeremiah write a new scroll (the book we have now) with all the words of the first and many more! See Scofield note at 36:32 for a clue to the arrangement of the book. God's word is eternal, settled in heaven!

7. the record of Judah's fall: 37-45 These chapters are chronologically arranged and tell the story of Jerusalem's final fall from the perspective of Jeremiah as a participant.

a. 37-38 Jeremiah imprisoned - The siege of Jerusalem had begun and up to this time Jeremiah was free. An army had come out of Egypt and the Babylonians had withdrawn temporarily to go and meet them in battle.

(1) he was questioned (37:1-10) Zedekiah sent a message asking him to pray, thinking the city was spared. His reply was definitely not! Babylon will be back! That answer made him very unpopular!

(2) he was imprisoned (37:11-21) Since the siege was lifted, he started to leave and go home to Anathoth temporarily to work out a land transaction there. He was stopped at the gate and accused of desertion to the Babylonians. The officials beat and imprisoned him in a dungeon. Later Zedekiah wanted to inquire of the Lord again and even though the reply hadn't changed, he had Jeremiah confined to the courtyard of the guard and fed regularly.

(3) he was condemned (38:1-6) Jeremiah used his partial freedom to preach and 4 high-ranking officials demanded that the king have him executed. The king did not stand in their way so he was thrown into a deep cistern with no water but a layer of mud and left to sink and die of starvation!

(4) he was rescued (38:7-13) One official, Ebed-Melech convinced the king to allow a rescue and pulled Jeremiah out with ropes.

(5) he was interviewed (38:14-28) He was put back into the courtyard and gave final advice to Zedekiah to surrender, which he rejected but Jeremiah was left in the courtyard.

b. 39 Jeremiah released

(1) Jerusalem conquered (1-10) After 30 months of siege the Babylonian army broke through the wall. Zedekiah tried a vain escape attempt but was captured, forced to watch his sons killed, had his eyes put out and taken to Babylon. Most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were taken there and the city was burned and walls broken down.

(2) Jeremiah released (11-18) Nebuchadnezzar had heard of Jeremiah (through letters to Babylon?) and ordered him free to go and so he remained among his people. His friend Ebed-melech was also spared.

c. 40-42 Jeremiah among the remnant - These chapters are the only real record we have of the events following the fall of Jerusalem. Gedaliah was appointed governor of the area by the Babylonians.

(1) Jeremiah chooses to stay (40:1-6) He was offered the choice of going to Babylon or staying there. He chose to stay and went to Mizpah to Gedaliah.

(2) Gedaliah ignores a warning (40:7-16) The remaining army officers who had been in the open country and not taken in the siege came to him and he reassured them of peace under Babylonian rule. Many Jews who had scattered during the invasion returned to the land in time for harvest. The officers warned him that one of their number, Ishmael, had been hired to assassinate him but he refused to believe the warning.

(3) Gedaliah assassinated (41:1-10) Sometime later it happened. Ishmael and ten men came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, killed him and his officials and Babylonian guards and took control of the city. They took captives and plunder and fled.

(4) Gedaliah avenged (41:11-18) The other army officers heard about it and set out en masse after him. He escaped to Ammon with 8 men but the captives were returned.

(5) the remnant's inquiry (42:1-6) This whole event put the remaining Jews into great fear. Nebuchadnezzar might retaliate and wipe out any remaining Jews without regard to whether they participated in this assassination or not! They asked Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord what to do. They promised to do whatever God said whether they liked it or not.

(6) God's answer (42:7-22) God said "Stay!" If they stayed God would protect and multiply them in the land. But God read their minds and knew they wanted to flee to Egypt to seek refuge from the Babylonians. He warned them against it.

d. 43-44 Jeremiah in Egypt

(1) the remnant flees (43:1-7) They did not keep their promise. They fled to Egypt anyway. They also took Jeremiah and Baruch with them.

(2) God's judgment follows (43:8-13) God's Word comes to Jeremiah. They sought to evade Babylon but Babylon will conquer Egypt and they will die anyway!

(3) the remnant warned against idolatry (44:1-14) Jeremiah warned all the Jews that had fled to Egypt previously and currently against falling into idolatry. He reminded them that idolatry had brought the destruction of Judah.

(4) the remnant rejects the warning (44:15-19) They obstinately declared that they would continue to worship the Queen of Heaven (Babylonian goddess Ishtar?) as they had done in Judah before its destruction. They blamed their misfortune on trying to worship the Lord!

(5) God rejects the remnant (44:20-30) God declares that almost all of them will die there in Egypt and never return to the land they love. None would swear by His Name again and He would show them whose word would stand, His or theirs!

e. 45 - Jeremiah and Baruch - This event happened in Jehoiakim's fourth year while Baruch was writing down Jeremiah's words in 36:4. He was evidently discouraged by the words he wrote because with the destruction of the nation also went his chances for personal blessing and increase. God warns him about being self-seeking and promises him that his life will be spared. This is enough!

III. Prophecies About Other Nations 46-51 God had a word to say about all the surrounding nations as well. His message was basically the same: they would be destroyed. So without going into great detail, look at their locations on a map and note that they were fulfilled.

1. Egypt (46) Egypt had encouraged Judah's revolt and they looked to her for deliverance.

a. to be defeated (1-12) In the battle of Carchemish of 605 where she did lose to Babylon.

b. to be invaded (13-26) Nebuchadnezzar would invade Egypt which he did between 571 and 567.

c. Israel to be preserved in her destruction (27-28)

2. Philistia (47) - to be destroyed - Ancient and ongoing enemy of Israel. It was destroyed by Pharaoh in 609 as he marched north to meet the Babylonians.

The following were all conquered by Babylon in the process of its expansion. Many were ancient enemies of Israel but found selves all in the same boat against Babylon.

3. Moab (48) - to be destroyed -

4. Ammon (49:1-6) - to be destroyed

5. Edom (49:7-22) - to be destroyed

6. Damascus (49:23-27) - to be destroyed

7. Kedar and Hazor (49:28-33) - to be destroyed

8. Elam (49:34-39) - to be destroyed

Finally:

9. Babylon (50-51) - to be destroyed - God's great instrument against the nations and against Judah will itself be destroyed. It was taken by the Medo-Persian alliance. Its fall is recorded in Dan. 5.

IV. Conclusion - Historical Appendix - 52 This chapter is nearly identical to 2 Kings 24:18-25:30 and is parallel to the material in Jeremiah 39. It was written after Jehoiachin's release from prison in Babylon (561) and may have been added to Jeremiah's scroll by the writer of Kings later to show how Jeremiah's prophecies had been fulfilled. It shows the details of who and what was taken to Babylon when, and serves as a reminder to us that God's Word stands true!

EZEKIEL: BIBLE SCHOOL COURSE

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL

I. THE MINISTRY OF EZEKIEL - Ezekiel like Jeremiah was also a priest. His father's name was Buzi (1:3). His name means "God will strengthen". He was among those who were carried as captives to Babylon with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC. He was probably 25 at the time he arrived in Babylon and began his prophetic ministry 5 years later in 593 BC. So while Jeremiah was prophesying to the people remaining in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was prophesying to those taken captive in Babylon. He prophesied both before the final fall of Jerusalem and after it. In fact, it became a turning point in the nature of the messages God gave him (33:21). The rest of the book is messages of restoration. Jeremiah's ministry lasted at least 22 years. The last dated prophecy in the book is 29:17 in 571 BC. While the pre-exilic prophets and even Jeremiah have ministries directed toward either Israel or Judah, Ezekiel is a spokesman to the "whole house of Israel" because the two nation division is now basically over. He evidently lived among a group of exiles in Tel-Aviv near the Kebar river in Babylon (3:15), also known as the Grand Canal which circled the city on the East. Ezekiel was married but his wife died the day the siege of Jerusalem began (588). Daniel was serving the Lord in Babylon at the same time in the king's court among the wise men. He is mentioned by Ezekiel in 14:14 and equated with Noah and Job so he already has a known reputation. Two things to remember about Ezekiel's ministry:

1. he is consumed by the glory of God - Jeremiah was consumed by love for the people of God; Ezekiel is consumed by passion for God Himself. It is mentioned on 12 occasions, eg. 11:22-23. He is also concerned with the Name of God and 15 times mentions that God had acted to keep His Name from being profaned, eg. 20:9. More than 60 times he mentions that God had acted so people would know that "He is the LORD," eg. 6:7.
2. he is concerned with the worship of God - As you read, you can tell that Ezekiel is a priest. Thus the long section dealing with the Millennial Temple and its worship and regulations.

II. THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL - Like Jeremiah, it is a series of prophecies rather than a narrative story. Three important things to notice:

1. it is chronological in arrangement - Ezekiel has a precise chronological arrangement with only 2 exceptions and dates his prophecies quite extensively. See chart below (dates from Bible Knowledge Commentary).

DATING OF EZEKIEL'S PROPHECIES

1:1	July 31, 593 BC
8:1	Sept. 7, 592 BC
20:1	Aug. 14, 591 BC
24:1	Jan. 15, 588 BC
29:1	Jan. 5, 587 BC **
29:17	Apr. 26, 571 BC
30:20	Apr. 29, 587 BC
31:1	June 21, 587 BC
32:1	Mar. 3, 585 BC
32:17	Mar. 17, 585 BC **
33:21	Jan. 9, 585 BC
40:1	(Apr. 28) 573 BC

** Ezekiel kept all his prophecies against Egypt together and basically in order beginning in 29:1 before going back in 33:21 to report the fall of Jerusalem. 29:17 was put where it is because, even though given later, it explains who will do the plundering predicted in the first 16 verses.

2. it is balanced in content - It focuses equally on judgment and on restoration. 24 chapters focus on judgment on Israel. But 33-48 focus on restoration.
3. it is varied in format - There are a variety of literary devices in it such as proverbs, visions, parables, symbolic acts, and allegories.

III. THE CONTRASTS BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND EZEKIEL

Jeremiah:	Ezekiel:
in Judah	in Babylon
before captivity	during captivity
logically arranged	chronologically arranged
message of judgment	balanced message
the wickedness of God's people	the glory of God

IV. THE OUTLINE OF EZEKIEL

I. The Prophet's Call	chs. 1-3
II. Prophecies Against Judah	chs. 4-24
III. Prophecies Against Other Nations	chs. 25-32
IV. Prophecies of Future Restoration	chs. 33-48

DETAILED OUTLINE OF EZEKIEL

- I. The Prophet's Call: 1-3
 - 1. Ezekiel's vision - 1
 - 2. Ezekiel's commission - 2
 - 3. Ezekiel's function - 3
- II. Prophecies Against Judah: 4-24
 - 1. the portrayal of judgment: 4-5
 - a. 4:1-3 the sign of the clay tablet
 - b. 4:4-8 the sign of the reclining prophet
 - c. 4:9-16 the sign of the defiled food
 - d. ch. 5 the sign of the shaven hair
 - 2. the prediction of judgment: 6-7
 - a. 6 the cause of judgment
 - b. 7 the nature of judgment
 - 3. the vision of judgment: 8-11
 - a. 8 the vision of God's temple defiled
 - b. 9 the vision of God's judgment executed
 - c. 10-11 the vision of God's glory departed
 - 4. the certainty of judgment: 12-14
 - a. 12:1-20 judgment on a besieged city
 - b. 12:21-28 judgment on a doubting people
 - c. 13 judgment on the lying prophets
 - d. 14:1-11 judgment on the idolatrous elders
 - e. 14:12-23 judgment on a wicked nation
 - 5. the parables of judgment: 15-17
 - a. 15 parable of the fruitless vine
 - b. 16 parable of the faithless wife
 - c. 17 parable of the senseless vine
 - 6. the responsibility for judgment: 18
 - 7. the lamentation of judgment: 19
 - 8. the history of judgment: 20-22
 - a. 20 Israel's past rehearsed
 - b. 21 God's sword unsheathed
 - c. 22 Israel's sins enumerated

9. the illustrations of judgment: 23-24
 - a. 23 the allegory of the two sisters
 - b. 24:1-14 the parable of the boiling pot
 - c. 24:15-27 the sign of Ezekiel's wife

III. Prophecies Against Other Nations: 25-32

1. Ammon (25:1-7)
2. Moab (25:8-11)
3. Edom (25:12-14)
4. Philistia (25:15-17)
5. Tyre (26:1-28:19)
6. Sidon (28:20-26)
7. Egypt (chs. 29-32)

IV. Prophecies of Future Restoration: 33-48

1. Israel's watchman: 33
2. Israel's restoration: 34-39
 - a. 34-35 the nation loved
 - b. 36-37 the nation recreated
 - c. 38-39 the nation delivered
3. Israel's Temple: 40-47:12
 - a. 40-42 its description
 - b. 43-44 its worship
 - c. 45:1-8 its setting
 - d. 45:9-46:24 its regulations
 - e. 47:1-12 its river
4. Israel's Land: 47:13-48:35
 - a. 47:13-20 its boundaries
 - b. 47:21-23 its inhabitants
 - c. 48 its division

I. The Prophet's Call: 1-3 It was in Ezekiel's thirtieth year, 5 years after he had been taken to Babylon (vs. 1). God first appeared to him by the Kebar River.

1. Ezekiel's vision: 1 God gives him a vision much like that of Apostle John in Revelation. Rather than just hearing, he sees an actual vision of God.
 - a. 1-3 the setting - already mentioned

b. 4-24 the cherubim - The first thing he sees is 4 living creatures in general appearance human-shaped . They are identified later (10:15) as cherubim. Cp. Rev. 4:6-8 where they appear in heaven with some slight differences. Evidently they are a special order of angel whose function is to surround God's throne (eg. the cherubim covering the mercy seat on the ark in Tabernacle and also embroidered on the curtains.) There must be many but only 4 at a time seem to be in view any time we see them. There must be slight differences between them.

(1) the living creatures (4-14) Each had 4 wings, 2 covering his body reverently and 2 outstretched touching another cherub. It seems as though they formed a square. Each had 4 faces, the front, a man, the right, a lion, the left, an ox and the back, an eagle. They moved as a unit without turning, always going straight ahead in any direction.

(2) the wheels (15-21) Below each cherub were 2 wheels intersecting each other at right angles so as to move in any direction without turning.

(3) the expanse (22-24) Not a space but a solid platform above the cherubim, sparkling like ice (compare the crystal sea of Rev. 4). It is as though the cherubim with wheels below and platform above form a mobile chariot for the throne of God.

- c. 25-28 the Lord - On the expanse is a throne and on it is a figure like a man surrounded by brilliant light and with a glowing appearance. Cp. Rev. 1:12-16. This seems to be the Lord Jesus! Ezekiel's reaction is like John's, God's glory is so overwhelming that he falls facedown.

2. Ezekiel's commission: 2 Now the Lord tells Ezekiel what he is to do. He is to go to the house of Israel and to speak to them as God's prophet. They are a rebellious nation and may not listen but he had to speak regardless!
3. Ezekiel's function: 3 God spells out the process by which He is going to use Ezekiel. Ezekiel is:
 - a. 1-3 to eat - He is given a scroll to eat that had God's words of judgment on it. So first he had to ingest God's Word, to get it from God.
 - b. 4-9 to speak - Now he has to speak what God has put in him to the house of Israel. The words are clear and understandable and Israel has no excuse for not listening.
 - c. 10-15 to go - to his fellow-countrymen in Exile to deliver the Word. Then in the vision he was returned to consciousness and sat for 7 days overwhelmed by the vision he had seen.
 - d. 16-21 to warn - 7 days later God spoke to him and explained his function as a watchman or a guard. A watchman is to be alert for impending danger and to warn the city of its approach. If he does not warn, disaster overtakes them and the guilt of it is on him. If he warns but they don't listen, it is their problem. So his responsibility was to warn Israel as a watchman. A serious thought for us!
 - e. 22-27 to prepare - Then he is called out to a broad valley or plain and there given 2 restrictions to prepare him for ministry.
 - (1) he is to confine himself inside his house - Very unusual. The people would have to come to him to get God's message! The idea was that he was not to go out and have free interaction with the people.
 - (2) his tongue will be stuck to the roof of his mouth - He will be dumb and unable to speak except (v. 27) when speaking the Word of the Lord! This sign was temporary and was lifted in 33:22 but it lasted 7 years! What an unusual way to be a prophet, to stay at home and then not to speak except on command!

II. Prophecies Against Judah: 4-24 The early years of Ezekiel's ministry are filled with the task of reminding the exiles of the sins which had resulted in their captivity and which were continuing back in the land of Judah currently and would lead to her ultimate destruction.

1. the portrayal of judgment: 4-5 God had Ezekiel do a number of strange symbolic acts to attract the attention of the people and to get his message across in a dramatic way. They were probably done at the entrance to his house or courtyard.
 - a. 4:1-3 the sign of the clay tablet - the fact of the siege - He is to draw Jerusalem on a clay tablet and then build a little model siege ramp up to it and enemy camps about it and little battering rams. He is to play out the siege of Jerusalem in miniature! Then to put an iron pan between himself and the model. This predicts the siege that will happen to Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar a few years hence and how God will refuse to listen to their cries for help!
 - b. 4:4-8 the sign of the reclining prophet - the length of the siege - Now Ezekiel himself is to be a sign. He is to lie first on his right side for 390 days and then on his left for 40. Evidently this was done for a period of time each day because later verses tell us of other things he was to do during the same period of time. During the time he was lying on his side, he was bound with ropes. The meaning of the numbers 390 and 40 are obscure except that they are said to be the number of years of the sin of Israel and Judah. At any rate this is part of the model of the siege and so it lasted over a year!
 - c. 4:9-16 the sign of the defiled food - the severity of the siege - He is to take 5 common grains and mix them and make bread out of them each day. This indicates scarcity of crops (so he must use a bit of each). He was to carefully weigh out about 8 oz. of bread and 2/3 quart of water for each day, again showing the famine in the city. He was to bake the bread over dried human dung to show how the inhabitants of the city will have to eat defiled food. Ezekiel complained to God and God allowed the substitution of animal dung (a common fuel in the near east).
 - d. ch. 5 the sign of the shaven hair - the results of the siege - Probably Ezekiel let his hair and beard grow during this time; this sign seems to be at the end of the days.
 - (1) the sign given (1-4) He is to shave his head and face with a sword and divide up the hair. 1/3 is burned in the city (BKC feels he left his house and went into town; I think this was done to the model of Jerusalem on the tablet). 1/3 is chopped with a sword around the city; 1/3 is scattered to the wind. A few hairs were tucked into Ezekiel's sash but even a few of them were taken and burned.
 - (2) the sign explained (5-17) A verbal message. Israel had sinned by idolatry and become worse even than the surrounding nations. So God will punish her with a siege so severe that fathers will eat their own children. This

sign is a prediction that when Jerusalem fell, some would die within the city by the famine, some would die in the fighting with the army, some would escape and be scattered abroad, and some would be carried captive but even some of those would die.

2. the prediction of judgment 6-7 After the signs were finished, Ezekiel delivered 2 sermons, both relating to the judgment God was going to bring on Israel.

a. 6 the cause of judgment - idolatry. It was the mountains and hills that were the centers of idolatry; shrines were set up throughout the land. Israel was supposed to worship only the Lord and that only at the Temple. 6-7 give the basics of the message. God will bring destruction through the land and all the idolatry won't stop it. Bodies will lie strewn on the mountains. Then the people will know that Jehovah is the true God! But note the measure of hope even in this prediction of judgment (8-10). Some will be spared and in their scatteredness and captivity they will recognize the gravity of their sin and turn to the Lord. His punishment was for restoration!

b. 7 the nature of judgment - Here is a verbal description of the siege of Jerusalem. God says basically 4 things about it:

(1) it is certain (1-4) V.4 It is the end; God will no longer look with pity or spare them.

(2) it will be soon (5-9) V. 7 The time is upon them.

(3) it will be severe (10-19) It will affect all commerce (12), those outside and inside the city (15), and even those who escape and hide (16), even the rich (19)!

(4) it will not be stopped (20-27) Not by the Temple (22) nor by religious seeking (26). One calamity will follow another until it is complete.

3. the vision of judgment 8-11 Now remember Ezekiel had been out of the land at this point for 7 years. He had now been predicting the destruction of Jerusalem by sign and sermon for 14 months (so was probably within 10 days of the end of the signs). So God took him back to Jerusalem in a vision and let him see exactly what was going on there and what would go on there. It is a 3-fold vision.

a. 8 the vision of God's temple defiled -

(1) the trip to the temple (1-4) Ezekiel was sitting in his house and Jewish elders were there but God transported him in the Spirit to Jerusalem. The same appearance of the Lord he had seen earlier was repeated and he saw the glory of God's presence by the Temple gate. Then he was shown the completeness of the idolatry there.

(2) an idol in the gate (5-6) Probably an Asherah pole like Manasseh had put there years before and later removed.

(3) elders in secret idolatry (7-13) The leaders of the land in an inner room each secretly worshipping their own idol, thinking God did not see. Among them is Jaazaniah whom Ezekiel recognized. He was from a godly family and his own brother had stood by Jeremiah (Jer. 26:24).

(4) women weeping for Tammuz (14-15) A Sumerian deity who was said to die and rise again each year thus producing the renewed growth in the spring. Worship was associated with fertility rites. A counterfeit of Christ!

(5) priests worshipping the sun (16-18) The only people allowed in the inner court were priests. They had turned their backs toward the Holy Place where God was and worshipped the rising sun! A gross insult to God! Place filled with idols!!

b. 9 the vision of God's judgment executed - First six angelic guards are called (1), then God's glory moves from the sanctuary to the temple entrance (in preparation for leaving in v. 3). Then the good people left in the city are marked by an angelic scribe (4), showing God would remember those who truly loved Him and finally the godless are slaughtered (7) and the courts filled with the slain. When Ezekiel cries out in anguish over his people, God tells him it has to be done; they have brought it upon themselves (10). The whole chapter shows that when the Babylonians destroy the city, it is really God at work!

c. 10-11 the vision of God's glory departed - Since the Temple was filled with idols God removed His shekinah glory cloud from it and His presence left it. The glory departed in stages:

- 9:3 repeated in 10:4 - to the threshold

- 10:18-19 - to the East Gate

- 11:22 - to the Mount of Olives - and thence gone. Though the Temple was rebuilt, the Glory never returned so when the veil was rent at Jesus' death, the Holy of Holies was empty! It will not return until the Millennium (43:1-5). During the vision there are some other noteworthy things:

(1) a second description of the cherubim (ch. 10) closely corresponding to the description in ch. 1. The angel scribe took fire from among them and (implied) cast it on the city showing that the destruction of Jerusalem came from God.

(2) a second condemnation of the leaders (11:1-13) They were predicting safety, saying they were safe like meat in a covered pot (3). God says no, the righteous men that they had slain were the meat in the pot (7). They would be driven out of the city and afflicted by foreigners (11). One man even died while Ezekiel was speaking in the vision!

(3) a promise of restoration (11:14-21) Almost a quick summary of Jeremiah's promises (20). Looks beyond restoration after captivity to the Millennial Age!

4. the certainty of judgment 12-14 There was a first series of signs and messages; now a second series of the same, indicating how certain God's judgment was to a people who really didn't believe it would happen.

a. 12:1-20 judgment on a besieged city - Ezekiel is given 2 signs to act out:

(1) the sign of the packing prophet (1-16) He is to pack up all his belongings as though he were going into exile, then to dig through the clay wall of his house. This was to show the people there that the people of Jerusalem would go into exile (11). Digging through the wall was a prediction of Zedekiah's vain attempt to escape at night but he would be caught and brought to Babylon though he would not see it (12-13). Zedekiah did try to flee and had his eyes put out!

(2) the sign of the trembling prophet (17-20) He is to tremble while eating and drinking to show the fear of the people of Jerusalem as the enemy devastates the land.

b. 12:21-28 judgment on a doubting people - Israel was doubting the prophecies that had been given to them by the prophets; they even had a proverb "every vision comes to nothing". Evidently even the exiles doubted Ezekiel's word (27) saying it was far in the future. God says it will happen now! The time is at hand!

c. 13 judgment on the lying prophets - Two groups of people were responsible for leading Israel into her false sense of security:

(1) false prophets (1-16) By prophesying lying visions in the name of the Lord, they had taken Israel, a cracking wall, and plastered it over (5). But God will unleash the fury of His storm against it and the wall will fall down level (13-14)! The false prophets themselves will be destroyed also.

(2) false prophetesses (17-23) The women had gotten into the act too by making magic charms and veils and using them to prey on the people materially for their own benefit. They will be destroyed and the people delivered from their grasp!

d. 14:1-11 judgment on the idolatrous elders - Some exiled elders came to him but God says they had set up idols in their hearts and refused to answer their inquiry except to say "repent!"

e. 14:12-23 judgment on a wicked nation - God sets forth the principle that when a whole country has become unfaithful, a faithful few would not avert His judgment, not even if those few were Noah, Daniel, and Job (14). A few righteous people will not avert the famine, the wild beasts, the sword, nor the plague. All will come on Jerusalem. The remnant may find mercy, but the nation won't. Important to note that evidently Daniel, though still a young man, was well known in Babylon for godliness to be ranked with Noah and Job!

5. the parables of judgment 15-17 Now we have another means of warning the people of the certainty of judgment, the use of parables, ie. telling a story to illustrate a point. The point of the 3 parables that Ezekiel told is simply that judgment on Israel is natural and certain!

a. 15 parable of the fruitless vine - He refers to a common plant, the grape vine. It has only one useful purpose: bearing fruit. If there is no fruit on it, what is it good for? You can't use it to make anything. It's even too twisted to make pegs. Then if it was thrown in the fire and the leaves burned off and the ends charred it would be really useless. Only one thing to do: burn it up. So Israel had not borne fruit; her ends were charred. There was only one thing left to do, let them be consumed! So God says (8) he will make the land desolate because of their unfaithfulness.

b. 16 parable of the faithless wife - Now God allegorizes his dealings with Judah (specifically) in human terms. He pictures her as a human being, a woman whom He had married. He seems to be thinking of the city of Jerusalem in particular as a symbol of the people. Parable in 4 parts:

(1) the wife chosen (1-14) - She began as an unwanted child of mixed descent cast into the open field and left to die according to the practice of infanticide of the day. But God passed by her and decreed she would live.

Having been a Canaanite city, she was made a city of Israel. Then God passed by again and saw she was old enough to marry so He clothed and adorned her for the wedding and made a covenant of marriage with her. This seems to refer to all the blessings under David and especially Solomon and how she became the envy of all the nations and was wealthy and prosperous.

(2) the wife unfaithful (15-34) You would think that after saving her life and making her such a bride that she would be loyal to Him forever. But instead she became proud of her beauty and engaged in prostitution. She took what God had provided and offered it to idols. She offered her own children in the fire and forgot how God had delivered her as an unwanted child! She increased in prostitution and gave her favors through alliances with surrounding nations. She was so unfaithful and so awful that she was worse than a prostitute. Men seek a prostitute and pay her. She sought lovers and paid them! She preferred others over her own husband, the Lord (32).

(3) the wife punished (35-58) God would have to punish her according to the Law (38-41) with the punishment of an adulteress. Her lovers would be the ones to execute the punishment. They would destroy her and tear down her shrines and burn down her houses and strip her belongings as plunder. God says that she had done just like her mother and sisters (44-45) The Canaanites had long ago forsaken God and been destroyed. Her sister was Samaria who forsook God and was destroyed. Her other sister was Sodom who did the same. But Judah was even worse than them and indeed provided some measure of justification for them (52) because she made them look good by comparison! But now she would be scorned like they were.

(4) the wife restored (59-63) Judah would be restored to her position as wife in the millennium and evidently Sodom and Samaria will be rebuilt and restored then too!

c. 17 parable of the senseless vine

(1) the parable told (1-10) A great eagle broke the top shoot off a cedar of Lebanon and planted it in a land of commerce. He took some seed and planted it and it became a vine a grew and spread its branches toward him. Then another great eagle came along and the vine turned toward him instead. The vine would be uprooted, stripped, and withered for this.

(2) the meaning explained (11-15) The first eagle is Nebuchadnezzar who had taken Jehoiachin to Babylon but had not been totally unkind to the Jews. He had installed Zedekiah as king and put him under oath to be faithful. But Zedekiah turned to Egypt for help to rebel against Babylon and violated his oath. He could not escape punishment for this!

(3) the point driven home (16-24) Pharaoh would be of no help and Zedekiah would die in Babylon. His troops would die and be scattered for his unfaithfulness. But God himself would plant a shoot, the Messiah, in Israel and they would grow and prosper. These are Millennial promises (22-24).

6. the responsibility for judgment 18 Ezekiel now preaches a direct message on the subject of responsibility for sin.

a. Israel's accusation (1-2) Ezekiel quoted a proverb that was popular among the Jews in v. 2. Point is they were accusing God of punishing them for the sins that their fathers had committed. Ezekiel had traced their history of unfaithfulness and they felt they were being punished unjustly; it was the former generations who should have been punished.

b. God's answer (3-32) God puts forth 3 hypothetical cases to prove that this generation was being justly punished:

(1) the righteous man (5-9) He does what is right and he will live, ie. be spared from judgment.

(2) the wicked son (10-13) He does wicked things and does not imitate his father. He will die and his father's righteousness will not help him.

(3) the repentant grandson (14-18) The third generation. He does righteousness like his grandfather. He will not die for his father's sins.

God's point is 18:4. We are individually responsible for sins. It is the one who sins that will be punished. He is talking about the punishment about to arrive on Jerusalem specifically. The ones who were left were basically all sinners and so would die. The righteous among them would be spared (eg. Jeremiah). NOTE: vs. 24-25 seem to refute the doctrine of eternal security but note 2 things: 1) What is in view here is not eternal salvation but temporal punishment coming upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The fact that they once worshipped the Lord would not spare them, since they had now turned to wickedness. 2) Eternal security is not an Old Testament doctrine but a New Testament one. It seems to operate there in the case, for example, of Saul and of David. But it is basically not an Old Testament teaching! God's real point was for them to repent (31-32).

7. the lamentation of judgment 19 This ch. is a lament or dirge ie. a song usually sung at a funeral in honor of the deceased! The deceased in this case is the "princes" or kings of Judah specifically. The nation is pictured as a lioness with 2 cubs. The first (3-4) was Shallum or Jehoahaz who ended up in Egypt. The second (5-9) was Jehoiachin who ended up in Babylon. Then he pictures Israel as a vine uprooted and shriveled pointing to the destruction of Jerusalem and his point is in v. 14: no more Davidic rulers. The days of Israel's kings are done! The song was sung in 592 before the actual death happened!

8. the history of judgment 20-22 A series of 3 messages given by Ezekiel in 591 BC on the occasion of a visit by some elders who came to see if there was any new word from the Lord.

a. 20 Israel's past rehearsed -

(1) her past rebellion (1-31) She was idolatrous way back in Egypt (8) which must be why they suffered so harshly. They rebelled against the Lord in the wilderness (13). The second generation who entered the land were rebellious (21) and finally in the land they were rebellious (28). Her whole history was one of rebellion.

(2) her future restoration (32-44) God will purge out the wicked as He had done before and for the sake of His Name will rule over a regathered Israel. Millennial promises (42-44).

(3) her present consumption (45-49) A brief parable about a forest fire in the south means God is about to set the fire of judgment to Judah via the Babylonians! He is going to consume her as He had always done with those who rebelled.

b. 21 God's sword unsheathed - God speaks of His coming judgment as a sword. V. 18 identifies the sword as the King of Babylon and his army.

(1) the sword drawn (1-7) V. 5 indicates Babylon had been created and irreversibly set against Judah.

(2) the sword sharpened (8-17) God sharpened it as a soldier would whet the edge of his sword before battle. God sharpened the Babylonians by their conquest of many lands; they were an effective army.

(3) the sword pointed (18-32) Now the sword is aimed directly at two targets (v. 19). When Nebuchadnezzar's army arrived, there were 3 nations in rebellion and a war council met at Riblah in the north to decide where to go; this is predicted in v. 21. God made the lot come up for Jerusalem first. But the rebelling Ammonites were to be next.

- at Jerusalem (18-27)

- at Ammon (28-32)

c. 22 Israel's sins enumerated - Here's why the sword is coming:

(1) the cause of judgment (1-16) They had shed blood and worshipped idols (3). 7-11 add to the list oppression, Sabbath-breaking, immorality, and dishonesty.

(2) the means of judgment (17-22) Parable of the furnace. Jerusalem would be the furnace and God would melt the people down like silver during the siege.

(3) the recipients of judgment (23-31) The list of those involved in sin includes princes (25), priests (26), officials (27), prophets (28), and common people (29). God says he cannot find a righteous man among them who could stand in for Him and influence the land for change and keep Him from destroying the city (30).

9. the illustrations of judgment 23-24 Ezekiel concludes the section of prophecy to Israel with 3 graphic illustrations of the judgment that God is going to send.

a. 23 the allegory of the two sisters - The Lord tells the story of His relationship with Israel and Judah in the form of a story about two unfaithful sisters he had married, Oholah, who represents Samaria and Oholibah, who represents Jerusalem. Oholah means "her tent"; Oholibah "my tent is in her". It possibly refers to Samaria's adulterous shrine and God's Temple in Jerusalem. It is the same basic idea as the allegory of ch. 16, the adulterous wife, except that there, her sin is stressed as idolatry; here it is the alliances with foreign nations that brought it about.

(1) the unfaithfulness of the sisters (1-21) In their youth they were unfaithful in Egypt and learned prostitution (3). Oholah then was unfaithful with Assyria (5) and God allowed her to be slain by them. Oholibah should have seen this and taken warning, but she too was unfaithful with Assyria (12) and then went farther with Babylon (14). Later she wanted to break with Babylon and turned to a number of others.

(2) the judgment of Oholibah (22-35) God is going to hand her over to Babylon, her former lover, who will hate her and strip her and carry her away captive. She will drink the same cup her sister did!

(3) the justice in God's judgment (36-49) God describes the details of what their idolatry has involved and how they actively sought out their relationships with these nations. He is just in punishing them and in particular in what He is about to do to Jerusalem!

b. 24:1-14 the parable of the boiling pot - This parable came on Jan. 15, 588 BC, the day the siege of Jerusalem began (2). Basically God reminds them how meat is cooked: the pot is put on the fire, the water and meat put in, and the wood lit and it cooks the meat! Jerusalem is the pot, the people the meat, and God is going to cook them thoroughly by the siege! The point is in vs. 14; the fire is lit and there is no turning back. She brought judgment on herself and it is inevitable!

c. 24:15-27 the sign of Ezekiel's wife - Here is perhaps the most heart-wrenching thing to happen to Jeremiah or to Ezekiel. God warned him in a dream (18) that his wife would die and that he was not to mourn for her. The next evening she died. But he could not express his grief; he had to keep it bottled up inside. When the people asked him why he was doing this, God's reply is that it was as a sign to them. The exiles loved Jerusalem and in particular the Temple. They had also left family there. It was all about to be taken away in one fell swoop by Babylon. And there in Babylon they would have to mourn in silence and waste away inside as he did. It is intended to make them recognize the Lord (24). Ezekiel is also told that when word of Jerusalem's fall comes, his tongue will be loosed to speak normally again (27).

III. Prophecies Against Other Nations - Chs. 25-32 After the siege of Jerusalem had begun, Ezekiel began to prophesy against the surrounding nations. God is going to destroy all of these nations and He repeats over and over as His basic reason their enmity against Judah (25:3,8,12,15). So they are to be destroyed in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant ("I will bless those who bless you; I will curse those who curse you"). It does not pay to stand against God's people! Ammon and Tyre rebelled with Judah against Babylon. Egypt's promise of aid enticed them to it. Moab and Edom sided with Babylon and Philistia was an ancient enemy.

1. Ammon (25:1-7) - to be destroyed by nomadic tribes from the east and claimed by them.

2. Moab (25:8-11) - to be destroyed along with Ammon.

3. Edom (25:12-14) - to be destroyed - It was conquered by the Nabateans during the intertestamental period and ceased to be a people.

4. Philistia (25:15-17) - to be destroyed - This was already mostly done by the Egyptians. They ceased to be a people during the intertestamental period.

5. Tyre (26:1-28:19) Tyre was a great seaport and commercial center. It was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar for 13 years until its mainland stronghold was vanquished. Alexander the Great later (332) conquered the impregnable island fortress and finally fulfilled these prophecies to the letter.

a. 26 its destruction prophesied

(1) it is to be leveled (1-6) down to the rock

(2) it is to be conquered (7-14)

(3) it is to be lamented (15-18)

(4) it is to be covered (19-21) with water

b. 27 its passing mourned - by the nations that traded

(1) the admirers she has (1-23)

(2) how they become mourners (24-36)

c. 28:1-19 its ruler rebuked

(1) its earthly ruler (1-10) Ethbaal III was rebuked for pretending to be a god though only a man. He was a picture for something God wanted to tell us about Satan and also foreshadows the end time world ruler!

(2) its spiritual ruler (11-19) Here the Lord goes beyond what could be said of a mere man. He is describing Satan, the one who was really behind Tyre and its ruler, the real king! Here we are told directly of Satan's origin (11-14), his fall (15-16) and his punishment (16b-18). This is important information especially for knowing his original state. Is. 14 details the factors in his fall.

6. Sidon (28:20-26) - fell with Tyre
 - a. 20-24 Sidon to be destroyed
 - b. 25-26 Israel to be regathered
7. Egypt (chs. 29-32) - series of 7 oracles against Egypt
 - a. 29:1-16 she will be reduced - from being a powerful nation
 - b. 29:17-21 she will be plundered - by Nebuchadnezzar
 - c. 30:1-19 she will be covered - every part of her devastated
 - d. 30:20-26 she will be defeated - by Babylon and dispersed
 - e. 31:1-18 she will be felled - like a majestic cedar cut down
 - f. 32:1-16 she will be mourned - by other nations
 - g. 32:17-32 she will be destroyed - multitudes killed by the sword

IV. Prophecies of Future Restoration chs. 33-48

1. Israel's watchman: 33 Ezekiel is again reminded of his appointment as God's watchman to the house of Israel. This is an odd chapter, not fitting with the prophecies that go before because they are all against Gentile nations. Yet it has much the same message, only addressed to the house of Israel.
 - a. 1-20 the watchman charged - This section is largely a repeated and expanded combined version of portions of ch. 3 and ch. 18 almost verbatim. Interesting to see that God here combines the subject of our responsibility to warn others with their responsibility to turn from sin. Two halves of the same truth.
 - b. 21-22 his mouth loosed - At long last on Jan. 9, 585 BC a messenger arrives with the news that Jerusalem has fallen. That morning just before his arrival Ezekiel's mouth was loosed so that he could speak at will after 7 years
 - c. 23-33 his words ignored - God gives Ezekiel a message against 2 groups:
 - (1) those remaining in the land after the invasion (23-29) They were smugly expecting to remain and possess it now that they had survived the invasion. But they still persisted in their sins so God says they would be destroyed.
 - (2) those who had been listening to Ezekiel in Babylon (30-33) They had been listening to him but not putting his words into practice. Hearers but not doers!
2. Israel's restoration: 34-39 Now Ezekiel moves to devote the rest of his book to events of the end time tribulation period and Millennium. Here He details how He is going to deal with the nation of Israel in the future.
 - a. 34-35 the nation loved - Here God shows that even though He has destroyed his nation Israel, He still loves her and will show that caring for her in the future.
 - (1) Israel pastured (34) - God pictures the leaders of the nation as shepherds caring for a flock of sheep.
 - the false shepherds removed (34:1-10) The kings that she had, had been false shepherds who harmed and plundered the flock rather than caring for it. So they were removed by God and no more would be allowed. Instead:
 - the true shepherd provided (34:11-31) God promises to regather the scattered flock and bring them back to the land (12-13). He will also judge the flock in that day to make sure that they maintain proper relationships between themselves instead of harming one another (20). He will give them a true shepherd (king) to reign over them (23-24). Some see Christ here but there is no reason to not believe that a resurrected David will reign over Israel once more during the millennium! It will be a time of peace and safety and abundant material blessing in the land.
 - (2) Edom destroyed (35) Another prophecy of the destruction of Edom. It seems out of place but it serves a two-fold purpose. The reason for her destruction is spelled out (10-11): her rejoicing over Israel's destruction and desire to profit by her demise. It stands here as a warning to those nations who will try to do the same thing during the Tribulation period, that they too will be destroyed. And it also serves to point out the final end of the old Esau vs. Jacob or Edom vs. Israel feud that had smoldered since the days of Jacob. God loved Jacob but hated Esau and so she is regathered while Edom is destroyed.

- b. 36-37 the nation recreated - Even though the nation of Israel has now existed since 1948, that return to the land and reestablishing of a country is only partial and preparatory for a greater event that God is going to do after the Rapture. He is going to recreate the nation of Israel in a way that will be all His doing. It has 3 aspects:
- (1) the return to the land (36) At present there are Jews everywhere in the world, only 3 million in Israel. There are probably more elsewhere than there. But the same trumpet that calls the church out of the world will also be Israel's feast of trumpets and call all her children to come back to the land. From all over the world God will gather the children of Israel back to their land and make them to prosper in it. The stages of this are outlined:
 - regathering (24) to the land
 - cleansing (25) from impurity
 - imparting (26-27) the Holy Spirit to believing Israelites, the new covenant which Jeremiah spoke of.
 - blessing (28) 1000 years of prosperity and abundance
 - (2) the resurrection of the nation (37:1-14) Israel was dead as a nation. They had no king, were not in their land, had no Temple and no hope. God pictures her in a vision to Ezekiel as a valley full of dry bones. God asks Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" (3) and then proceeds to show him they can!
 - the vision (1-10) As Ezekiel prophesies he sees the bones come together and then become covered with sinews and flesh. He prophesies again and the wind (Hebrew *ruach* means *spirit*) comes and they receive life and live!
 - the explanation (11-14) The bones are Israel. First God is going to regather her physically and then put His Spirit in her. So she will have both physical and spiritual rebirth. This is a statement of hope to the captives. By the power of God even this is possible!
 - (3) the reunion of the nation (37:15-28) Ezekiel is told to take 2 sticks and write Judah on one and Ephraim on the other, then to bind them together into one. Israel had been divided since the time of Rehoboam. But in the recreation of the nation there would no longer be two nations with 2 kings, but one nation with it's one king David (24).
- c. 38-39 the nation delivered - These 2 chapters describe a future massive invasion of the nation of Israel once she is regathered in the land. It is by a confederacy of nations from the north led by a nation Ezekiel calls Magog. It obviously doesn't occur during the millennium (it is not the same as Rev. 20:7-9) and nothing like it has ever occurred in Israel's history. Therefore it must occur during the Tribulation period. The Bible Knowledge Commentary feels it occurs during first 3 1/2 years or just before middle because the land is in peace and safety (11). I think it occurs about the middle of the last 3 1/2 years and is the first event in the series of campaigns known as Armageddon (Dan. 11:40-45).
- (1) the invasion described (38)
 - the invaders listed (1-6) Magog is the area north and east of the Black sea, now part of Russia. "Chief" is the Hebrew *Rosh* which may be an early form that can be traced to the modern name Russia. Also Meshech to Moscow and Tubal to Tobolsk. But whether or not the names trace out, there is no question that a nation occupying the area now held by Russia will lead the pack. Persia is modern Iran; Cush is northern Sudan and Ethiopia; Put is Libya. Meshech, Tubal, Gomer and Beth Togarmah were evidently in Asia Minor, which is now Turkey. Some have tried to identify Gomer with Germany. At any rate all or most of these modern nations are today allied with Russia!
 - the invaders' motive (7-13) Put simply: plunder. During the early part of the Tribulation period Israel will establish a reputation for material blessing, will be a prosperous country, perhaps through controlling trade between Asia and Europe.
 - the invaders' service (14-16) There is a greater purpose. God is going to use the invasion to get glory to Himself. By destroying them, God will show the nations that He is God and also will show Israel the same (39:7)!
 - the invaders destroyed (17-23) They will not be defeated by Israel or any army. God Himself will destroy them by supernatural means (21-23).
 - (2) the invaders destroyed (39)
 - the army destroyed (1-8) They will be destroyed by God on the mountains of Israel.
 - the weapons burned (9-10) The Israelites will use their shields and weapons for fuel and there are so many that it will last for 7 years, on into the Millennium!

- the carcasses buried (11-20) It will take 7 months. Israel will use a valley east of the Dead Sea in Jordan for burying and the operation will be so immense that an actual town, Hamonah, will be set up there for those in the work. They will have help in the work from the birds and wild animals who will devour many of the carcasses, leaving only bones.

- the effect on Israel (21-29) This destruction of Magog will be the final thing to really turn the hearts of Israel back to Him. And ultimately in the Millennium God will show Himself holy through them to the world (27)!

3. Israel's Temple: 40-47:12 The last 9 chapters of the book comprise a single vision given to Ezekiel in the year 573 BC, some 14 yrs after Jerusalem fell. The conditions in these chapters are clearly millennial. The Temple described here has never yet existed as described nor could it, because a river of life-giving water flows out from it to water the land. Neither has Israel ever been divided like this vision says. So if these things are ever to be, then it must be in the millennium. So, in the millennium there will once again be a great Temple built in earthly Jerusalem.

a. 40-42 its description - God took Ezekiel to Jerusalem again in a vision and allowed him to tour the temple. It is described as it is measured for him by an angel with a measuring rod. The detail in the description and measurements is amazing! Rather than trying to visualize it from the description, let's look at a drawing of it as it is described:

(1) the east gate (40:5-16) projects in from outer wall of the Temple complex and is approximately 88 by 44 ft. It is entered by steps, has 6 alcoves for the guards and ends in a portico (covered porch) leading into the outer court.

(2) the outer court (17-19) an open area (approximately 175 ft. long) between the outer wall and the Temple area. Its outer edge was paved and contained 30 rooms.

(3) the north and south gates (20-27) are identical to the east gate in the center of their respective walls.

(4) the inner court (28-47) corresponds to the outer enclosed area in the Tabernacle. It contained the Temple proper, that is, the building containing the Holy Place and Holy of Holies and also the Altar of Burnt Offering. It had 3 gates on the north, east and south, identical to those on the outer wall only turned backwards. It had a room on either side for the priests in charge of the Temple and of the altar.

(5) the Temple building (40:48-41:26) Approximately 175 x 88 ft. and sitting on a raised base. It was entered by stairs leading to an entranceway or portico and thence to the outer sanctuary or Holy Place (70 x 35 ft.) and finally to the inner sanctuary or Holy of Holies (35 ft. square). The sanctuaries were surrounded by a series of 30 store rooms and there were 3 stories of them (90 in all) which were accessed from the outside, not from within the sanctuary. The only furniture mentioned is a wooden altar (22), perhaps the altar of incense?

(6) the priests chambers (42:1-14) On either side of the inner court rooms were provided for the priests to eat their portion of the sacrifices. Ch. 46 also tells us there were kitchens for the priests and for the people to use in preparing sacrifices.

(7) the outer walls (42:15-20) Here we get the dimensions of the whole Temple complex; 875 by 875 ft. is 765,625 sq.ft., enough for more than 13 football fields!

b. 43-44 its worship - Having toured the Temple complex, God now shows Ezekiel the various aspects of its worship.

(1) with glory (43:1-12) Ezekiel sees his vision of God's glory one last time that he had seen by the Kebar river. It comes in through the East Gate and fills the inner court with glory. The point is in v. 7. God will stay! Israel will never again defile His Temple. It will not be an empty temple but a real dwelling place of God! Vs. 10-11 tell the reason that God gave such a detailed vision, so that the Israelites would be ashamed of their sins!

(2) with sacrifice (43:13-27) There will be animal sacrifices in this Temple as in the Old Testament. They will be memorial in nature and look back to the cross much as the Lord's Supper does now (it will be abolished once the church is taken out).

- the altar described (13-17) It is a huge thing over 19 ft. high and 21 feet square on top, in 3 layers like a cake. It was accessed by a set of stairs facing east.

- the offerings described (18-27) The altar will be dedicated for use by a seven day process during which bulls, goats, and rams are sacrificed. From the 8th day on, regular sacrifices will begin as they are brought by the people. It is a sign that God's fellowship with His people is resumed.

(3) its worshippers (44:1-9)

- the prince (1-3) (ie. resurrected David) will worship there. He will be the only one allowed to enter through the East Gate where God entered.

- the people (4-9) No Gentiles will be permitted in there (ie. in the inner court?) but only those of the House of Israel. This is to serve as a current lesson to the Israelites who had defiled the Temple by bringing in strangers!

(4) its priests (44:10-31)

- the Levites (10-14) were demoted partially from their original service because of their sins of idolatry. Now they will be servants to do the day to day work of the Temple.

- the priests (15-31) will now come only from the line of Zadok who remained faithful to the Lord when Israel went astray. Regulations are given about their dress and behavior. They will once again serve in behalf of the people before God much as in Old Testament times.

c. 45:1-8 its setting - It will sit in the middle of a rectangle of land approximately 8 by 3 miles given to the priests. Next to it will be another rectangle given to the Levites. On the other side will be the city of Jerusalem and its land. The prince (David) will then have the land extending an equal width to the borders of the land on either side. So it will be located on the current site of Jerusalem.

d. 45:9-46:24 its regulations - Ezekiel is now given instructions for the weekly and annual worship ceremonies. There will be worship on the Sabbath day led by the prince. There will be special feasts each month on the new moon (46:6). There will be 3 annual feasts celebrated in the land: the New Year (45:18), the Passover (45:21) and the Feast of Tabernacles (45:25). There will be daily sacrifices as well. They will also celebrate the Sabbatical year (46:17). Finally there is a description of kitchens in the Temple Complex for cooking the sacrifices.

e. 47:1-12 its river - There will be a river flowing from the Temple out into the land. It flows eastward growing deeper and deeper down into the Jordan Valley and ultimately into the Dead Sea making it fresh and full of life. Joel mentioned this river (3:18) and so did Zechariah (14:8) and he says another branch will flow west into the Mediterranean as well! The banks of the river will be lined with fruit trees, their fruit for food and their leaves for healing. John's vision contained the same thing in the New Jerusalem, compare Rev. 22:1-2. Perhaps there is a connection!

4. Israel's Land: 47:13-48:35 Now God describes for Ezekiel the land of Israel as it will be in the Millennial Age. V. 14 tells us that God promised it to Abraham and his seed and so it will be literally fulfilled. The promises of the Old Testament cannot be spiritualized away to apply to the church. God will yet keep them!

a. 47:13-20 its boundaries - It will run from north of Damascus south to the River of Egypt and between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. It will include portions that are today occupied by Lebanon and Syria.

b. 47:21-23 its inhabitants - It is to be owned by Israelites who enter the Millennium, but Gentiles may also settle among them.

c. 48 its division - The 12 tribes will all receive equal sized portions of the land running from east to west.

(1) the northern tribes (1-7) Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben and Judah will have portions to the north of Jerusalem.

(2) the sacred portion (8-20) A special portion right in the middle will contain the city of Jerusalem, the Temple Complex, and the land of the priests and levites.

(3) the prince (21-22) His land completes the central rectangle from east to west.

(4) the southern tribes (23-29) Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad will inherit equal portions south of Jerusalem.

(5) the city (30-35) A square 1 3/4 mi. on each side. It is walled with 3 gates on each wall, named after the 12 tribes. But the most blessed thing about the city is the title given it in v. 35, *Jehovah-shammah* which means *the Lord is there*. Quite a contrast to the days of Ezekiel when God had withdrawn His presence from both the Temple and the city!

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY OUTLINE

I. Daniel's Personal Experiences	chs. 1-6
1. the king's food	Ch. 1
2. the great statue	Ch. 2
3. the fiery furnace	Ch. 3
4. the fallen tree	Ch. 4
5. the handwriting on the wall	Ch. 5
6. the lions' den	Ch. 6
II. Daniel's Prophetic Visions	chs. 7-12
1. the vision of the 4 beasts	Ch. 7
2. the vision of the ram and the goat	Ch. 8
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4. the vision of Israel's future	chs. 10-12

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY Ch. 1 - The King's Food

The Book of Daniel is the key that ties together the prophetic literature of the Bible. You cannot understand Revelation, Matthew 13, 24-25, Zechariah, or Isaiah without it, because in it is revealed the clear framework on which all prophecy hangs. I must confess that over the last years I've had a distinct change in my interest in studying prophecy. I used to take great delight in understanding and correlating every detail. *Dr. Warren Wiersbe tells about the time when as a young preacher he preached a sermon on the second coming in which he tried to explain every detail. That sermon outline got put in a file and today he never looks at it unless he needs a dose of humility. Another pastor who sat through that message said to him at the time, "You sound like you're on the planning committee for the return of Christ." Wiersbe understood what he meant, but the older man reinforced his point by going on to say, "Personally, I've transferred from the program committee to the welcoming committee."* [Be Hopeful by Warren W. Wiersbe. Victor Books, 1982. Page 107.] That's kind of what happened to me. I haven't changed my theology but now I'm more interested in welcoming Jesus than I am in arguing about the details of His return! If there is one point that the book makes, it is found in 4:25b, *God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.* God is at work in history, then and now, doing exactly what He chooses, to accomplish His will, for His glory! In this Book God has written the history of the world ahead of time. He has already brought much of what was written here to pass. It is in the history books now. And the rest is just as certain and sure because God rules the nations of men and does exactly what He determines with them! The book may be outlined very simply. It divides evenly in half. The first half contains the stories of 6 key personal experiences that Daniel had or knew of. The second half contains the record of 4 prophetic visions which God gave Daniel to show him things to come. But before you think, "Oh my, we have to wait until Ch. 7 to study prophecy!", let me assure you that beginning with Ch. 2 each personal experience also has direct prophetic significance, if only as an Old Testament picture or type of things to come. So, let's begin with chapter 1 as an introduction to the book and more specifically to the man Daniel himself and try to understand the nature, caliber, and situation of the man God used as the channel to reveal to us all these glorious truths about the future. And we begin with understanding:

I. Daniel's Pressures (1-7) When we meet Daniel, he is a teenager, a young man who is facing a tremendous set of pressures. He was placed in:

1. a different home (1-3) The year is 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar, who had just been crowned King of Babylon and had just defeated the two largest powers in the world, Assyria and then Egypt, turned his attention to Jerusalem in September. Jehoiakim, the King of Judah, wisely declined to offer pitched resistance and submitted to Nebuchadnezzar and became his vassal. Nebuchadnezzar did not inflict much punishment but made it graphically clear that Judah was now a subject state. He took many of the items from Judah's temple to Babylon and put them in the house of his god, Bel or Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, as a sign that his god was superior. But he also took a number of young men from Judah to become his servants at the court in Babylon. Note in verse 3 that these were young men from the royal family and the nobility. Compare what God told Hezekiah more than a century before in **Is. 39:7**. Some of Jehoiakim's own children and other relatives were taken along with the children of the other chief leaders and no doubt army commanders, etc. And among them, verse 6 tells us, were Daniel and 3 of his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Can you imagine being ripped suddenly away from your home and family against your will and being placed in the palace of a hostile foreign country with no hope of ever going home again! Talk about feeling alone and homesick! And can you imagine the kind of attitude and treatment he received from the young Babylonians there? Throughout his personal history we see Babylonians who are jealous of him and despise him, not for anything he's done but for who he is. And on top of that he was immersed in:

2. a different culture (4-5) In one sense they were hostages, insurance, Nebuchadnezzar's ticket to insure Jehoiakim's loyalty. But he had a plan to use them as well, to use them to help rule his conquered people, perhaps one day to be in charge of Judean affairs or at least advisors on Judean affairs. But first he had to make them into Babylonians. So, they were thrown into a 3 year training program in Babylonian culture. They had to learn the difficult Akkadian language and script. They had to learn all the history of Babylon, its kings and conquests, its writings and its customs, dress, and behavior, its beliefs and values, its foods and drinks, all of which were entirely different from their own. They were being trained to fit into a foreign culture and be absorbed by it so as to be indistinguishable from it, to forget the ways of Judah and learn the ways of Babylon. And of course, that meant being pressured to accept a:

3. a different religion (6-7) Daniel and his three friends all had names that contained the name of the God of Judah. Their names were immediately changed. Daniel (God is my judge) became Belteshazzar (Bel protect his life). Hananiah (Jehovah is gracious) became Shadrach (command of Aku or Marduk). Mishael (who is what God is?) became Meshach (who is what Aku or Marduk is?). And Azariah (Jehovah helps) became Abednego (servant of Nego or Nebo, Bel's son, the fire god). Do you get the picture? Now these young men probably came from godly families, as is evidenced by their behavior later, but here by their very names. The Babylonians wanted to erase every trace of that and pressure them to worship the idols of Babylon. You talk about young people having pressures today! What encouragement it is to us that they can stand like Daniel did! It takes pressure to refine and purify and bring out the best! And it did in Daniel.

God's Purpose: Let's check these same events from God's perspective. What's He doing? He's preparing and sending a cross-cultural missionary! God takes Daniel to the foreign land, gives him a crash course immersion in Babylonian culture and religion so that he is prepared to be a witness, and then in chapter 2 exalts him to a position of respect next to the King through his faith! Yes, Daniel is suffering under all these losses and pressures but through them, God is preparing him to impact the greatest people on earth in that day for Himself as you'll see throughout the book! The question is will he capitulate and be consumed by the culture or will he learn to integrate with that culture and bear witness of God to it?

II. Daniel's Problem (8-10) From the first day in Babylon Daniel and his friends had a very immediate problem. They had been assigned their meals to be given them from the king's own table. Now the first problem was:

1. the defiling food As godly Jews, they followed the dietary laws of Leviticus. The Babylonians ate meats that were forbidden to them, like pork. But beyond that there is little doubt that all the meat on the king's table had first been offered as a sacrifice to the king's gods! Ex. 34:15 clearly forbids a Jew to eat meat that has been sacrificed to an idol or false god. The wine was similar (compare 5:4). At table the wine would be lifted up in praise to Marduk as well. Daniel and his three friends could not break the law of God and become unclean by participating with idols like this. The only thing, the only One, they had left was God. They could not turn from Him. But the second half of the problem was:

2. the demanding king He valued these youths. Ashpenaz, the chief official in charge, could not see how anything could be better for them than the food from the king's own table and feared for his own life if he let them deteriorate in any way. The king himself would have a little trouble understanding that they refused the best in all the land! To stand up and refuse to eat this would be seen as rebellion and would endanger their lives! And sometimes we have a "demanding king" over us, whether it be an employer or a parent or even a bully on the playground, who tries to force us to do wrong. So if they went one way they had trouble with God, if the other, with man. Who would you rather offend?

III. Daniel's Resolve (8,11-14) Daniel made a choice and the other three stood with him. He chose God over man. He chose that, come what may, he would obey God. Now this choice is called resolve in the NIV. Let's look at:

1. its source: the heart (8) The NIV doesn't translate literally. The Hebrew says, "Daniel laid upon his heart that he would not defile himself..." Daniel was not playing the odds. He was not seeing what would be the best deal and what would help him survive. He loved God with his heart, with the very core of his being. And deep in there he knew what he had to do. He had to refuse to disobey Him no matter what. That's tremendous. We all need that. I challenge all of us, young and old to have that. But notice:

2. its manner: the request (8) He didn't get up on a soap box and say, "You heathens are a bunch of pagans and I'm never going to eat your filthy idol-tainted food!" Sometimes we think that's what standing up for God is, being obnoxious! Daniel quietly and humbly asked Ashpenaz for permission not to eat it and explained why, how it would defile his own conscience! Ashpenaz liked him but was too scared to grant the request. But Daniel didn't give up. He asked the guard (KJV Melzar) who was immediately in charge of him and proposed a concrete idea of how to do it. Maybe there's a lesson in here! We make some of our own trouble, don't we! A humble, informative, suggestive attitude will go

a lot further in maintaining relationships while refusing pressure! Not in all cases, to be sure, but often. But ultimately it is a matter of:

3. its faith: the test (11-14) God revealed to their minds a way to prove to Ashpenaz that he would not be in danger, a 10 day test with the only thing nobody bothered to offer as sacrifices, vegetables and water. And they had to be willing to put it all on the line and trust God. I wonder what they would have done if the test failed? Still refused, no doubt! But notice in 9a that it doesn't all depend on Daniel. God was at work too, changing Ashpenaz' heart! If you represent Him well, count on Him to be at work for you too and to make a way. In fact, 1 Cor. 10:13 is good to note right about here. God ALWAYS makes a way to escape temptation, a way so that you don't have to sin. Count on it! When you go to God with all your pressure, God will make a way to get you through it somehow, even if it's through a fire (Ch. 3) or a lion's den (Ch. 6)!

IV. Daniel's Reward (15-21) First of all he got:

1. his problem solved (15-16) God did a little pink-up job on them and they looked so good from their vegetarian diet that they got to stay on it. God did make the way for them. So Daniel's immediate problem was solved, although it would recur in different forms later.

2. his ability increased (17-21) Not only did God gift all these boys and especially Daniel with academics but also with wisdom and practical sense. He increased their abilities to be used. But most importantly, God put Daniel in a crucial position where he would serve in the palace and have access to the king. This is key to what happens in the rest of the book. You see, God wants to reveal what He is doing in history, not just to Daniel and his friends, or even to Israel. Babylon was His instrument of judgment on Judah. But she's cocky; she attributes her victories to her own strength and her false gods. God needs a means to declare His glory to her, to point out to her, before she falls, Whose hand really did it and Daniel is that means.

3. his testimony noticed Now Daniel lived on through the reigns of a number of kings for the next 70 years. However, his testimony was noticed. There was another young man, a priest, who was also taken captive to Babylon about 8 years later than Daniel. He didn't live in or have access to the palace, but lived out among the common people, those Jews living in captivity. His name was Ezekiel. And listen to what God says to him about 15 years later in **Ez. 14:14, 28:3**. God puts Daniel's righteousness on a plane with Noah and Job and describes him as being the epitome of wisdom! You see, by that time Daniel's righteousness and wisdom had become a household word, one that Ezekiel could speak to the Jews and they would already recognize it as being so. His testimony was noticed by all! So will yours be and it won't take long!

Now this is the man to whom God revealed the history of the world in prophecy, a righteous man, a wise man, a man whose heart was set on Him. If you want God to reveal Himself to you, to have the deepness of knowing His will and mining the real treasures out of His Word, then that's where your heart has to be set also.

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 2 The Great Statue

Daniel 2 is perhaps the most important chapter in the Bible for understanding prophecy. John Walvoord writes, *"Nowhere else in Scripture, except in Dan. 7, is a more comprehensive picture given of world history as it stretched from the time of Daniel 600 years before Christ to the consummation at the second advent of Christ."* Put simply, if you know Daniel 2, you know the plan of world history until the coming of Christ. Now this is a long chapter and is worth at least two or three studies but we won't do that. If we had the time, we would spend one session just studying:

I. The Personal Situation (1-30) The story of Daniel versus the wise men of Babylon. Since we don't have that luxury, I'm going to simply outline the situation and leave the specific details for you to study on your own. Basically, King Nebuchadnezzar had a very disturbing dream and took it very seriously. He wanted to know what it meant but didn't quite trust the wise men who were his advisors, so he put them to the test, *"Tell me the dream and then I'll know that your interpretation is correct too!"* This bummed them out. They couldn't do it. So, the king decreed that all the wise men should be put to death. When Daniel, whose head was also on the line, heard about it, he asked the king for time to interpret the dream. Then he and his three friends went home and prayed like crazy and God showed him the dream and he went in and told it to the king. Now what I want to do is draw out the three major points that this section makes:

1. wise men fail: no man knows the future (1-12) Compare **vs. 10-11**. They are exactly right. No man knows the future. I don't care whether you look into the stars, into crystal balls, or into chicken guts, you won't find the future in there. We live in a world that wants to know what comes next and they are flocking to all kinds of sources to find it. But it isn't there.

2. Daniel succeeds: by appealing to God (13-19) Daniel's plan was very simple: PRAY! Prov. 3:32 says *The Lord takes the upright into His confidence*. Ps. 25:14, *The Lord confides in those who fear Him*. Perhaps Daniel knew those promises, but we have a similar one in James 1:5! If you want to know what God is doing, you have only to ask. He may not tell you what's going to happen to you personally tomorrow, but if you want to understand His plan for the world, ask Him to make the Scriptures clear to you. Daniel's method still works. My point is, realize the importance of prayer in understanding prophecy!

3. the lesson: God alone knows the future (20-30) Read 26-27. God is in control of the destiny of the world. It is fixed, sure, and certain and only He can reveal it. That is what we have in this book. God, who alone knows where the world is going, is telling King Nebuchadnezzar, and through him us, what will happen throughout history. So, without further ado let's move to:

II. The Prophetic Explanation (31-45) First, let's try to visualize:

1. the dream (31-35) It is actually very simple. In his dream Nebuchadnezzar sees an enormous dazzling statue of a man. I can just visualize this dream like it was on TV with the camera zoomed in on the golden head and panning slowly down the statue through the chest of silver and the abdomen of bronze to the black legs of iron and toes. Then it zooms out and behind the statue is a cliff and all of a sudden there is a quaking and a huge chunk of rock lifts itself out of the cliff and flies through the air toward the statue. The rock lands on its feet crushing them instantly and the whole statue crumbles downward into a pile of dust which the wind blows away and when it's gone, all that's left is the stone which begins to grow and grow as the camera zooms further out until it goes beyond the horizons in all directions. Now let me point out three things:

a. the human statue: the plan of human history The fact that it is a statue of a man is significant. This statue is God's symbol for all of human history from that moment in 600 BC until its very end. Besides giving specifics about nations which we'll look at in a moment, God is making a comment about the quality of it:

b. the decreasing value Notice how the four metals decrease in value from gold to silver to bronze to iron and finally to clay pottery. Man's view is that his history is soaring to new heights. God's is that it is degenerating to the dust! The sin of man is compounding and his history will end in a period of wickedness like the world has never known! But at the same time notice:

c. the increasing strength Each successive metal grows stronger. This fourth empire will be the strongest the world has ever known. More later. But now let's look concretely at:

2. the four world empires (36-43) Each metal, we are told, represents a successive kingdom or empire in history.

a. the head of gold: Babylon (36-38) With Babylon's rise God began a new epoch in world history, the times of the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24). Up until 605 BC history had centered around Israel but with her removal into captivity. From that moment Jerusalem and all Palestine were under the control of Gentile world powers. It was so in Jesus' day. The beginning of this chain was Babylon. Her era of world dominance lasted from 605-539 BC. Then we come to:

b. the chest of silver: Medo-Persia (39a) We know, both from history and from direct mention in 5:31 and 8:20, that the empire to conquer and succeed Babylon was Medo-Persia, the Persian Empire. It lasted all the way down to about 330 BC. But remember now, from Daniel's perspective this and all the rest are predictions of the future. God said a second kingdom would follow Babylon and then a third would come:

c. the belly of bronze: Greece (39b) Again we know this refers to Greece, both from history and from direct mention in 8:21. Remember, Greece, the empire, didn't even exist yet. It was a distant peninsula. But God said it would become an empire that would rule the whole world and it did! Alexander the Great swept through the remains of the Persian empire and took it for his own and from about 330 BC to 100 BC it was basically a Greek-dominated world! And then would come:

d. the legs of iron: Rome (40-43) Roman dominance of the world lasted 1000 years! It was the strongest empire the world had or has ever known. It cruelly crushed those that had preceded it! And in the form we know of it from history, it was never conquered; it just slowly crumbled away into individual nations again.

Now this would be a good place to describe what I call:

THE PROPHETIC GAP that is found in Daniel and the other Old Testament prophets. Simply put, they just do not see the church age at all. They do not know about it. There is good reason. Compare **Eph. 3:4-6**. That God was going to create a new body called the church and call out from the Gentiles a people for his name was a mystery. It was simply not known, not revealed to previous generations. So, Daniel and his fellow prophets saw the future as you might look at a mountain range from a great distance; there is an unseen gap between the first and second ridge but from your view it looks like one mountain. They speak about what are future events to them that we know were fulfilled 2000 years ago, but in the

next phrase describe events that lie in our future and the end of the age. That's what this vision does. Somewhere about the ankles or heels, this statue skips from ancient Rome to the time of the return of Christ when the kingdom of God is set up to rule the whole world. That's why this fourth world empire is spoken of in two forms actually. It had one form when it conquered the world from Greece. But it will have an entirely different form in its final state. Yet notice it is the same empire, which brings me to another point:

THERE WILL BE ONLY FOUR WORLD EMPIRES before God's kingdom is set up. The fourth was Rome and if God is true, then that Empire must be put back together. That which has crumbled into the dust of nations must be assembled back together out of the same dust. It must exist again so that God can smash it and set up His kingdom! And friends, you don't have to read the newspaper long to see that the nations of the old empire are assembling themselves before your very eyes. There is going to be a United States of Europe one day; there is already a Commonwealth. They have a common currency and one day will have a common capital. It is no secret. They want it! Of course, right now it is more for economic purposes. But one day they will form a fully united empire, a revived Roman empire and their thoughts will turn again to world conquest. Now in its final form that empire will have:

(1) its form: 10 toes It will be a unity of 10 nations. It will amaze you at how often this picture reappears but let's compare **7:23-24**. See, this final kingdom has two forms. From the original comes a form of 10 kingdoms united as one, here depicted as horns. Compare **Rev. 17:12-13**. Again, at the time of the return of Christ an empire composed of 10 nations united as one. So, the final empire to exercise world dominion will have a 10 in 1 form. But:

(2) its nature: a mixture The toes are partly clay, hard pottery clay which is brittle, building weakness into the toes of the image and does not amalgamate with the iron. So, this final kingdom will have great strength but also a built-in weakness and that weakness will be a lack of true unity. It will be united by force and power but not by nature. More about that in chapter 7.

3. the final empire (44-45) *These kings* means the 10 nation kingdom. In the days of that final empire, a crushing stone will fly and that will mean:

a. the end of earthly kingdoms Christ is the Rock and He will come, Scripture says, to crush the nations with a rod of iron. He will come to destroy all the armies and the empires of earth in one sudden fell swoop. All earth's empires will come crumbling down to dust in one day and when the dust has cleared you will see:

b. the eternal establishment of God's kingdom God will set up His own kingdom and rule forever. World empires will be no more. And you don't have to worry about it yielding to another or crumbling away. It will last forever. And you can bank on it, be certain of it. What a dream; what an interpretation! So simple, yet reaching to the end of history. If it happened to you, it would really shake you up, but Nebuchadnezzar knew it had to be true because Daniel told him the dream itself first! So it produced:

III. The Powerful Reaction (46-49) First of all:

1. on Nebuchadnezzar He fell down and worshipped Daniel's God. He acknowledged Him in many ways but was not yet converted or brought to believe in Him. He's not giving up his gods, only adding another to the list and acknowledging Him as being real. But it had a profound effect:

2. on Daniel He is appointed governor over the province of Babylon (this area out of the whole empire). His three friends are also made overseers with him. This sets the stage for a number of things that happen in future chapters. He is now in position to be used by God with the king, but he is also in position to be hated by his peers for his favored position.

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 3 The Fiery Furnace

Chapter 3 is obviously connected to chapter 2 and must have followed immediately on its heels. It is the story of the fiery furnace and it is so very familiar to us. We know the both the story and its lessons almost by heart. Yet there is an entire second level of meaning here that we must explore, a prophetic picture of the end times. So, we're going to start with a review of:

I. The Story And Its Lessons I want to divide this story into 6 major parts that make 6 major points. We'll see later that each will correspond to a specific event in the future.

1. Nebuchadnezzar erects his statue (1-7) Do you see what Nebuchadnezzar is doing? He's acting out his chapter 2 vision! He was the head of gold. But instead of staying awed by the meaning of the dream, he let it go to his head. He erected a statue of a man, just like the one in his dream, only ALL of gold! It was no doubt a statue of himself and, seeing himself at the top of the statue and being told he had been given authority over the whole world, he took that a step further and demanded that all his subjects worship his statue and therefore him! The penalty for not doing so was

being cast into a furnace, which was evidently Nebuchadnezzar's favorite method of execution (Jer. 29:21-22). Now this reminds us of:

- **the PRESSURE we experience** In many places on earth there is still this same exact pressure today. Islamic governments mandate Islam. Atheistic governments, until recently, outlawed religion, period. The pressure you and I face, however, is usually much less direct than that. It may come in the form of an employer or a school demanding of us that which is wrong. It may come from peers pressuring us into wrong lifestyles.

2. the Jews commanded to worship (8-15) These three young Jews were on the King's staff. It was inevitable that they would be personally confronted with this demand sooner or later. They must demonstrate loyalty to the king. Notice the charge is two fold. First, they did not worship his gods. They were not idolaters, but Jews who worshipped only their own God and that was what kept them from worshipping the king and his statue. Well, this points out:

- **the PROBLEM we have** If we belong to Christ and give first allegiance to Him, we are many times caught in a dilemma. You see, nobody else had any problem with falling down to the image but the believers! When pressure is applied to us, we often stand out because we are the only ones to whom it matters! How do we answer this dilemma of being loyal to God, yet displaying honesty and caring to a world that demands loyalty of us?

3. the Jews refuse to worship (16-18) They wouldn't do it and they were clear about it. They made no excuse. They declared their loyalty to God as being greater than to the king. They mention three truths that hit home:

(1) God is able. Really, they are answering the threat of verse 15, "What god is able?" "OUR GOD IS ABLE". There is no article before *furnace*; He can deliver us from ANY furnace!

(2) He will deliver. This is faith. Note they did not say "from the furnace" but "out of your hand". Whether they died in the furnace or not, God would deliver them out of the king's power!

(3) We'll never worship. The NIV says, "even if He does not," which is incorrect. The Hebrew and the KJV say "But if not..." That is, if we are not cast in, we will still never worship your gods. You can't bribe us with our lives to worship idols! What an example of:

- **the PRIORITY we must exercise - Acts 4:19,5:29** When it comes right down to it, we must make that same choice to obey God rather than men and we must take the same stand that we will never compromise our allegiance, no matter what it may cost us, trusting exactly what they did, that our God is able and He will deliver us one way or the other.

4. the Jews cast into the furnace (19-23) Boy, old Nebuchadnezzar got hot and when he did, so did his furnace! Evidently it was much like a limekiln with an opening above for materials and one below for fuel. It was so hot it killed the men who threw them in and down they fell, right in the middle. This is a picture of:

- **the PERSECUTION we'll face - 1 Pet. 4:12-14,19** Persecution is not a strange out of the ordinary thing. It is normal. All who will live godly in Christ Jesus SHALL suffer persecution. Choosing God may cost us our job, our friends, our position. In some places it may cost us our life. But no matter what the cost, we must still continue to do what is right!

5. the Jews preserved by God (24-25) They didn't burn! Can you imagine it? The ropes burned off them but neither they nor their clothing was affected in the least. And there was a fourth man in there with them! Nebuchadnezzar says literally, "a son of the gods". In verse 28 he uses the word *angel* which means *messenger*. Personally, though I can't prove it externally, I believe this was Jesus in the fire with them. You find Him appearing in so many other places that this being simply an angel would be almost anti-climactic. Notice that they didn't want to get out. They stayed in there enjoying the presence of the fourth man. Now that reminds us of:

- **the PRESERVATION we'll know - Ps. 91:14-15** God promises to be with us IN trouble. **Is. 43:1-2** says the same. **Mt. 28:20** says the same. He does not guarantee to remove us FROM the persecution but to preserve us in it, even if that preservation is an early trip to glory! But most times, it means that by His strength He carries us through the fire.

6. the Jews promoted (26-30) It not only amazed Nebuchadnezzar, but brought glory to God and took him one step further along the line to a personal faith. When He saw that they laid their bodies on the line for God and that God answered, he was impressed. And in the end the fiery trial led to a promotion for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego where they were entrusted with a greater position in the kingdom. Now here's:

- **the PROMOTION we'll receive - 1 Pet. 5:10** We have no guarantee of an exalted ending in this life, though in the end we win. However, just like them, you will come out of the fire better for it, stronger, closer to the Lord. It is in the fire that God does in our character what He can do in no other way. But now let's shift gears and go back and look at:

II. The Prophetic Picture This is what happened in Babylon, the first great world empire. But when God later wants to talk about the fourth and final world empire, look at what He calls it in **Rev. 17:3-6, 12-13**. He calls it MYSTERY (which is not part of the name but simply John's way of saying "I am now talking in secret code, not using the real name") and the code name is BABYLON. While the real name of this fourth Empire will not be Babylon, Babylon is a fitting symbol for it. So you see, the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar and his cronies is singled out as a type or picture, a shadow of what the final world empire will be like. And that is especially true in Daniel 3. All 6 points in it foreshadow things that will occur in the revived Roman empire of the end times.

1. the world leader erects his statue - Rev. 13:11-18 The world leader, the ruler of that final empire known here as the beast (or anti-christ), will also erect his own statue (an improved version: it talks and appears alive). And he will demand that the world worship it and therefore him. The penalty is either death or starvation. Without worship you don't get the mark and without the mark you can't buy or sell, so you don't eat. Look at the PRESSURE he will apply!

2. the Jews commanded to worship - Mt. 24:15 The place he will choose to set up his statue is in the Temple in Jerusalem. **2 Thess. 2:4** says he will actually sit in the Temple of God and proclaim Himself God. Why there? Because, like Nebuchadnezzar of old, he is going to make a particular demand that the JEWS worship him. **Dan. 9:27** tells us that he will have had a covenant with them for 3 1/2 years. They have been free to worship and sacrifice but now he will break it and demand THEIR worship of himself. It will be an inescapable PROBLEM for them! What will they do?

3. the Jews refuse and flee - Mt. 24:16 Some will cave in and worship but many will not. They will refuse and flee to the wilderness. This act will reveal the antichrist for who he really is and will be the thing that will turn many of them to believe in Jesus. They will maintain their true PRIORITY. But as a consequence:

4. the Jews are persecuted - Rev. 12:13-17 The woman is Israel, the dragon, Satan, the child, Christ. For the final 3 1/2 years of the tribulation period Satan will pursue, hate, and PERSECUTE the Jews. If God did not intervene, they would be wiped off the face of the earth but:

5. the Jews are preserved by God - Rev. 7:3-4 Many of them will die, but at least 144,000 will be sealed by God for His protection. They will survive the fire of the furnace of persecution which is heated 7 times hotter than normal. Christ will be right there in the furnace with them and bring them out the other side PRESERVED untouched so that in chapter 14 they stand with Him on Mt. Zion at His return! And in the end:

6. the Jews inherit the kingdom - Mt. 25:34, 40 In this vision the goats are the lost gentiles, the sheep are the saved Gentiles and the brethren are the Jews. The kingdom has been prepared for the brethren and those who side with them. They go alive into the Millennial Kingdom of Christ and are PROMOTED. Zechariah tells us that Jerusalem will be the capital of the world and the whole world will be under its rule.

Isn't it incredible that the first Gentile world ruler who lived 600 years BC acted out in his life an exact picture of events that the last Gentile world ruler will do thousands of years later?

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 4 The Fallen Tree

This whole chapter is an incredible thing. It is the story of a work God did in the life of the King of Babylon, a heathen idol-worshipping king. And in that regard we can be greatly encouraged. We often pray for leaders of nations, world leader types, but I wonder whether we really believe that God can do anything with them. This chapter shows us He can!

I. The Decree of Nebuchadnezzar (1-3) Wow! Is this the same Nebuchadnezzar we've been reading about? This whole chapter is a decree that he sent out to all the subjects of his empire. It is actually a testimony of faith. Up until now (3:29) God had been the God of Daniel or the God of Shadrach, etc. Now He is the MOST HIGH GOD, the Sovereign One who rules over all the kingdoms of men. This man is changed; he's different! And it all happened through a most remarkable experience. It began with:

II. The Dream of Nebuchadnezzar (4-27) Even after all he had seen of God, it had not shaken him. He was still contented and prosperous, saw no reason to think his gods were inadequate or that anything should change in his life. But then he had a dream that shook him to his roots:

1. the dream uncomprehended (4-7) He was afraid; it terrified him. The dream ended with a decree in verse 17. He knew it was a message from God. He knew heaven was speaking to him. But he couldn't comprehend it. So he called the best of his advisers and they couldn't either. The natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. They can only be known through the Spirit. And so, he needed a man who had the Spirit and sent for Daniel and we have:

2. the dream revealed (8-18) It had four major items. First there was the great tree which fed and sheltered the whole land, majestic, its top reaching to heaven. Then he sees this angel come down out of the sky and say "Cut down the tree" and the great tree is cut down. This, I'm sure was what scared him. He was not stupid. This was enough like his last dream to be recognizable. The tree was enough like the head of gold on the great statue to be recognizable. He senses that this dream has to do with his own downfall or destruction somehow! Then he sees a band put around the stump and it remaining in the ground and then the dream just kind of ends without a conclusion except that there is a strange change in verses 15 and 16 from "it" to "him". He knows the him is himself but there is something incredible about being changed into an animal in there and all of this is just terrifying. Then through Daniel we have:

3. the dream interpreted (19-27) Daniel spells it out very clearly:

a. the tree is Nebuchadnezzar (19-22) "You are the tree!" I think he'd kind of guessed that, don't you?

b. the cutting is his deposing (23-25) "You are going to be deposed from your throne. You are going to go out of your mind and become like an animal. You are going to lose everything you have, even your senses. This is going to last 7 years and won't end until you acknowledge the true God and His sovereignty over you."

c. the stump is assurance of preservation (26) "Just as a stump can live and sprout branches again, so you will not lose your kingdom and it will be restored to you at the end of all this." And then based on all this Daniel gives:

d. the warning (27) "Nebuchadnezzar, God is telling you that you're proud. You need to humble yourself. Perhaps if you do, all this can be avoided." Look how God warned this heathen king. Do you know God is in the business of warning sinners? He takes no delight in punishing them. He warns them over and over again, sometimes by extraordinary means that they need to turn to Him. But Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't listen! And so, we come to:

III. The Deposing of Nebuchadnezzar (28-36) Now this section is the real meat of the chapter and I'd like to look at it on two levels. First there is the direct application we can make:

1. the personal lessons First you can see:

a. the patience of God (28-29) God waited a whole year before doing this to him. He had a whole year to contemplate and examine himself and repent. Our God is the God of the second chance and the third and the fourth. That is, until the moment you die. That is the cutoff. Beyond that there is no more mercy. 2 Pet. 3:9 says God is patient because He doesn't want anyone to perish! He wants all to have the utmost opportunity to come to repentance! Aren't you glad!

b. the pride of man (30) Can you imagine anybody walking around and saying that? (*from The Most High God, a commentary on the book of Daniel, by Dr. Renald E. Showers:*) "From a purely human viewpoint, Nebuchadnezzar had good reason to boast. He probably was the greatest builder in ancient times. Forty-nine building inscriptions of this king have been uncovered thus far. Most of the bricks recovered from ancient Babylon bear this inscription: 'I am Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.' He himself declared that his heart impelled him to build. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt the old palace of his father, then built two more palaces. He built seventeen religious temples in Babylon and its suburb, Borsippa. He completed the two great walls that surrounded the city. The outer wall was wide enough for chariots to pass each other on its top. The king installed great fortifications to protect the city and had canals dug from one end of the city to another to facilitate commerce. One of Nebuchadnezzar's most splendid projects was the magnificent Ishtar Gate. This was a double gateway through the walls of the city. The walls of this gate were covered with bulls and four-legged dragons in high relief. The approach to the gate was between strong fortress walls on which were rows of lions in relief and covered with brightly colored tiles. The king's greatest building feat was the Hanging Gardens. One of Nebuchadnezzar's wives, the princess of Media, grew homesick for the mountains of her homeland. In order to satisfy her, the king had mountains built on the roof of the royal palace complex. These mountains were planted with trees and other kinds of plants. An ingenious hydraulic machine system was devised to lift water from the Euphrates River to water the elevated gardens. These Hanging Gardens became so famous that the Greeks named them one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The fact that Nebuchadnezzar was very proud of Babylon is indicated by one of his prayers to Marduk: 'Like dear life I love thy exalted lodging place: in no place have I made a town more glorious than thy city of Babylon.' Well, men do exalt themselves, you know! It's not too uncommon for a person to credit themselves with everything in their lives! In fact, that's the nature of man, the normal attitude of the flesh. That's where Adam got off track and that's the root of all that we inherited from him, the pride of life. Well, God can't just let you get by with that. It is a challenge to His being. He has to do something to show you the truth and so He did with Nebuchadnezzar. And in it we see:

c. the sovereignty of God (31-33) This is incredible. Nebuchadnezzar was struck with a mental illness which caused him to believe he was an ox and eat grass. Now that sounds impossible. But, it's true because God says it's true. Yet it is not totally without correlation to what has actually been observed: (*From Daniel, The Key to Prophetic Revelation, a commentary by John F. Walvoord, p. 109*): Raymond Harrison recites a personal experience with a modern case similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar, which he observed in a British mental institution in 1946. Harrison

writes, A great many doctors spend an entire, busy professional career without once encountering an instance of the kind of monomania described in the book of Daniel. The present writer, therefore, considers himself particularly fortunate to have actually observed a clinical case of boanthropy in a British mental institution in 1946. The patient was in his early 20's, who reportedly had been hospitalized for about five years. His symptoms were well-developed on admission, and diagnosis was immediate and conclusive. He was of average height and weight with good physique and was in excellent bodily health. His mental symptoms included pronounced anti-social tendencies, and because of this he spent the entire day from dawn to dusk outdoors, in the grounds of the institution.... His daily routine consisted of wandering around the magnificent lawns with which the otherwise dingy hospital situation was graced, and it was his custom to pluck up and eat handfuls of the grass as he went along. On observation he was seen to discriminate carefully between grass and weeds, and on inquiry from the attendant the writer was told the diet of this patient consisted exclusively of grass from hospital lawns. He never ate institutional food with the other inmates, and his only drink was water.... The writer was able to examine him cursorily, and the only physical abnormality noted consisted of a lengthening of the hair and a coarse, thickened condition of the finger-nails. Without institutional care, the patient would have manifested precisely the same physical conditions as those mentioned in Daniel 4:33.... From the foregoing it seems evident that the author of the fourth chapter of Daniel was describing accurately an attestable, if rather rare, mental affliction." It's a wonder to me why God didn't simply destroy him like he did Herod in Acts 12 when he became so proud. But God can do whatever He wills whenever He wills it. And it's even more extraordinary that he was restored from it and his kingdom was maintained by his regents for him! But again, God was in control.

d. the surrender of man (34-36) How simple it was. He simply raised his eyes toward heaven. Just like the Israelites looking at the serpent on the pole or us looking to the cross. Surrender is such a simple act, acknowledging God's sovereignty and our utter impotence. And when he surrendered, Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his throne in full sanity! Now Nebuchadnezzar himself, as we saw in chapter 3, is a prophetic foreshadowing of the man who will be the leader of the final great world empire, the man we call the beast or the antiChrist.

2. the prophetic picture - 2 Thess. 2 Here he is called the man of lawlessness. And what happened to Nebuchadnezzar of old is a picture of prophetic events in two ways. First, Nebuchadnezzar's pride is a picture of:

a. the pride of the future world leader (3-4) He is going to be the proudest man on earth. He is going to proclaim himself to be God and he's going to do it right in God's temple. He's going to literally shake his fist in the face of God Almighty and say, "I defy you to do anything about it!" Like Nebuchadnezzar he's going to look at his world empire and credit himself with building it and all of his wealth and military might he will credit to himself. And God cannot let that stand. He cannot let it go unchallenged. So, Nebuchadnezzar's abasement through the dream and being deposed is a picture of:

b. the abasement of the future world leader (8) Jesus is literally going to blow him away. He'll remove him simply by the words out of His mouth and the brightness of His glory. He won't even have to lift a finger to destroy him and everything he stands for. That's how insignificant he is. With all of his army and his kingdom he will be cast into the lake of fire forever. And you know what? Philippians says that one day every knee shall bow to Jesus, things in heaven, on earth and even UNDER THE EARTH. One day this world leader will kneel in hell and confess that Jesus is Lord. But unlike Nebuchadnezzar, his chance will be past. Two men bow the knee: one on earth, one in hell. You know, you can have it either way. Bow now or bow later but you will bow, no matter how proud you are.

IV. The Difference in Nebuchadnezzar (37) What a new and different man from the one who walked around on the rooftop glorifying himself! He learned the lesson: those who walk in pride, He is able to humble. Now he knew Who was in charge. I can't prove it, but I have a sneaking suspicion you might just meet old Nebuchadnezzar in heaven someday!

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 5 The Handwriting On The Wall

When we leave chapter 4, we are somewhere before 562 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's death. In chapter 5 we arrive in the year 538 BC. The throne has changed hands four times, mostly through intrigue within the family. The empire has deteriorated in every way. Nabonidus is the king but he resides at Tema in Arabia and has set up his oldest son Belshazzar as co-regent with him in Babylon. This chapter is the story of his last night on earth. It is also the story of the last night of the kingdom of Babylon. And in this story, we find a picture of the last moments of the last kingdom on earth, the last Babylon, as well. Let's first look at:

I. The Situation (1-12) Read 1-4. Belshazzar is having a drinking party and a rather extravagant one at that. The king, 1000 of his nobles and all his wives and concubines are celebrating. The palace hall is full of people and food and laughter. But we see here:

1. Babylon's wickedness (1-4) in several ways. First, we see her:

a. moral bankruptcy History proves that as nations deteriorate, they become more and more involved with the seeking of pleasure. Morality is abandoned. Gluttony, drunkenness, and orgies form the order of the day for those in power. Hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure, that was the order of the day for Belshazzar. It was also the order for Rome as it came to its final days. It will also be the order for that Mystery Babylon, that final 10 nation western empire. Compare Rev. 18:3-7. Note in verses 3 and 7 the words *excessive luxury*. This final empire will follow the same pattern only worse. Along with it will come:

b. contempt for God They got out the vessels that had been taken from the temple of God at Jerusalem and praised their own idols with them. He honored his god with the vessels of a "conquered god"; he spit on the God of Israel. Of course, this will be even more true in that final empire, won't it? Compare 2 Thes. 2:4. This world leader, this antichrist will exalt himself over all gods, will sit in God's temple in Jerusalem and proclaim himself to be God. What a picture we have here. And it is all done in:

c. false security What the text does not tell you is that at this very moment the city of Babylon was under siege. The invading army of the Medes and Persians was camped around the city. The province of Babylon had already fallen and Belshazzar's own father Nabonidus had already been taken captive. But Babylon was considered to be an impregnable city. According to Herodotus it had walls 350 ft. high by 87 ft. thick. Great double bronze gates sealed the city and the Euphrates river itself ran under the wall to form an inexhaustible water supply. They had supplies laid up for 20 years! Hence this banquet was an expression of proud contempt for their enemies. They were basking in their supposed security thumbing their noses at the world. 1 Thes. 5:3 tells us that will be the attitude also at the time of the end. They will say "Peace and safety". They will rest in the false security of their earthly power. But like Belshazzar, sudden destruction shall come upon them. But not without:

2. Babylon's warning (5-12) READ 5-6. What an amazing thing. See the king choke on his wine and gasp as a man's hand appears without an arm over by the light. Listen to the banquet hall fall silent as every eye turns to see it. See every eye follow the hand as it stretches out one finger and etches letters in the plaster on the wall. Three words and then it disappears. Belshazzar is so scared his knees are shaking. See:

a. the quandary of Belshazzar (7-8) He offers to pay someone to read it and interpret it. He offers the post of third highest ruler, that is, after himself. He calls all the wise men and nobody knows what it means. He knows it is the hand of God, but try as he might he can't understand the writing. However, his mother has heard all the commotion and sets them on:

b. the quest for Daniel (9-12) I have no idea what Daniel has been doing these last 20 years. Probably being retired. He would have been 80 by this time anyway. But the queen mother (who was actually Nebuchadnezzar's daughter) remembered how 30 years earlier he had interpreted her father Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 4. And she said to call for Daniel. So they did. Notice he wasn't at the party. He was home praying where he belonged! So that's the situation. When Daniel arrived, they got:

II. The Sermon (13-24) He's an old man now and he addresses this young contemptible king with very little respect compared to the way he always spoke to Nebuchadnezzar. He gives him a sermon and it only has two points but they go straight for the jugular:

1. Belshazzar knew about Nebuchadnezzar (18-21) He retells the story of chapter 4 briefly, but verse 22 adds an important thought. Belshazzar KNEW ALL THIS. He knew how Nebuchadnezzar had become a follower of the Most High God. He knew the miracle of the man turned into beast. But:

2. Belshazzar refused to listen (22-24) What an indictment! Daniel is another Nathan saying "Thou art the man!" Belshazzar knew but was hardened. He deliberately lifted himself up against God. Like Pharaoh! Well, God takes on all comers of this type! He cannot let puny man get by with this! Let me show you some interesting facts about that last kingdom as well. Compare Rev. 13:6, 9:20. Look at this leader. He KNOWS about GOD. He KNOWS about HEAVEN. And he KNOWS about THOSE WHO DWELL IN HEAVEN. Now who would that be? In my book it's all those who turned up missing at the Rapture, the disappeared CHURCH! This man is not a spiritual ignorant, but a deliberate rebel! And the subjects of his kingdom, the rest of men, are just like him. No matter what plague God sends they curse Him and refuse to repent. The hand was Babylon's warning. Those end-time plagues will be theirs. But they will have no effect. And the writing on the wall is:

III. The Sentence (25-31) of God passed upon Babylon.

1. the sentence explained (25-28) There are four words, written in Aramaic, all past participles. The wise men, no doubt, could read them and understand the literal meaning. But they couldn't understand what they signified. Daniel told them God's meaning.

a. MENE means the kingdom is numbered, a limit has been set like in the phrase "your days are numbered". God has put a limit on the Kingdom of Babylon and time has run out. It is interesting to note that that final kingdom has also been numbered. Compare Dan. 9:26-27; 12:11. Seven years is it. From the time that the antichrist sits in

the Temple and blasphemes God he will have 1260 days and not one day more. God has fixed a limit. The kingdoms of this world think they're going to last forever. Not so; there is a limit set by Almighty God. This word was repeated twice for emphasis.

b. TEKEL means the kingdom is weighed as in a set of balances. God has a great set of spiritual balances. On one side are his standards for the existence of a nation. On the other are its deeds. When the balance tips too far, God sets the number of its days. That is true of every nation according to Jer. 18:6-10, even the good old USA. Babylon no longer deserved to exist. 70 years before, He used her as an instrument to do his will in chastising Judah; now He had to cast her into the dust.

c. UPHARSIN means the kingdom is divided/Persians The word PERES which Daniel says in verse 28 is the singular form of the word PARSIN in 25. The prefix *U* means *and*. It means to divide. But the word Persian in Aramaic also has the same root. There is a play on words here. When God says PARSIN He's saying divided and Persians in the same breath. The kingdom is to be divided up and given to the Persians who at that very moment were swarming all around the city. God is going to give the Kingdom to someone else to rule. This will also be true of that final kingdom. Compare Dan. 7:18, 25-28. The saints will possess the kingdom. All his glory and majesty will be cast in the dust. And the humble saints of God will rule the world in that Millennial day when Jesus Christ returns. What a sentence! It's a death sentence. And it is not long before we see:

2. the sentence executed (29-30) That very night, perhaps while the party was still going on, or perhaps after they had all crawled into bed in a drunken stupor. The ancient historian Herodotus tells us the story of:

a. the sudden judgment of Babylon The Persian general stationed his army at the place where the Euphrates passed through the wall of the city, with another set of troops where it left. He then diverted the flow of the river into a marsh so that they could ford it. The troops went under the walls and the Babylonians were so confident that they had left the gates to the river inside the walls open. And they were so busy partying that nobody noticed until it was too late. Their very strength, the river, proved to be their weakness, and their celebration became their own funeral. God had set this forth long before. Compare Jer. 51:56-58. And so God's Word came to pass. His sentence was executed and that immediately. And this is a picture of:

b. the sudden judgment of the end -1 Thes. 5:1-3 At the return of Christ it's going to be the same way. The world is going to be sitting in their false security, thinking themselves invincible. And then in that moment when they least expect, as suddenly as a thief in the night appearing out of nowhere, there will be Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, and destruction will come upon them. You see, the handwriting is already on the wall for this old world and for that final world empire. As for Daniel, he survived and became an administrator in the new kingdom. What a picture of those Jews who survive the Tribulation and live to reign in the Millennium!

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 6 The Lions' Den

At chapter 6 we move into the second great world empire. Persia now rules. Cyrus is the emperor. Darius is under him, ruling the kingdom of Babylon (compare the marginal reading of verse 28). Daniel is an old man, at least in his 80's but he becomes part of the new government. Yet before long he ends up in a den of lions. This, like chapter 3, is a very familiar story and contains some basic lessons we need to apply to our lives. But if you will back off and look at the story on another level, you'll find that it is a prophetic picture of what is going to happen to the Jews in the end-time tribulation kingdom, just like chapter 3 was, only more detailed. I've divided the picture into eight pieces for easy assembly and digestion so we'll begin with:

I. Daniel's Position (1-3) Daniel was placed as one of three administrators helping the King rule. Under them were 120 lower officials and a whole chain of accountability to oversee the king's business. Daniel so excelled in his responsibilities that the King wanted to make him second in command.

1. application: the need for integrity (4) Notice Daniel's exceptional qualities; he was neither corrupt nor negligent. He did his job honestly and industriously, with real integrity. That, of course, is a great example to us and a challenge, isn't it? It's a picture of the kind of integrity we ought to have in what we do.

2. picture: Antichrist's covenant - Dan. 9:27 The fact that Daniel the Jew was given a preferred position is a prophetic picture. At the beginning of the 7 year tribulation period the leader of the western world is going to make an agreement or a covenant with the Jewish people. That agreement will allow for the establishment of the Temple of God and its regular worship with daily sacrifices once again. He is going to appear favorable toward them and no doubt at that time they will see him as a friend. But he will be unlike Darius who really did like Daniel.

II. The Enemies' Plot (4-9) The other officials were very jealous of Daniel and wanted him, not only removed from office, but killed so as not to be a further threat to them. The only thing they could find to trap him with was his religion. So, they devised a plan to make it illegal to worship anybody but the king for 30 days and got it signed into law.

1. application: the expectation of attack Logically it would seem strange that someone who is doing a good job and is fair and honest would be hated by others. But they are. You can expect to be attacked for doing right, for being honest at work, for refusing to cheat. You can expect people to be jealous of you for succeeding by doing a good job. You see, we point out their own flaws and it is natural for them to hate that. So don't be surprised at it if it comes.

2. picture: Antichrist's command - Rev. 13:14-15 In the end time it will be the leader himself, the antichrist who will plot against the Jews. Unlike Darius who felt bound by his own law, this man will break his own law. He will break his covenant with the Jews. He will defile the Temple and will set up his own statue there and demand the very thing that Darius' decree did, that all men worship him! Under pain of death! It is this event, I believe, that will cause the Jews to see who he really is and to understand who Jesus really was and turn to him.

III. Daniel's Principle (10) Daniel knew about the law but he would not stop praying. He prayed just like he always did.

1. application: the willingness to sacrifice Daniel knew loyalty to his God could cost him his life. But he was willing to sacrifice that. He was willing to risk a den of lions. God was more important to him than life. I wonder if He is to us. Jesus said something about losing our lives for His sake and finding them. It's likely that we'll never get put to this test exactly, but I wonder whether we're willing to sacrifice our job if need be, our friends, or whatever it may cost. Daniel is our example in that.

2. picture: the Remnant's refusal to worship Some Jews will capitulate to the Antichrist's command. But many, even most will not. Those who truly want to know God will refuse to worship. They will instead flee for their lives into the hills and leave everything behind. That is what Jesus spoke of in Mt. 24 when He spoke of this very time and event and said "Flee to the hills; don't stop to go back into the house to get anything..." They will refuse and be willing to die rather than give in.

IV. Daniel's Prosecution (11-15) They drag Daniel from his prayer chamber and take him before the king. All of a sudden, the king realizes what's going on and how he has been duped into killing Daniel. He is distressed and doesn't want to do it, but is bound by his own law. He made every effort to save him, except one as I see it. He could have done what was right and refused to do it, even if it meant his kingdom or his life. But when it came to that step, unlike Daniel, he compromised and gave in!

1. application: the opportunity for compromise is always there with us. It is to resist but not to resist unto blood, to stand but to bend in the clinch. Darius and Daniel are two different men. Darius is a "good" man, doing the best that man can do. Daniel is a GODLY man, secure in His God. That's the difference.

2. picture: Antichrist's mark - Rev. 13:15-17 Those Jews will have opportunity to compromise also in the Tribulation. They can take the mark of the beast. That mark will be necessary to transact any commerce or business; without it a person can't procure food and will die. Some will do it. But many won't. Many will be like Daniel, not Darius.

V. Daniel's Penalty (16-17) He is cast into a den of lions. Nebuchadnezzar liked to fry his enemies in a furnace. Darius liked to watch them torn to shreds and eaten by lions. Nice guys. But the den is sealed with the king's seal so no one but God can help him. It is secure. There is no more human hope for him, no changing things.

1. application: the loss of human hope There will be times when all human help is out of the picture, when no one can help and deliver you but God. But with God nothing is ever totally hopeless, is it?

2. picture: Satan's wrath - Rev. 12:13-17 The red dragon here is Satan and the woman is Israel. In symbolic terms this is saying that when the Remnant of Israel refuse to worship and flee to the desert, that the Antichrist will vent all his fury upon them and attempt to slay them all. He will send his army after them. Left to themselves they would all be swept away. But God will supernaturally help them and prevent it.

VI. Daniel's Deliverance (18-23) They pulled him up without a mark because he had trusted in his God. God delivered him just as he did Shadrach and friends. He sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths.

1. application: God's promise - 2 Tim. 4:16-18 Lions are symbolic of persecutors. In fact, Satan himself is described as a roaring lion looking to devour. Nero was Paul's lion. At his first trial Paul was indeed let go. The second time some years later he was beheaded. But the promise still stands. He will deliver us from the lion. He will rescue us one way or the other, through life or through death. But either way He will bring us safely to His heavenly Kingdom.

2. picture: the Remnant's protection - Rev. 14:1 God's job of protecting that tribulation remnant of Israel is a good one. At the end of it when Jesus lands on the Mount of Olives, they are all safe to stand there with Him. They are protected. Just as God shut the lions' mouths so He will supernaturally help this remnant of the Jews who believe and bring them out of the lion's den.

VII. The Princes' Demise (24) Now God has His turn. He has Darius throw Daniel's enemies to the lions! And they make a great snack. It also verifies that there was nothing wrong with the lions! This was a genuine miracle.

1. application: the principle of ultimate justice *Vengeance is mine; I WILL repay*, says the Lord! There is justice. It may be slow in coming. It may be preceded by reams of injustice. But in the end, you pay, don't you! Even if you get away with it until you die. But you can't get away with it past that!

2. picture: Antichrist's destruction - Rev. 19:19-21 Even the antichrist can't escape it. This satanically empowered superman is cast into the lake of fire to burn forever and ever. He who would have destroyed them is himself destroyed eternally.

VIII. Darius' Decree (25-28) Darius passed another decree after that first one and sent it throughout the land. In it he extolled the God of Daniel and made all men respect and honor Him. He gives glory to Him and admits that He reigns and rules and nothing can touch him.

1. application: God's ultimate purpose - Rom. 8:28 God had purpose even in allowing Daniel in the den of lions. It resulted in His glory. And God has purpose in the persecutions and oppositions He allows in our lives. It all works together for good.

2. picture: God is glorified - Rev. 19:1-6 Read what they shout in heaven on the day of Christ's return. Just as the miracle of delivering Daniel and destroying his adversaries brought God glory, so the destruction of the antichrist and his empire will bring glory to God. Sound familiar? The Lord God Almighty reigns; He's in control. The whole of human history points to that one final conclusion, that at His feet every knee will bow and acknowledge Him as sovereign.

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 7 The Vision Of The Four Beasts

At chapter 7 we turn the corner in this book and move from Daniel's personal history to Daniel's prophetic visions. He had four of them and they came at different times in his life but he wrote them down in succession. This first vision would actually fall between chapters 4-5 as it came in the first year of Belshazzar which was 553 BC, when Daniel was in his late 60's. This vision is an exact parallel to the vision Nebuchadnezzar had in chapter 2, only with four animals instead of four metals. Plus, it expands on that vision with a number of details about the fourth world empire. So first let's look at:

I. The General Vision (1-18)

1. the four kingdoms (1-3, 15-18) The Great Sea in the Old Testament is the Mediterranean and to the ancients, it represented the known world. Daniel is told that four great kingdoms, four world empires, would arise. Just like the winds stir up the waves, God will stir up the nations of earth and produce out of it these four empires. By the way, note that this chapter contains God's viewpoint. To man in chapter 2, these nations are precious metals, wonderful things. To God they are dangerous beasts which must be destroyed!

a. the lion: BABYLON (4) This is no ordinary lion. It had wings. Daniel was sitting in Babylon. Guess what the royal symbol of Babylon was: a winged lion! Nobody would miss this. Further this lion has an experience. He loses his wings and stands on his feet like a man and is given the heart of a man. Doesn't that sound familiar? Like chapter 4? It was Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom of Babylon in view, the head of gold in chapter 2. Following that came:

b. the bear: MEDO-PERSIA (5) It was a hungry, voracious beast and odd-looking because it had one shoulder higher than the other. The second world empire was a combined empire, the Medes and Persians, and Persia came to be the dominant half of the alliance. It was having a snack of three ribs, probably representing three kingdoms it had conquered, Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt. This parallels the chest of silver in Dan. 2.

c. the leopard: GREECE (6) It is a very unusual leopard, a flying leopard, suggesting great speed and a four headed leopard. This was Alexander the Great and his Greek army which swept across the known world in 10 years. After his death in 323 BC it was divided into four parts, exactly as predicted. This is the bronze abdomen of Dan. 2. Last came:

d. the terrible beast: ROME (7-8) It wasn't even a recognizable animal, different from all the other animals, probably a composite of all of them. Its chief characteristic was iron teeth and 10 horns on its head. This was Rome, the strongest empire the world had ever known. In its final form it will be composed of 10 nations. It has another horn that comes up and we'll save that for a moment. This is the new information in this vision. But note how closely this corresponds to the legs and feet of iron and the 10 toes of the statue in Ch. 2! Now look what happens:

2. the fate of the kingdoms (9-12) In chapter 2 a stone smashed the feet of the statue. Here's a greater picture. God sits in judgment of the world. He decrees the slaying of this last and final beast. This is the kingdom that will be on earth when Christ returns. It will be destroyed by His coming. Notice the other beasts. Their dominion was removed but

their lives were prolonged. They no longer ruled, but they continued to exist as part of the kingdom which swallowed them up. So, in its destruction, they were destroyed, just as the stone smashing the feet destroyed the whole statue. All the kingdoms of man are destroyed and cast into the lake of fire when Christ returns. And then comes:

3. the final kingdom (13-14) We don't have any trouble figuring out who this Son of Man is, do we? Jesus said, "Unto ME is given all authority in heaven and earth!" The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ! And He will reign over all along with His saints. This is the Millennium! But now we come to the more interesting part. We already knew all that from chapter 2 and so did Daniel. But he was troubled by that whole business with the horns. So, he is given by the angel an explanation which I call:

II. The Expanded Vision (19-28) Notice that verses 19-22 contain a restatement and an expansion of the vision. Daniel tells in more detail what he saw this horn do. It's almost as though in some kind of animated cartoon it popped off the head of the beast and took on a life of its own and acted like a human being. Then in verses 23-27 we have the explanation that the angel gave to Daniel of what it meant. So, what I would like to do here is to parallel the two things piece by piece, comparing what Daniel saw and what it meant:

1. the 4th beast (19) is the 4th kingdom (23) that is, Rome, both past and future.

2. its devouring is conquering, not the beasts that preceded it, but the whole earth. That was Rome's practice and reputation. It had the greatest extent and power of all.

3. the 10 horns (20) are 10 kings (24) From this beast comes 10 horns. Now we have crossed from the past to the yet future. The first form of this kingdom was united. The final form of this kingdom will be a 10 nation composite, a unity formed of 10 kingdoms covering the area occupied by the original Roman Empire. It doesn't take much to figure out that we're looking at the preparations for that with all that's happening in Europe and the proposed formation of a United States of Europe.

4. the little horn is the antichrist This horn has eyes and a mouth. It is like a man. It IS a man. It is the leader of that final kingdom which will try to rule the world. For a short title, we call him antichrist. Once the empire has taken its 10 nation form, he will arrive on the scene and gain control of its power.

5. 3 horns falling means he subdues 3 kings In order to gain control of this kingdom he will have to subdue 3 of the 10 nations or leaders. He welds these 10 nations into a solid empire under his control.

6. the little horn speaking is him blaspheming God (25) He is boastful. But his boasting is blasphemy. He will speak against God. In fact, he will claim to BE God and demand worship. He will do this at the mid-point of the tribulation period.

7. the horn warring (21) is persecuting the saints The saints are believing Israel who refuse to worship him, no doubt along with many Gentiles who are also converted. He will change the times and the laws and make his own.

8. the horn prevailing is 3 1/2 years He was winning, defeating them, prevailing over them. He will have that tyrannical control and exercise his persecution for 3 1/2 times, which means years, the final half of the Tribulation period. This is God's specific limit. And then:

9. judgment comes (22) by the return of Christ (26) He and all his kingdom will be destroyed, cast into the lake of fire forever, when Jesus returns in victory. We read this in Rev. 19 last time. And finally:

10. the saints rule is the millennium (27) Particularly this has in view the converted Jews and Gentiles who survive the Tribulation and go on alive into the Millennium to repopulate the world. Jesus will be the King and the saints will rule with Him. Now before we quit, I want you to go to the Book of Revelation and see:

III. The Parallel Vision This is not a unique vision nor a private interpretation. God gave almost the identical vision to John, but in even more detail which helps us.

1. the missing piece - Rev. 17:3, 7-8 Here we meet our beast again with his 10 horns. It's the same beast, that final kingdom. But here you have the explanation of how that kingdom can be over and gone and yet still be there at Christ's return. This kingdom will be and then not be and then be again. It will die and be resurrected, as it were, dissolve and be reconstituted. Rome was, but now it is not, yet it will be again. The world once laughed at that. Now it is beginning not to be so funny anymore. If the countries of the old Empire reunite, they could well represent the most powerful force on earth! But once you understand that missing piece of information you have:

2. the same vision - Rev. 13:1-7 A 10-horned beast empire again coming out of the sea of the peoples. Notice he was an indescribable animal except that he had parts like a lion, a bear, and a leopard! Sound familiar? Verses 5-7

speak of the ruler of this empire and are almost identical to Daniel's vision, including the figure of 42 months (3 1/2 years). This beast or antichrist is the main character of this whole section of Revelation and in Rev. 19 it is he and his henchman who are cast into the Lake of Fire and his army destroyed. Why does God repeat things? To show us they are certain and sure. These things are going to happen exactly as God has predicted!

Verse 28 says the vision troubled Daniel greatly. It shocked him, but he kept it private and didn't share it with anyone. Most of the people around him were unbelievers who would not comprehend it. I'm glad he shared it with us. But remember, it is not the kind of thing to go sharing with your unsaved friends. Our message to them is the Cross, not the Kingdom. They can't understand it without the Spirit and it is liable to confuse them. But to us it should bring awe and worship. God is in control after all. History is falling out according to plan before our very eyes. What a great God we have!

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 8 The Vision Of The Ram And The Goat

Each chapter in Daniel adds more details to the overviews given in previous chapters. And like chapter 7, God again uses a vision of animals to reveal events that are yet future. So far, we have had two parallel overviews of the four great Gentile Empires of world history given to us in chapters 2 and 7. Chapter 8 singles out a portion of that history, the time of Persia and Greece, and gives specific details. Now look at:

I. The Introduction

1. to the vision (1-2) Daniel saw this in Belshazzar's reign in 551 BC. The events pictured here concern events from 200 to 400 years in the future to him. Every prediction of this chapter has been fulfilled historically to a T! What a confirmation of our faith in God and His Word. Though he lived in Babylon, in this vision he sees himself in Susa, a royal city of the Kingdom of Persia, where Esther and Nehemiah would later live. Hence Persia is the first entity shown to him in the vision.

2. to the interpretation (15-19) Though Daniel interpreted dreams for others, he did not understand this one and God sent the angel Gabriel to tell him specifically the meaning of what he saw. Twice he says the vision concerns the time of the end, but two ends are in view here, the end of the third or Greek kingdom and also, in type, the final end, the tribulation period. All the events in this chapter have been historically fulfilled. However, as we shall see, they picture events of the final end. Now the first thing we meet in the vision is:

II. The Ram: Medo-Persia, the land where Daniel saw himself.

1. its characteristics detailed (3-4) Daniel saw a ram with two long horns, one longer than the other. Persia was greater than Media but arose later. The ram was already in the east so he pushed north, west and south. The Persian Empire expanded north, west and south. It seemed nothing could stop it. And just to make sure, we have:

2. its identity revealed (20) directly. This symbolism may seem strange to us. But remember in chapter 7 I told you the royal symbol of Babylon was a winged lion. Guess what the royal symbol of Persia was! A ram! But this powerful ram finally met his match in:

III. The Goat: Greece A goat attacked and trampled the ram.

1. its characteristics detailed (5-8) It came from the west and moved so fast that its feet didn't touch the ground. It had a single horn that gained the victory over the ram and then was broken off and replaced by four others.

2. its identity revealed (21-22) The goat represents the kingdom of Greece and:

a. the great horn is Alexander the Great He was the first one to be called king of Greece. He swept from his homeland in the west across the whole of the Persian empire to the shores of India in just a few years beginning in 334 BC. However, just at the height of his power he died of malaria and alcoholism at age 32. The great horn was broken and:

b. the 4 horns are 4 kingdoms after him. His 4 generals each received a portion of his great empire and set up their own smaller kingdoms. Two of them don't concern our history. But Seleucus and his descendants ruled Syria and the east while Ptolemy ruled Egypt. The Jews were caught in the middle of their conflicts for 200 years But Daniel saw one more thing:

IV. The Little Horn: Antiochus Epiphanes 200 years later there rose to power in the Syrian kingdom a particular king who is in view here. His name was Antiochus IV. He declared himself "Epiphanes" or "illustrious one". His enemies called him "Epimanes" which means "madman"! How do we know he is the one referred to here?

1. his characteristics detailed (9-14)

a. his origin (9) He is ruler of one of the four kingdoms who expanded the kingdom toward the south, the east, and over Palestine. This narrows it to Syria.

b. his greatness (10) He became a conquering power for a time and particularly persecuted the Jews.

c. his desecration of the Temple (11-12) The prince of the host could be the High Priest or the Messiah. This king defiled the Temple and took away the daily sacrifice of the Jews. Antiochus was the only Syrian ruler to do this and it precipitated the revolt of the entire Jewish nation. This clinches it. He's the man. He came to power in 174 BC and in 170 he first attacked Jerusalem to put down some trouble there. Two years later in 168 he attacked and burned it wholesale, killing thousands of Jews and in 167 he took the ultimate step of ordering the Jews to sacrifice a sow on the altar, ordering the people to eat swine's flesh or die, and forbidding any Jewish sacrifice.

d. his duration (13-14) God says clearly this desecration would last 2300 evenings and mornings and then the Temple would be operating again. Sacrifice was restored by the Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus in 164. If you count the phrase as meaning whole days you backtrack just over 6 years to 170, the time when Antiochus first invaded. If you count the phrase as indicating individual sacrifices you have 1150 days or 3 years beginning in 167, the time when the Temple was defiled. At any rate it is literal and it was fulfilled to the T!

2. his personal history explained (23-25) Notice four particular characteristics about him:

a. deception to gain power He not only rose to power by murdering his own brother, but two years after his first invasion of the city in 170, he sent to them his chief tax collector, who made them promises of peace and security. All this was a setup for in 168 he fell upon the city without warning (1 Maccabees 1). Deception was his trade!

b. devastation of the Jews and Temple He killed thousands of Jews outright. He made it illegal to circumcise children and those mothers who disobeyed were killed and their children hanged. He commanded Jews to offer swine and unclean animals in sacrifice under pain of death.

c. determination to stand against God Most noteworthy of all, he set up an idol on the very altar of God in the Temple. The Jews referred to it as the abomination that makes desolate. They could no longer use the Temple. He was absolutely determined to wipe out every vestige of the worship of the true God.

d. destruction not by man He only lived three years after that. He died in 164 BC of a vile disease in Persia. Like Herod in Acts 12, God smote him, not a human enemy. Now everything in this whole chapter is fulfilled in history that we know. Yet verse 19 says this has something to do with the time of the end, the time of wrath, the Tribulation Period. How can that be? The answer is that verses 23-25 have a double fulfillment. They have already been fulfilled historically in Antiochus. But they also point to:

3. his end-time anti-type: the False Prophet If you read Rev. 13 carefully you will discover that there is, not one end-time leader in the world but two. There is the beast referred to in verses 1-10, a Gentile world leader. We usually call him the Antichrist, a political/military leader. But this man is assisted by another man known as the False Prophet. It is him I want you to read about for a moment. Compare Rev. 13:11-17. This man comes out of the land, that is, the land of Palestine, not the sea of the nations. He is probably a Jew. He is headquartered in Jerusalem. He is the ally of the Antichrist who promotes and aids his cause. But notice the same important things are true about him as they were of Antiochus Epiphanes:

a. deception is his trademark (13-14) He will deceive the whole earth except for the elect.

b. devastation of the Jews and Temple (14b-15) He is the one who will have the idea and give the order to set up the great statue of the Antichrist in the Temple at Jerusalem and stop the daily sacrifice. He commands that all must worship and kills those who don't. What is this but a direct attack on Israel and a direct stand against Almighty God whose Temple it is?

c. destruction not by man (Cp. 19:20) God will cast him and his leader into the lake of fire; no human will destroy him. Everything that vile Antiochus was in history, this man will be and worse. Another madman is coming. Now if God showed you all this, I don't know what your reaction would be, but compare **Dan. 8:26-27**. It exhausted Daniel and he lay ill for several days. The vision was sealed. It really was not for Daniel's benefit. He was to receive it and pass it safely on to us. What a benefit we have to be able to look back on history and see that the Word of God came to pass exactly as prophesied! We have a great privilege. We live in a day when the prophecies made of old are becoming more and more clear. Our understanding is much greater than Daniel's because we are so much closer to the end than he!

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Ch. 9 The Vision Of The Seventy Weeks

Daniel chapter 9 divides very easily into two parts. The first 19 verses are a record of a personal event which happened to Daniel. They have to do with a prophecy given to another man of God:

I. The Prophecy Of 70 Years (1-19) Read verses 1-2. Daniel was reading Jer. 29:10 and all of a sudden, he realized what time it was. The year was 538 BC, the first year of the Medo-Persian kingdom. He began to count his fingers. "I was deported in 605 BC (or whatever number he called that year). This is 538. 70 years are almost up!" This shook Daniel up badly because he believed God's Word. And the rest of these verses are the record of how he prayed and confessed his sin and the sin of his people. Then He asks God to indeed do what He promised and keep His Word. And He did! Cyrus wrote a decree and the Jews were allowed to go home that very year, just a shade ahead of schedule! We could take a whole message to look at the lessons in this prayer but let me give you just three of them:

1. Daniel studied, believed and applied the Scriptures to his life He had a regular habit of being in the Scriptures and studied them carefully. He believed what he read was true and, when it applied to his life, he reacted accordingly. We need to be in the Scriptures daily with that same attitude! We study, we seek to hear from God and discern what He's doing, and we put our lives at his feet and change them accordingly.

2. Daniel prayed at a level that impacted his own people and the world He spelled out the whole picture in his prayer. He realized why his people were sitting in Babylon instead of in their own land. He recognized their sin and how God had said he would bring judgment. He confessed the sin of his people, even though he hadn't committed it. He confessed God's justice in bringing judgment and appealed to God's mercy to bring forgiveness to his wayward people and to restore them. And in some fashion we don't clearly understand, Daniel's prayer was a part of that whole process of restoring Israel from captivity. However, it is not just for Daniel. We can do the same thing today. We can impact our own nation and the peoples of the earth in prayer. We can be intercessors that change the world and advance God's plan to redeem some from every people on earth, if we can just learn to pray at a higher level and not spend all our time focusing on our personal problems and needs. We must pray in a way that impacts the world.

3. Daniel focused his heart and prayer on the glory of God (17-19) The thing that must grip our hearts above all else is the glory of God. The thing that matters most ultimately is not me or you and what happens to us or how we feel, but His glory, that He will get the glory due His name, that in my life and your life and in our people and in the peoples of earth He will be glorified as He should be. All the nations He has made will come and worship before Him. That's a promise He has made. His glory must become the driving force of our life.

Now, as Daniel was praying he was given another vision in **20-23**:

II. The Prophecy Of 70 Weeks (20-27) This is one of the most important prophecies in all the Scriptures. And I'll tell you why. In the other visions of world history given in chapters 2 and 7, we see four world empires and the final one destroyed by God with no break! But this vision teaches us there will be a GAP in that plan and that's very important, because it is this gap that WE live in! So, let's take this vision apart piece by piece. First some:

1. general facts (24) This prophecy is about 70 "weeks". Literally in Hebrew it says 70 "sevens".

a. they are weeks of 7 years We mark time in decades (units of 10). The Hebrews marked it in heptads (units of 7) or Sabbatical units. Every seventh year was a sabbatical year. In 10:2 Daniel uses the Hebrew phrase "weeks of days" to make sure we catch the difference. So, we are talking about 490 years.

b. they concern the Jews and Jerusalem This is history seen from the Jewish perspective now, not the Gentile one. These 70 weeks complete the history of the Jewish nation and the city of Jerusalem.

c. they reach to the final Kingdom Six things are mentioned as happening during this period. Sin is brought to its completion, summed up, atoned for, and everlasting righteousness is brought in. The Most Holy (Christ or the Millennial Temple?) is anointed. In other words, the terminal point of this vision is the same as of the other ones, the time when the stone smashes the statue or the fourth beast is destroyed, the time when God's Kingdom is finally set up on earth. Now let's check details.

2. the first 69 weeks are 483 years (25) The first 69 weeks are spoken of as a separate entity. We are told three things about them:

a. they start with a decree - 458 or 444 BC A decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. For years I have maintained along with most scholars that that decree is the one given in 444 BC by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in Neh. 2:1. Now I'm not so sure and I'll show you why in a minute. It could also refer to the earlier decree of Artaxerxes which sent Ezra back to the land in 458 BC (Ezra 7:7). Just remember this. At the time of Daniel, the city has been destroyed and is in ruins. So, from that time we must look ahead to the time when the authorization is given to rebuild the city.

b. they end with Messiah the Prince (Jesus) It says literally *until the Messiah comes*. Well, we know when He came! In our series on chronology, we placed the beginning of His ministry in AD 26 and His death in AD 30. So, if God's Word is true, the time period from when the decree was given until Jesus came must be 483 years. Well, although it is obvious that from approximately 450 BC to 30 AD is approximately 480 years, we Bible believers have always been sticklers for details! 483 means 483. Various approaches have been used to show the fulfillment of this prophecy. The most popular starts with 444 and converts 360-day Hebrew years to 365-day years which we use. It also says that because of verse 26, the period ends with the death of Christ. The only problem is that He ends up dying in 33 AD which doesn't jive with New Testament facts and history. I think this might be a bit of overkill. If we use the earlier decree in 458 and simply travel forward in time 483 years, we end up in the yr. 26 AD which is the year He was baptized and began His ministry. It does say "to the COMING of Messiah". At any rate you can see that God accurately kept His promise!

c. their division: The 69 weeks are divided into 2 periods:

(1) 7 weeks (49 years) - the city is completed This seems to be the time until the city is actually completed with houses and wall and trench. Nehemiah rebuilt the wall, and weren't those troubled times? What opposition he faced! To say that it took 50 years from his time to complete the city is probably very realistic. Then after another:

(2) 62 weeks (434 years) - Messiah comes This period is just as literal as the first 49. At the end of this time Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, stood on the earth and proclaimed Himself openly to Israel! But here's the interesting part:

3. the interlude which is the current church age (26) Just look at the verses generally for a moment. What it says is that after the 69 weeks (483 years) are completed other things happen for an undetermined period, to the end, and at the end there will be one last "week", one last 7 year period. It's as though God's time clock will be stopped when Messiah comes and then restarted again at the end to finish the countdown. So, the 70 weeks are NOT successive. There is an interlude and we've been living in it for 2000 years! Three significant things are predicted in it:

a. Messiah would die (AD 30) How much clearer than that can you get. Isaiah 53 and the Psalms talk about it too, but you just can't get any plainer than that. When Messiah comes, He will die and have nothing, that is, He will not get His Kingdom. And He did die and the Kingdom did not come, just at the conclusion of the 69 weeks. Then a second thing would happen:

b. Jerusalem would be destroyed (AD 70) Notice it does not say "the prince that shall come" but "the PEOPLE of the prince..." This refers to the fourth world empire, Rome, the one that will be struck by the stone. Titus destroyed Jerusalem once and for all in AD 70 along with the Temple. It was a horrible massacre but it occurred 40 years after the end of the 69 weeks. Then Daniel seems to predict:

c. an age of war and desolations We have seen it. Just read the record of history from then to now. Daniel didn't know about it. He didn't understand it. But God gave just a glimpse of it here. God was going to set Israel aside and do a new thing, call out of all the nations a people for His Son, the church. But one day when He is finished with that, when it is time, God will start the clock ticking again for Israel and there will be:

4. the 70th week of 7 years (27) We can expect that it will be just as literal as the first 69 weeks were. It will be an actual 7 year period which will end in the establishing of the Millennial Kingdom.

a. its start: a covenant We often say it starts at the Rapture of the Church. While I certainly believe the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation, there is nothing to say that there are exactly 7 years from the Rapture itself to the Return of Christ. There may be a period of days, weeks, months, even a few years before things are ready and the clock starts ticking. It depends on how God chooses to work it. The 7 year period begins with the ruler of the revived Roman Empire making a covenant with the Jews. It sounds to me like it will be a seven year agreement that will allow them once again to have their Temple and to offer their sacrifices unhindered under his jurisdiction. However:

b. its midpoint: an abomination Exactly in the middle, at the 3 1/2 year mark, he will change his mind. He will break his word and put a stop to the Temple sacrifices. In fact, he will desecrate the temple by setting up his own statue in it. This is called the abomination of desolation and Jesus said, "when you see what Daniel was talking about stand in the Temple, then run" for that will usher in the final period of horrible tribulation that will end in the return of Christ.

c. its end: a destruction The Roman prince will come to his end as Christ returns. The stone will smash the image and the saints of the Most High will possess the Kingdom forever.

Now let me just summarize this whole prophecy once more and close with this reminder. If God fulfilled the first 69 weeks of this prophecy so literally, He will also keep the latter part. We are living in a time that is the interlude predicted by God 2500 years ago! We can expect ALL His predictions to come true.

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY Chs. 10-12

The Vision Of Israel's Future Part I - 10:1-11:20

Chapters 10-12 of Daniel are actually one long unit and describe Daniel's fourth and final vision. Chapter 10 is the introduction to the vision and chapters 11-12 are the vision itself. It is a vision of Israel's future in the hands of the Gentiles and it is unique in Scripture. There is no other such detailed prediction of future events anywhere else. There are 400 silent years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. There were no prophets and no scriptural books written. But God put the record of what would happen in those years down ahead of time in detail through Daniel.

I. The Introduction To The Vision (10:1-9)

1. the setting of the vision (1-4) The year is 536 BC. Cyrus has already let the exiled Jews return to Jerusalem two years earlier to build the Temple. Daniel, now in his 80's, did not go with them, but he was concerned for them. He was concerned about the future of his people. In his last vision two years earlier, God had told him the city would be rebuilt in troubled times. Earlier visions had laid out the changing of empires and the oppression of the Jews. He set himself to fasting and praying to find out what would become of his people. He went out by the Tigris River one day after three weeks of this and God gave him a vision.

2. the Sender of the vision (5-9) Daniel was granted a vision of God unlike anything he had seen previously. Some scholars take this to be an angel. I don't think so. If you'll compare **Rev. 1:13-17**, you'll find an almost exact word by word description of Christ. I believe this is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ to Daniel and it is so majestic that it takes his breath and causes him to lose consciousness. It had that same effect on John in Revelation. The point is that this vision is not simply some dream Daniel had. It was sent by God Himself. Now since Daniel could not bear the presence of God, evidently a second person, an angel, speaks to him next and reveals:

II. The Conflict In The Heavens (10:10-11:1) We do not realize it, but all around us, all the time, is going on:

1. the spiritual struggle of the angels (11-14) This angel was sent out to Daniel three weeks earlier but was engaged in a conflict with a demonic prince. Men do not fight angels. Evidently just as God has levels of angels and uses them to accomplish His will in the world, there are also demonic forces that accomplish Satan's will. This demonic prince and his forces were so strong that the angel had to call the archangel Michael to come and help him so he could be freed to come to Daniel. This kind of conflict is going on all around us. There are angels sent to minister to us and demons sent to oppose and hinder us. If our eyes could be opened to the spirit world, we would be both shocked and thankful for all that is happening every day! You can see here:

2. the strengthening ministry of the angels (15-19) While the angel was saying all this, Daniel had still never looked up or said anything. So the angel touched his mouth and strengthened him to speak. Then he tells how he can't breathe and is so overcome and the angel says "be strong" and instantly he is made stronger and can listen and understand. Angels have this kind of ministry to us all the time. They did to Jesus on earth. They strengthen us. They meet our needs and help us without being seen. But what's really significant here is:

3. the spiritual battle for the nations (10:20-11:1) Satan has demonic powers that have charge not just over individuals but over whole nations and empires, strong demonic powers who resist the work of the angels of God and hinder it, who struggle to keep whole nations blinded and enslaved to the prince of this world. He has his own world government in the spirit realm, if you will. That brings new meaning to **Eph. 6:12** which says that we are not struggling *against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*. That's why we need God's armor to stand! At that time God was, as we know, working out a plan for both Persia and Greece and the demonic princes of both those nations were involved in great conflict with God's angels. This one was going to return to the fight, but first he must give Daniel precious information about the future of his people and the nations they will live under:

III. The History Of The Nations (11:2-20) This prediction of events that would occur over the next 300 years is so detailed and so accurate that it has caused unbelieving liberal scholars to believe it could not have been written by Daniel ahead of time, but was written instead in the second century BC after the fact and Daniel's name was attached to it! To us it is just another wonderful proof of the sovereignty of our God who makes all of history turn out according to His plan! First, he predicts:

1. the Greek conquest: Greece wins Persia (2-4) This is not new news. Daniel already knew this from the visions in chapters 2, 7, and 8. But here there are added some new specifics:

a. four Persian kings to come (2) after Cyrus and the fourth would be richer than all and begin hostilities with Greece. Cyrus was followed by Cambyses (530-522), Pseudo-Smerdis (522), Darius I Hystaspes (521-486), and finally by the great Xerxes (the King in Esther 485-465). He brought the Persian Empire to the zenith of its power and mounted a massive expedition against Greece which failed, but was followed by a long running conflict between the two empires that was finally settled by the:

b. rise of Alexander the Great (3) He finally conquered the Persian Empire and the whole world now became a Greek empire. But he didn't last long. He died in 323 of malaria and alcoholism. And after him came the:

c. division of the Greek empire (4) His four generals inherited the four sections of the empire. Two of them this record is not concerned with because they are farther west, but Ptolemy got Egypt south of Palestine and Seleucus got Syria and Mesopotamia north and east of Palestine. So, these two kingdoms are called the South and the North respectively in the rest of this prophecy. Now all of this is old hat; it was already revealed in chapters 7 and 8. But now is given new information that is the most detailed yet:

2. the Greek conflict: Syria vs. Egypt (5-20) From 312-175 BC there was almost a constant war between these two kingdoms. Here God gives us an ahead of time play by play description of a 150 year war that is incredible:

a. animosity develops (5) At first Seleucus and Ptolemy were allies and joined together against another general who controlled Babylon. But their success left Seleucus in control of a much larger area than Ptolemy and jealousy and hostility developed between the two. They died. Ptolemy's son (II) and Seleucus' grandson Antiochus II really hated each other during their reigns but finally there was an:

b. alliance attempted (6) around 250 BC. Ptolemy II gave his daughter Berenice to Antiochus II, demanding he divorce his first wife Laodice to forge an alliance. This did not last. Laodice arranged to have Berenice killed and then poisoned her own ex-husband and made her son Seleucus II king. Meanwhile in Egypt, Ptolemy II died and his son, Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III, took the throne and to avenge the death of his sister, he staged a:

c. successful invasion by Egypt (7-8) He defeated the Syrian army, killed Laodice, and returned to Egypt with large amounts of spoils, including temple treasures. This, of course, was a humiliating defeat to Seleucus II so he staged an:

d. invasion by Syria and further attack (9-12) He tried to mount an invasion of Egypt but was repulsed by Ptolemy's forces and died in a fall from his horse! His son Seleucus III was assassinated. His second son Antiochus III took the throne and he fought Egypt. At that time Egypt controlled Palestine and he pushed them back as far as Gaza, the very borders of Egypt. Ptolemy IV is now on the throne in Egypt and he is furious and goes out to meet Syria at the southern border of Israel. Thousands were killed and the invasion was not successful. But Antiochus III would not give up and soon there was a:

e. successful invasion by Syria (13-16) He came back with a larger army. He was joined in this invasion by Philip V of Macedon and also by many of the Jews from Palestine. He consolidated his control over Palestine and took the Egyptian stronghold of Sidon on the coast in 203. By 199 BC Antiochus III had absolute unchallenged control of all Palestine but decided to try a new plan.

f. alliance fails again (17) He decided to make peace but his motives were not peaceful. Under threats from Rome, which is by now the most formidable power in the west, to stop advancing, he attempted to make peace. He gave his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy V of Egypt in 192 in the hopes that she would ruin him and side with her father but she didn't. She constantly sided with her husband and his kingdom.

g. Rome dominates the region (18-20) Antiochus then gave up on Egypt and set his sights on conquering Greece which was now under Roman control and that pitted him against Rome. He was defeated twice by the Roman general Scipio. He returned home miserable and defeated and died trying to plunder a temple in Elam in 187. His son Seleucus IV was under tribute to Rome and had to tax his people heavily to pay the Romans an annual tribute of 1000 talents to keep his kingdom. After 12 years of this he was quietly poisoned by his own treasurer and died, not in anger nor in battle!

O my friend, I don't care whether you remember any of these names or dates but do you see the absolute accuracy of the Word of God? Detail upon detail, hundreds of years worth all predicted accurately hundreds of years in advance! God knows what He's doing! Next time we'll pick up the story in verse 21, as it more directly concerns Israel and see the same thing again. God is in control and if He's in that kind of control over nations and kings and armies, then He's in control over the things that affect your life too!

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY Chs. 10-12

The Vision Of Israel's Future Part II - 11:21-35

Now we look at the middle part of Daniel's final vision of the future. We concluded last time having looked at God's detailed predictions of the history of Syria and Egypt throughout the reigns of about a dozen kings and covering a period of about 150 years. This time we'll look at the reign of just one king, a man whose name we know from history as Antiochus IV Epiphanes (the illustrious one). His followers nicknamed him Epimanes (the madman). His reign lasted a scant 12 years (175-163 BC) but God devotes 15 full verses of this vision to him, when all those before him have been passed over in a brief mention. In fact, if you remember, he already appeared in chapter 8 as the little horn in the vision of the ram and goat and nine verses were dedicated to his history there. That vision gave a brief overview of his history but this one is much more detailed and shows how he fits into the entire history of the period. The reason so much space is given to predicting him is that he, more than any other, earned himself a distinct place in history as a destroyer of the Jews. God's description of him is "a contemptible person" in verse 21. He, more than the others, earned the contempt of God because he set himself to oppose God. Now keeping in mind that Daniel is seeing all this in 536 BC, 350 years before it came to pass, let's look at:

I. The History of Antiochus Epiphanes And let's divide it into three parts:

1. his rise to power (21-24) Pardon the alliterated outline but I had to do something to keep things lively!

a. his initiation of intrigue (21) As you might have guessed, Antiochus was not the rightful heir to the throne. He was the brother of Seleucus IV, who as I told you, was poisoned by his own treasurer. Antiochus may even have been the cause of that. At any rate, his brother had two young sons, the first, Demetrius, being held hostage in Rome and a baby named Antiochus in Syria. Epiphanes pretended to be Demetrius' guardian and went to Antioch to press his claims. Meanwhile the other baby son was mysteriously murdered, leaving him with clear title to the throne! He immediately faced military action against him by Egypt but:

b. his muscle leads to murder (22) There were a series of military campaigns against Egypt which are hard to distinguish. But he met with general success. In view here is the murder of the Jewish High Priest Onias in 172 BC which Antiochus ordered to secure his rule over Palestine.

c. his deals made in deceit (23) Antiochus made a series of leagues with other nations, none of them in good faith. He gained in power, though comparatively few people supported him.

d. his power increased by plunder (24) Antiochus began to plunder the richest parts of the areas under his control during peacetime, so that he could use the spoils to buy favor and the support of other leaders. Now follows a brief description of:

2. his reign of terror (25-30) Though Antiochus had an entire series of running battles with Egypt, there are two primary times when he invaded it with great success.

a. first invasion of Egypt (25-27)

(1) eventual victory (25-26) In 170 BC his army got as far as the very border of Egypt, near the Nile delta, before being attacked by a large Egyptian force. He did win the battle but was unable to proceed further. Verse 26 refers to Egypt's loss through some sort of internal conspiracy, of which we're unaware. At any rate Antiochus then practiced:

(2) deceitful diplomacy (27) He and the vanquished Ptolemy sat at a table together as though friendship had been established and both lied through their teeth with no intention of keeping their agreements.

b. first persecution of Jews (28) On his way home from Egypt with a great amount of spoil, he passed through Judea, attacked Jerusalem, and plundered it as well. He then returned to Syria.

c. second invasion of Egypt (29-30a) In 168 BC he moved against Egypt again, only this time the outcome was to be different. He was met instead by the Roman navy and a commander, Popilius Laenas, with a decree from the Roman senate that he depart from Egypt and cease from war against it. The story goes that when he asked for time the commander drew a circle around his feet in the sand and said, "I want your answer before you step out of this circle!" He knew he could not fight Rome and left in great fury. And you know what was in his path! He chose to vent:

3. his wrath against Israel (30-35) Initially in 168 he invaded Jerusalem the second time and dispatched 22,000 troops. They killed thousands of men, women, and children, took thousands of others as prisoners and sold them as slaves. But the chief thing noted here is:

a. the desecration of the Temple (30-31) His goal was to eliminate the Jewish religion, to turn the Jews to the worship of Greek gods, particularly Zeus. Some of the Jews did convert and join his forces. He forbid their religious

practices including circumcision and sacrifices. In December of 167 he did the ultimate. He erected a statue of Zeus in the Temple beside the altar and offered a sow on the altar of God, commanding that this be done on the 25th of each month to celebrate his birthday! Many of the Jews did fall in line and forsake their faith. Antiochus went on home and died four years later in Persia, completely insane. But this was enough to provoke:

b. the revolt of the Jews (32-35) In 164 a godly Jew by the name of Judas Maccabeus led the Jews in a revolt against the Syrian power. We have in these verses predicted the 100 year time of Jewish independence, the days of the Maccabees recorded in the Apocrypha. Here they are in summary fashion. The Jews suffered a great deal but were able to maintain their own independence for a time until Rome finally took control of Palestine in 63 BC. Here we note:

(1) their persecution (33) They were instructed in the things of God, the law of God, but they suffered greatly. Many of these courageous Jews died in battle for their faith or were tortured. Many were forced to leave everything and live in the hills like modern guerrillas to survive. But they did.

(2) their power (34) They were supernaturally helped and won many battles. There were, of course, many who were not sincere in their faith but simply hated the Syrians who ruled them. But the upshot is that for 100 years the Syrians could no longer control Palestine and paid dearly for Antiochus' hatred. However, the point is that all of this was part of:

(3) God's purpose (35) God was purifying His people, purging them of their sin and their indifference in the furnace of affliction. But the time for it was appointed. It was only to last so long and that's it. You know, sometimes God does that with us also! He refines us like gold in the fire of suffering. But He also appoints a time for it. He's in total control of everything that happens. I think you can see that from all the details that we have just studied. Man thought he was doing it all but God arranged and orchestrated it all. That is the lesson from this horrible man's life.

But before we quit let's look at:

II. The Picture In Antiochus Epiphanes As we mentioned back in chapter 8 Antiochus and the things he did are pictures; they are events that foreshadow events to come in the end time:

1. his reign pictures events in the Tribulation Jesus in Mt. 24 spoke of another end-time desecration of the Temple. We are told that, like Antiochus did, the Beast will set up his statue in the Temple and proclaim himself God. The Jews will be commanded to worship and many will have to flee and hide in the mountains, just like in Antiochus' day. But God will help them and protect them just like He did the Maccabees and He will also refine them to bring them to true faith in their Messiah. And, just as in that day, some will defect and will worship the Roman beast. So, the horrors of Antiochus' dealings with the Jews are just a little taste in advance of what is yet to come full scale. But:

2. his character pictures the False Prophet We are told in Rev. 13 that there will be a world leader known as the False Prophet who will promote the worship of the Roman military leader we call the Antichrist. His chief characteristic will be that of Antiochus: deceit. He will deceive many. He will get the world to believe the lie that the Roman leader is God. But like Antiochus he is also going to hate the Jews. He is going to lead in their persecution and direct operations against them with all the hatred that mad Antiochus had.

What sad days are yet to come! But lest anybody would say, "That could never happen!" let them simply look at history. It already has! And it will again. God knows the future. We've proved that. And He says there is coming a time upon this world, a time of tribulation worse than any the world has ever known, just before the return of His Son, worse than the days of Antiochus, bad as they were. It is about time the world took that seriously. It's about time believers took that seriously. Next time we'll look at the details of that awful future period that are revealed in the conclusion of this vision.

DANIEL: THE KEY TO PROPHECY

Chs. 10-12 The Vision Of Israel's Future Part III - 11:36-12:13

In this message we will finish the Book of Daniel and look at the conclusion of Daniel's final vision. At 11:36 Daniel's vision takes a strange jump from the past to the future. All the events before it are historically fulfilled before the time of Christ. The events after it relate to the "time of wrath" (verse 36), "the time of the end" (verse 40), that is, the Tribulation Period. We must begin by figuring out who the king is in verse 36. The king in 21-35 has been Antiochus Epiphanes. He desecrated the Temple and caused the Jewish revolt mentioned in 32-35. But strangely, he died one year into the revolt in 163 BC. Now all of a sudden in verse 36, the vision is talking about another king. There have been no more kings, no more individual rulers, who ruled over Israel from that day to this. She became part of the Roman Empire and was destroyed as a nation in 70 AD, not to be re-formed until 19 centuries later in 1948. This king is still future to us. He is:

I. The End-Time Leader: The False Prophet (11:36-39) What has happened is this. Remember how I showed you last time that Antiochus was a great picture of the False Prophet of the Tribulation Period? Well, the vision has skipped from

the type directly to the anti-type, from the Antiochus of antiquity to the False Prophet of the future. Let's read about him in **Rev. 13:11-15**. Verses 1-10 tell us of a first beast, a Gentile, who is given authority over the whole of the final 10 nation revived Roman Empire. 11-15 tell of a second man, from the land, a Jew, who is the Eastern ally of the man in Rome and promotes his worship. The two are a devilish duo and in chapter 19 we see them cast into hell together. With this in mind, now return to Daniel 11 and see:

1. his character (36-37) As a religious leader situated in Jerusalem, he will attempt to destroy all faith in God. Though he is a Jew, he will not regard the "god of his fathers" or the Jewish Messiah ("the one desired by women"). Instead, he will blaspheme the true God and try to turn Israel away from Him, just like Antiochus tried to get them to worship Zeus.

2. his function (38-39) is to promote the worship of the Roman ruler whom we often call the Antichrist. He will engineer the setting up of his statue and the desecration of the Temple called the Abomination of Desolation. And he will do everything to smash those who refuse to bow. Isn't that what we read in Revelation? Well, as we see here, he will not only have a religious role but also a military role as co-ruler of that revived Roman Empire. We have before us:

II. The End-Time Events: War (11:40-45) Now, if you're a real student and read a bunch of commentaries, you will find any number of interpretations of what is happening. It is not wise to be too dogmatic on the issue. As 12:4 says, this vision was not intended to be understood by Daniel but understanding of it would increase in the end. It is really the people of that time who will clearly see it unfold. We can only take our best shot. And the best shot in my book is the position of that renowned prophetic scholar Dr. Clarence Mason, because it makes the most sense in my judgment. So here goes. First let's identify:

1. the combatants (40,44) There are four armies, four kings referred to in these verses.

a. the False Prophet is the revived Roman Empire as we have seen.

b. the king of the north is a Russian confederacy In previous verses the north meant Syria but now it is pushed further north. Ez. 38-39 describe a terrible invasion of the land of Israel by a confederacy of nations led by a man named Gog of the land of Magog. If you read the description in 38:1-6 you will see clearly that this group of nations includes the former Soviet Union, as well as the Arab areas of Iran and Iraq. Strangely enough, Cush and Put or Ethiopia and Libya are also listed as allies there. Then we have:

c. the king of the south is an African confederacy In previous verses the south meant Egypt. But Egypt became part of the Roman Empire. In ancient times the Roman Empire included only a thin strip of land on the northern coast of Africa from Egypt on the east to Carthage on the west. The ancients were not aware of the extent of the African continent and on their maps labelled everything below Rome's territory as Put. Cush was the area below Egypt. So, these terms seem to refer to what we call the nations of Africa. Just as the term north has been pushed far North so South has been pushed far south and that leaves:

d. the kings of the east are an Asian confederacy The great nations of Asia with the greatest population in the world, India and China and the other nations of that area. These have the capability of the largest army in the world. Notice they are referred to in the plural instead of singular in Revelation. They will not unite under single leadership like the other three areas of the world. Now here's:

2. the battle plan It begins with:

a. an invasion by the king of the south (40a) The south will invade the False Prophet's Roman territory, that is, he will begin an attack against Egypt with the intent of moving on up into Palestine. But at the same time there will be an:

b. invasion by king of North (40b-43) The word "HE" from the second use in verses 40 through 43 is referring naturally back to the King of the north. He will move down towards the Holy Land conquering other nations along the way. His ally, the King of the south has drawn the False Prophet and his armies to the border in Egypt so the King of the North sweeps down through Palestine. This invasion is described in great detail in Ez. 38-39. It is initially a huge success. Jerusalem is taken and sacked before the False Prophet can get back north to do anything about it. Egypt is evidently taken by the Libyans and "Nubians" (Ethiopians) who are "in submission" (his allies). However, we read there that God intervenes in a miraculous way and literally supernaturally destroys the northern army on the mountains of Israel. Now we move to the third event, an:

c. invasion by kings of East (44-45) - Rev. 16:12 The word "HE" in 44-45 goes back to referring to the False Prophet. He hears of the northern invasion and also hears a report from the East. Rev. 16:12 tells us that the Kings of the East will cross the Euphrates River at the very tail end of the Tribulation Period. **Rev. 9:14-16** relate to this same event and number the army at 200 million men, the largest army the world has ever known. It must have seemed astronomical to John but today China has over a billion people by itself and India does also. Reports of an army of this size would shake anybody up. The False Prophet heads back in great fury north from Egypt to Palestine. By this time, I'm sure reinforcements from the western half of the Roman Empire have arrived along with the

main leader, the beast. And though their camp is in the area of Jerusalem, they draw up battle lines and prepare to meet this final assault in the Valley of Megiddo in the north of Israel, at a place called Armageddon. And then comes the final event:

d. destruction by Christ (45b) - Rev. 19:19-21 This final battle is never really engaged, because as they face each other, the sky lights up and there appears in it the sign of the Son of Man and Jesus Christ Himself rides down to earth on a white horse to finish the job. He speaks and all the remaining armies of earth are destroyed. The Beast and the False Prophet are cast into hell together and the Kingdom of God comes at last. Now as Daniel sees all this in the vision, he is certainly worried about what will happen to his people. Will they be destroyed? So, the angel turns his attention to:

III. The End Time People: Israel (12:1-3) and gives Daniel three primary assurances about Israel during this horrible period. He mentions:

1. their refining (1) Yes, they will suffer but that suffering will be a refining time. They will have supernatural protection from the Archangel Michael and a great many of them who are true believers will be delivered and live through this time to populate the earth in the Millennium. One side note: Jesus quoted a phrase from this verse to refer to the time right before His coming, so we know that it is the final end in view in these verses, not some historical event close to Daniel's day.

2. their resurrection (2) - Rev. 20:4-5 Those of Israel who die from that time until Christ's return will be resurrected. Rev. 20 describes the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs and how they are raised to life and reign with Christ during the Millennium. The unbelieving ones are raised at the end of the Millennium to face the Great White Throne judgment.

3. their reward (3) They will be glorified. They will shine like the stars forever and ever. What an encouragement to be faithful and to win others! Now in the remainder of chapter 12 we see:

IV. The End-Time Vision: Sealed (12:4-13) This vision was given to be understood later. And after Daniel is told this, the angel departs and the vision ends. But there are two significant facts mentioned in this closing section. We are given the time of the duration of the period that has just been described. And we are told:

1. it will occupy 3 1/2 years (4-7) The events described from 11:35 on will take place in one 3 1/2 yr. period., the second half of Daniel's 70th week (Chapter 9), from the midpoint where the Temple is desecrated to its end. This agrees, not only with Daniel, but with Revelation and other references. This final war will take place in a 3 1/2 yr. period. But we are also told:

2. it will occupy 1290 days (8-13) Now of course this is a re-affirmation to Daniel. We're not talking in symbolic years. We are talking about 1290 actual days from the time the Temple is desecrated until it is finished. Now 3 1/2 Hebrew years are 1260 days. Where did the other 30 days come from? Maybe that is the time required after Christ's return for the completion of the judgment of all living men and the setting up of the kingdom. Then he mentions 1335 days, 45 more. What are they for? The answer is simple. We don't know. But the point is that in just a little more than 3 1/2 literal years, all these events will take place and be finished. And with that we bid a fond farewell to Daniel and thank God that, though he never understood the significance of what he saw, we have been blessed to see God unfolding it through history and through preparation in the world we live in today. Our understanding is much greater than his. But I fear our commitment may be much less. The object of all prophecy is to move us spiritually, to show us the importance of our ministry where we are TODAY and to challenge us to serve with renewed vigor and a sense that the time is short.

THE MINOR PROPHETS

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Amos: The Shepherd Prophet **Amos 1:1, 7:14-15**

Setting: The date is ~760 BC. There are two kingdoms, Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Judah is ruled by Uzziah, a godly king and is following the Lord. Israel is ruled by Jereboam II and has fallen into idolatry, but it is a time of prosperity and expansion and also a time of extreme moral declension and unrighteous behavior.

I. Amos was a country boy.

1. he was from Tekoa, a small town in the hill country of Judah, 10 miles south of Jerusalem. It sat on a 2700 ft. high hill at the edge of the wilderness of Judah, the last of the villages before a barren, but majestic landscape, a pastureland.
2. he was a shepherd (1:1) This is not the normal word but it means sheep breeder or sheep dealer (its other use is 2 Kings 3:4 of the king of Moab).
3. he was also a herdsman (7:14) - a unique word that means herdsman or cattleman.
4. he was also in agricultural business - He had orchards of sycamore fig trees. The developing fruit is slit or scratched allowing juice to run out producing sweeter, more edible figs. These would have been down in the lowlands by the Jordan or the Dead sea.

II. Amos was not a prophet by training or heritage.

1. he was not part of any "band of prophets" - He did not sit under the training of anyone like Elisha and Elijah, had no background which prepared him for the way God was going to use him.
2. his father was not a prophet - He was not taking up something that ran in the family or was expected of him. In fact the OPPOSITE was expected of him. He was, I'm sure expected to be participating in the family business.
3. he was prepared by his LIFE - He already had a walk with and a knowledge of God, a knowledge of the sacred history of his own people, a knowledge of his times, the places and conditions prevailing.

III. Amos had a very clear call. We have no details but the Lord spoke to him as he was busy following his flock and clearly sent him north to Israel to prophesy, to speak God's message to them.

1. it was not something he wanted or sought after - He probably was reluctant about or even resistant to it.
2. he was sent where he didn't want to go - He was sent to Israel, to a city, to Bethel, the king's residence, to the key center of idolatry in the country.
3. yet he submitted and went out of simple obedience to God

IV. God used him to deliver His Word - He brought key and powerful messages to His people there, focusing on God's demand for righteousness and the pronouncement of His judgment upon them for their wickedness.

1. we don't know the fruit - There was no revival or mass repentance, no change in the kingdom of Israel.
2. there was resistance to it (7:10-17) - Amaziah was the chief priest at Bethel. He sent a message to the king accusing Amos of treason, saying the king will die, trying to scare him and ordered him to leave and go back to his own land. He had a scornful attitude as though Amos was making a profit by doing it.

V. His clear sense of God's call sustained him - It didn't matter what Amaziah commanded him. God had taken him from the flock and God had sent him to speak and he was going to speak and he did.

Amos' ministry there probably only lasted a year, maybe two, and he probably went back home to Judah and to his country home and livestock. In essence his ministry was a short-term mission trip! But he probably went home and wrote down a record of the prophecies God had given him on that trip and it ended up recorded in Scripture for all future generations.

The Blessedness Of Persevering

Amos: The Faithful Prophet Who Endured In Spite Of Opposition (Part 1)

Now we come to the “minor prophets”, whom we don’t often study and don’t know too well. You do realize they’re only called minor because their writings are short and all twelve fit on one scroll, right? There’s nothing “minor” about their lives or their ministries; they were all extremely important to the work God was doing in building His Kingdom. So today I’d like to look at one prophet and consider him as an example of patience in the face of suffering, the prophet Amos. Well, we need, first of all, to find out as clearly as we can:

I. Who Amos Was - 1:1 As you know, for 300 years after Solomon, God’s nation was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. It’s important to the story to notice that Amos:

1. he lived in the village of Tekoa in Judah Tekoa was a village about 12 miles directly south of the capital of Jerusalem, on the top edge of the eastern slope of the Judean hills which fall away toward the valley of the Dead Sea. Amos came from a rural setting, a pastoral setting; look what he says about himself in **7:14-15**. I’ve always felt like those two verses are my own life story too. God reached down and took a country boy who grew up wading in the creek and playing in the woods and taking care of animals, took him from all the things that were his life and sent him to preach to His people. That’s exactly what he did with Amos. Amos was saying that:

2. he had no religious training He was **not a prophet**. He was not a prophet by profession; he did not start out that way. He wasn’t trained in the Scriptures and didn’t sit under a rabbi. Nor was he the **son of a prophet**, that is, he was not of the order of people who were known as prophets of the Lord in his day. Remember how Elisha led a group referred to as the “sons of the prophets” 50 years earlier? He was not part of that segment of Hebrew society that had to do with religious things at all. Rather:

3. he practiced an ordinary occupation He was one of the shepherds of Tekoa. That word *shepherd* in Hebrew in 1:1 is different from the normal word for *shepherd* and it seems to mean that Amos:

a. he was a sheep breeder The only other place it’s used in Scripture is in **2 Kings 3:4** which says *Now King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder. He would send as tribute to the king of Israel 100,000 male lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams*. In other words, it appears that Amos didn’t simply keep a few sheep in subsistence fashion like they do in the *jailo* in Kyrgyzstan; he was probably one of a group of people involved in a larger breeding and selling operation, a businessman dealing in sheep, if you will. On top of that, he says that:

b. he was a cattle herdsman The word *shepherd* in 7:14 specifically refers to cattle or oxen. So it would seem that his was a real livestock business branching out into various types of animals. Then he says literally that:

c. he was a piercer of sycamore-figs The sycamore fig tree grows figs in clusters on twigs that stick directly out of its trunk and they can get pretty big, up to 50 feet. It was evidently the practice in that day to climb the tree and nip or pierce the apex of each fig to cause them to ripen quickly, about 4 days later, which is evidently what Amos did. These trees do not grow up on the mountain near Tekoa where frost hits; they grow in the lowlands below toward the Dead Sea 7 or 8 miles away and bear several crops of figs each year, so in the various seasons Amos would go down and work in the plantations where these grew to help in the harvest.

I tell you all of that to give you a picture of what Amos’ life was like. His days were spent out of doors with animals and trees, far from the realm of Temples and altars and priests and prophets. But somehow in the midst of it all:

4. he received a Divine call to a short term mission The voice of God spoke to him. We don’t know how - in a vision, in a dream, or directly as He did to Moses from the bush. And the gist of God’s command was that he was to leave all that he was doing, to drop his involvement in all of these pursuits, leave his home in Judah and go somewhere else to deliver God’s message. And, unlike Isaiah or Jeremiah who appear to have prophesied for many years, it appears that Amos is writing looking back and telling the story of a time in his life that only lasted two years or so, though I’m not sure that he knew when he was called how long it was going to last. Today we would call this essentially an extended short term mission trip!

Who does God call to participate with Him in His mission of proclaiming His message to the world? Well, I know a lot of missionaries, for instance. Steve was a pilot, a flight instructor. Airplanes were his life. Brian was a businessman, Charlie was a printer, Craig was an ex-military engineer, Dawn was a physical therapist, Nancy a nurse, Burt a doctor, Mike a dentist, Von a musician and Janet, a lawyer. God delights in taking people who are not theologically trained professionals and turning them into His messengers! He calls people from all walks of life to give themselves to His work. And that’s my first point: *God not only can, but He wants to use YOU!* No matter who you are! You say, “I’m just a common, ordinary person!” Peter, Andrew, James and John were poor fishermen! Matthew was a tax collector. Even the Sanhedrin scornfully said of the apostles that they were *unlearned ordinary men* - that’s what baffled them! But they had been with Jesus! Many of the converts in the early church who helped spread the Gospel so rapidly throughout the Roman Empire were

slaves who performed all sorts of menial duties for their masters! Listen, Jesus wants to use YOU to take His message to people that need to hear it!

Some of those He calls end up going to the mission field full time in a second career like our partners Tom and Bev Kelly who signed up and went to Mongolia in 1992 after a successful career in business, to help plant the church there. God could call you to leave everything and go permanently. Still others He calls specifically to go as Amos went, on a shorter-term endeavor that serves a strategic purpose in advancing His kingdom. That's why we send short term mission teams each year. I KNOW that long term workers are at the core of what God is doing in reaching the world, but in the process, God uses short term mission efforts greatly, especially in places where it is difficult or impossible to remain for very long. For instance, the Kyrgyz make all kinds of short trips of several weeks' duration across the border into north-west China and see great fruits from it but they can't stay there, so they pursue their normal work or ministry at home and go several times a year. If you're listening, God could be calling you to go on an experience like that. But even if He doesn't, you're still not off the hook! We all need to be involved in touching the whole world, even if it is only through prayer. But every one of us is SENT! For the vast majority of Christ's followers, going into all the world primarily means delivering the message of the Gospel in the slice of the world that we are in, in our town, in our neighborhood, at our work, in our school, in our club or our group, in the natural flow of relationships that He has given us. Nancy was a little old lady who attended here many years ago. She lived in an apartment complex and she had some noticeable paranoia; she thought the FBI was continually monitoring her telephone and I couldn't convince her otherwise. But you know, she loved Jesus and she had a younger neighbor who was lonely and hurting and one day at lunch God used her to lead that neighbor to Jesus! By our standards... ah listen, God has no standard but willingness! If He can use Amos, if He can use Nancy, he can use you! You can be His prophet, one who proclaims His Word! Now let's look at:

II. Who Amos Was Sent To - the northern Kingdom of Israel The trip of which Amos is speaking seems to have occurred somewhere around the year 757 BC. Where Amos lived:

1. it was a spiritually high time in Judah during Uzziah's reign Uzziah had been on the throne for about 20+ years at this point and he was a good king who loved God and led the people of Judah to serve Him. As a young king he was trained and instructed by a prophet named Zechariah and his heart sought the Lord. He led his people to military success and financial success. If you were a believer, Judah was a pretty cozy place to be right about then, but now to the dark side:

2. it was a haughty time in Israel toward the end of Jeroboam's reign Jeroboam II had been ruling the northern kingdom perhaps 38 years at this point and was about to die in another couple. Under him Israel:

a. they had won victory and extended their domain As a young king the goal of Jeroboam's heart was to conquer Syria, whose capital was Damascus, and control her territory. And he succeeded. Israel now exerted control over all the lands dominated by Syria to the northeast and across the Jordan including Hamath, Moab and Ammon. Naturally they were proud and confident in their victory. At that time Assyria was busy with a war on their eastern front and there was nobody else who could stand against them. And as a result of these victories, tribute and revenue came flowing in from those lands so:

b. there was abundant prosperity According to **5:11** the leading citizens were living in *stone mansions* rather than the unburned brick of former days. According to **3:15** they were following the example of Ahab and adorning their "great" houses with ivory and the king had both a winter and a summer palace. In **6:4-6** we find the description of a banqueting scene within one of these palatial abodes which is lifelike in its portraiture. The guests stretched themselves upon the silken cushions of the couches, eating the flesh of lambs and stall-fed calves, drinking wine from huge bowls, singing idle songs to the sound of harps with their bodies perfumed and anointed with oil. But this prosperity was limited to the fat cats and was fed by **rampant injustice**. Look **2:6-7, 8:4-6**. Morality went out the window. They underfilled containers, overcharged in their prices, sold inferior quality goods and generally took advantage of the poor so that, at least in one case Amos knew of, a person was sold into slavery for the price of a pair of sandals! The first time I went to Kyrgyzstan in 1997 I tried to teach business ethics (like honesty and integrity) at a university and the students laughed at me! They said, "We deal with liars and thieves every day - these things do not work here!" They didn't work in Israel either. And along with all of this:

c. there was flourishing religiosity, only it was in **blatant idolatry** The worship took place in the two temples of the golden calves that Jeroboam I had set up at Bethel and Dan to represent Jehovah and keep people from going south to Judah to worship. According to **2:7-8** worshippers engaged in sacred prostitution before the altar, father and son with the same woman, clothed in garments taken as pledges from the poor while they drank sacrificial wine that was bought with the money of those who were fined for non-attendance! And Israel had the audacity to call this rank pagan idolatry the worship of the LORD!

This is where Amos was sent, not even to Samaria the capital city, but right to Bethel, right to the center of all of this appalling evil. Can you imagine Amos' eyes, coming from godly Judah and walking into all of this? I know how our team felt arriving in south India last year and seeing all the idols everywhere, the statues and the pictures, in your vehicle, at the hotel desk, in front yards, on buildings, in temples by the road, even in every thatched hut in the village! They have not only sacred cows, but elephants and monkeys and snakes and who knows what else. The things that Satan has con-

vinced people to do in the name of worshipping God are simply beyond comprehension! Those are the kinds of places God sends His messengers, the tough places! And they're not all far away! Bethel was only 23 miles north of Tekoa where Amos lived, yet it was in another world! God has called some of us to serve not 5 miles away in Philadelphia. Every student my daughter taught at Esperanza Academy Charter School in Hunting Park had someone they loved killed by gunfire or in a drug overdose or some other senseless way, so much so that they weren't even shocked by it any more. You don't have to go far to serve the women at Cradle of Hope or the homeless at one of the city missions or soup kitchens. Listen, God is looking for people who are willing to leave the comfort zone of their nice "Christianized" home and follow His call to TOUGH places among difficult people who desperately need to experience the love of Jesus! That's where God has the greatest need for His servants and that's where He often does His greatest works!

By this time, you might be thinking I'm about one brick shy of a load! What kind of idea is this, that God might want us to expose ourselves to danger and difficulty and risk all to take His message to the people who least want to hear it? *Well, back in 1792 William Carey had the audacity to publish a little booklet that he called "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens". Titles were long in those days. It simply said God had called us to send missionaries to reach the rest of the world that is without Christ. He wanted to reach the masses of India, but the Baptist churches rejected him outright. During one meeting he was abruptly interrupted by an older minister who said, "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me." Oswald Smith says, "even the Directors of the East India Company opposed [Carey's] work. Following is the idiotic resolution they presented to Parliament: 'The sending out of missionaries into one Eastern possession is the maddest, most extravagant, most costly, most indefensible project which has ever been suggested by a moonstruck fanatic.'" Smith goes on to say, "In 1796, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland passed the following infamous resolution: 'To spread the knowledge of the gospel amongst barbarians and heathens seems to be highly preposterous.' One speaker in the House of Commons said that he would rather see a band of devils let loose in India than a band of missionaries. Such was the opposition to missions when Carey set forth. Yet Carey himself was able to write, 'Why is my soul disquieted within me? Things may turn out better than I expect. Everything is known to God, and God cares.'" William Carey endured in spite of opposition, and became the father of the modern missionary movement! [The Challenge of Life, Oswald J. Smith]* Amos obeyed God and went, and oh, the opposition HE encountered! But you'll have to wait until next week to hear about that. The real question is, will you obey the challenge? Will you heed the call? Will you use all the means God has placed at your disposal to see heathen people with no real knowledge of God find life in Jesus Christ?

The Blessedness Of Persevering

Amos: The Faithful Prophet Who Endured In Spite Of Opposition (Part 2)

Last week we began to consider the life of Amos, an ordinary shepherd and herdsman living in Judah whom God called to deliver his message as a prophet and sent him north to Bethel in Israel, to the very center of Israel's moral debauchery, pagan idolatry and blatant injustice. Even though he knew what he was going into, when God called him, he dropped everything in his life and went. And there in Bethel:

I. Amos Delivered God's Message We obviously can't study it all this morning, but if you like, you can find a great detailed summary of the book of Amos at this link www.bible.org/seriespage/amos; we'll just read a sample: **2:6-16**. The basic message that Amos repeatedly preached had two points. First of all:

1. Israel is more guilty than all the surrounding nations That's what the whole *For three transgressions and for four...* formula is about. You'll find those words repeated seven times in the first two chapters. One by one, Amos condemned all of Israel's neighboring lands but then he landed on Israel as the eighth. In Hebrew poetry that's the double overfulfillment of the statement. You can read a long explanation at that link, but God's point is, "Israel, you are more guilty than all of the rest of them! Your sin is greater than everybody else's! Why? Because YOU KNOW BETTER!" That's what Amos was sent to tell them in order that he could tell them the second part of his message which was that:

2. God will soon judge her sins, destroy the nation and send her into captivity In summary, it's like Jonah's message to Nineveh, "Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed!" Amos was saying, "Israel, God will soon destroy you for your sins!" God didn't put a number on it in this case but He did have Amos repeat the message multiple times, "God will not tolerate your sins much longer; He will destroy you!"

You know, even in the Gospel which we have been sent to carry to the world there is that component. Judgment is coming and people need to repent of their sins! Paul was preaching in Athens where idols were everywhere when he said, *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.* - Acts 17:30-31. Jesus said in Luke's version of the Great Commission that *...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* - 24:47. The message we carry is certainly a message of incredible love shown at the cross but it carries with it a sentence of judgment and a call for repentance of sin and a demand for a change of lifestyle, the very same things Amos preached to Israel. Don't leave that part out! It is not enough to simply say, "Believe in Jesus and you will go to heaven!" Anyone would sign up for that. But repentance comes first. A sorrow over sins and a knowledge that judgment is coming is what drives us to the cross to find forgiveness and experience the great love of Jesus. I remember how for weeks be-

fore I was saved as a teen, I lay awake at night in fear that I would be lost. Without that awakening to sin, there is no genuine salvation. Well, you can imagine how well that message went over in a land that was victorious and prosperous and committed to immorality and idolatry! About as well as it goes over when you preach it here! Wherever God's message goes, wherever the Gospel goes, it saves some, but at the same time it also creates offense. Obviously, Amos didn't just say everything written in his book one time and go home; I can read it in less than half an hour. These are summaries of things that he preached over and over again in different places, at different venues in the city. In the beginning, I'm sure the crowds liked to hear him proclaim God's judgment on the other nations, but when he began to attack their own evil practices, it created great offense and before long:

II. Amos Faced Strong Opposition There is one keynote incident he recorded - **7:10-13**. The opposition Amos faced is in many ways very much like the opposition that any number of believers and missionaries face all around the world. First of all:

1. he was opposed by the religious leadership Amaziah was evidently the chief priest of the worship of the golden calf there at Bethel, the one charged with the responsibility of seeing that its religion flourished. And though Bethel was not King Jeroboam's residence, it was his sanctuary, the place where the king himself came to worship because it was closest to Samaria. The Jewish Targum calls Amaziah the prince or president of Bethel, seeming to indicate that he was more than a priest, that he was also responsible for the civil government of the city, administering it on behalf of the king. So on both counts, Amos' message was endangering him in his responsibilities. He sounds like the Pharisees who opposed Jesus, the highest religious leaders and yet the rulers of the Jews. Is it not always the religious and community leaders who oppose the message of the Gospel most vehemently? Last April Narsbek and his wife and brother-in-law pulled into a school yard in a village near Naryn, Kyrgyzstan to deliver two carloads of Samaritan's Purse gift boxes to the children containing school supplies. The imam from the local mosque showed up and demanded that they leave. When they didn't, he left and returned with 15 or so budding young Muslim missionaries and they physically attacked Narsbek and his brother-in-law, trying to choke them. Then when they got free and jumped in the cars, they threw stones breaking out all the windows and injuring them. They drove out over a gate to get away and were pursued on the road. It has now become a case the believers there are prosecuting in court to help all believers in Kyrgyzstan have their rights respected. Religious leaders, whether imams, shamans, monks, priests, or even liberal Protestant leaders feel threatened by our message; they often feel it their duty to stop us! We ought to expect that; Jesus did. But Amos persevered through his confrontation with religious leadership. Then notice that:

2. he was accused of conspiracy against the government and reported Amaziah sent a message to King Jeroboam to say "Amos is conspiring against YOU..." He took Amos' words and twisted them, just the way the Jewish leaders accused Jesus to Pilate, "*We found this man subverting our nation, forbidding us to pay the tribute tax to Caesar and claiming that he himself is Christ, a king.*" - Lk. 23:32. Maybe Amaziah accused Amos of being a CIJ agent (you know, Central Intelligence of Judah)! Americans always get accused of being CIA! Of course, even if nothing happens, as it didn't in Amos' case (I guess Jeroboam was too busy with the affairs of state to care), the true goal of this tactic is to create fear in us, to make us afraid of what's going to happen to us and frighten us away. People who want to stop us from sharing are always threatening and trying to find ways to make us afraid, but Amos persevered despite false accusations. Then, notice that:

3. he was resented for the impact that he was having on people Amaziah said, *The land cannot bear all his words*. That is to say, "Amos is making an impact on the people and if we don't do something, it's going to result in a change in the system! People are believing him and abandoning the worship here at Bethel. We can't let that happen!" What did the Pharisees say to each other about Jesus? "*See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!*" - Jn. 12:19. They were driven by jealousy. As you have an impact and people give their lives to Jesus and change their behavior, the status quo changes. Resentment builds and jealousy rises, maybe from other family members, maybe from employers, maybe from neighbors. Amos persevered through that resentment. Now all of that was in the message Amaziah sent to the king. But notice that in verse 12 Amaziah gets personal. Amos':

4. his motive for doing ministry was impugned There is no record of how Amos supported himself during this time in Samaria. I rather doubt that he had saved up for it and he was evidently surviving there over a reasonably long time so I'm guessing that there were those of the faithful in Israel who believed Amos' words and helped him by putting him up or feeding him. So Amaziah accuses him of doing it all for the money, of making a living by preaching doom for profit! Isn't that always the suspicion, that somehow we get something out of this? Our missionaries spend years raising support so that they can leave home and travel to a strange place, struggle to learn the language, push through all the rejection, start, for instance, an educational center to teach people computers for which they raise the funds from back home, and somehow they're accused of doing it all for their own benefit! Even here the church is often accused of being all about money, of being greedy. But Amos endured through that! And finally notice that:

5. he was told, if not forced, to go home It was explicit. *Get out! Go back to Judah and preach destruction to them! We don't want you here!* We're not sure what actually sent Amos home, whether they eventually threw him out or not, but that threat and even the real experience of deportation happens to missionaries. A couple of years ago it happened

to two different families I knew in Kyrgyzstan. They got notice that their visas were no longer valid and on very short notice they had to uproot their families and leave permanently. It crashed their worlds; they tried to make sense of it and figure out why God would allow that to happen after HE sent them there. If you proclaim God's message, you may be shunned by family. Any number of Kyrgyz young people I've met were thrown out of their homes completely after they believed. You might lose a job or be thrown out of school for sharing your faith. Being on the receiving end of complete rejections like this is not pleasant, but we are called to endure it as Jesus did. But what I really want you to see is this: despite the opposition he experienced:

III. Amos Faithfully Continued To Proclaim God's Word right in the face of the opposition. He didn't run and hide or suddenly clam up and slink off to consider his options. He boldly answers Amaziah - **7: 14-17**. He shows no fear at all of Amaziah and all the things that were threatened against him. I want you to notice two things in his reply. First:

1. he realized that his mission was not his own idea, but God's He says, "I'm no prophet. I was involved in the middle of my livestock business and my fig trees. This wasn't my idea; GOD SENT ME HERE!" That's what will enable you to endure, realizing that wherever you are sent, you are not on a mission of your own making; you are on GOD's mission! If God sent you there, you don't leave until God sends you somewhere else, no matter how much opposition you encounter or who tells you to go home! Listen: *...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* - **Is. 55:8-9**. God doesn't do things the way we would do them. He sends us to places and to situations where He knows we'll be opposed and persecuted and endure suffering. He doesn't expect us to understand it; He expects us to be faithful and to endure it! Secondly:

2. he realized that his message was not his own, but God's Amos says, *Now hear the Word of the Lord...* and he gives Amaziah the message from God applied directly to him. "You'll be carried off into exile and die and not only will your family will be destroyed, but all Israel will be carried into exile exactly as I have been preaching." In other words, "The message is not mine; it is God's! He sent me here to deliver it and whatever He says IS going to happen!" That's what will enable you to endure, realizing that the message you carry is not your own message but the enduring infallible Word of God and what He says WILL come to pass. Listen: *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* - **Is. 55:10-11**. The message you deliver is God's message and it will ALWAYS accomplish the purpose for which He had you deliver it! So keep on delivering it, no matter whether you see any results, no matter whether people oppose you and accuse you and tell you to leave. The message WILL accomplish God's purpose! Don't ever stop delivering it!

Well, if Amos' book is written in any semblance of chronological order, Amos did indeed continue to preach and to share the visions that God gave him with the people of Israel. But eventually Amos did go home and probably back to his sheep and cattle, however he did not leave until after he had been in Israel at least two years, we estimate. And we estimate that because:

IV. God Confirmed His Own Words Through Amos Go back to that little phrase at the end of 1:1. It is so significant. Amos was sent to Israel *two years before THE earthquake*. What earthquake? Well God had Amos preaching things like this: **6:11, 8:8, 9:1, 5**. What does that sound like to you? Well, God confirmed those words of destruction:

1. initially by a great earthquake two years later about 755 BC It must have been a very strong earthquake as archaeologists have confirmed the apparent destruction from that quake in the ruins of Hazor and of other cities and not only that, it was so severe that:

a. it was remembered for hundreds of years Here it is simply called "the earthquake", taking for granted that anyone reading it would know which one was meant and when it happened. Look with me at **Zech. 14:5**. 300 years later Zechariah implies that Judah remembers the earthquake that happened during the days of Uzziah, that is, Amos' earthquake, and how they all ran to get away from it! Interestingly, according to all the Jewish sources:

b. its cause appears to be the intrusion of Uzziah into the priests' office Remember the story of how King Uzziah of Judah became lifted up with pride and went into the Temple to offer sacrifice and all the priests gathered and opposed him? Remember how while he raged at them, he was suddenly smitten with leprosy? Well, here's what the Jewish historian Josephus says about that day: *And when they cried out that he must go out of the temple, and not transgress against God, he was wroth at them, and threatened to kill them, unless they would hold their peace. In the meantime, a great earthquake shook the ground and a rent was made in the temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone through it, and fell upon the king's face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately. And before the city, at a place called Eroge, half the mountain broke off from the rest on the west, and rolled itself four furlongs [half a mile], and stood still at the east mountain, till the roads, as well as the king's gardens, were spoiled by the obstruction.* That great earthquake made a wide crack in the Temple in Jerusalem and since Bethel is only 12 miles north of Jerusalem, you can imagine the reaction of the people in the temple there in the idolatrous temple as they see its pillars shake and pieces of the roof come crashing down. You can just see

people running out of the temple and out of their houses, running for their lives and thinking, "Amos was right! God is destroying our city!" One can only wish that he had still been present to cry, "Repent!" even louder! But if there was any repentance in Israel, it was only temporary. Bethel and all Israel went right back to its debauchery and Amos' prophecies were confirmed by God:

2. ultimately in Israel's deportation to Assyria in 722 BC 35 years later Samaria was captured and destroyed along with many other cities and many of the remaining Israelites were carried away into captivity, exactly as Amos had said it would happen. It was the end of Israel as an independent nation.

Dear friends, the message you carry is the message of God and HE will let none of His words fall to the ground! He will fulfill them in His time! Don't give up, no matter how much opposition you must endure! One day this Gospel of the Kingdom WILL be preached to all the peoples of the earth and then the end WILL come! Wherever God sends you, whatever He calls you to share, endure! Stand firm as Amos and the prophets of old did and God will bless your obedience! *The history of American foreign missions begins exactly 200 years ago in 1812 with the commissioning of eight missionaries who set sail for India. The best known among them were Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann. Upon arrival all of them were denied permission to work in India and the Judsons sailed to the island of Mauritius but on the way, Ann gave birth to a stillborn child. Eventually they arrived in Burma but it took more than two years to learn the language and they lost their son Roger at the age of 2. There was strong resistance to conversion and it was six years until they saw their first convert in 1819, but immediately the government began to torture some of the young Christians. During the civil war with Britain, Adoniram was accused of being a spy and held in the "Death Prison" from 1824-25 which included being hung upside down in leg-irons at night as well as a "Death March" that nearly killed him. Then the next year, in 1826, his wife died, followed six months later by their 2-year-old daughter Maria. In 1831 he married Sarah Boardman, a colleague whose husband had also died; they also had a stillborn son and lost a 1-year-old; Sarah herself died in 1845. Three years later in 1848 he married his third wife, Emily, but at last he himself died at sea in 1850 from ongoing tuberculosis and she followed him in death in 1854 from the same cause. At the time of his death there were only between a dozen and twenty five enduring Burmese converts to Christ. But the one key thing Adoniram Judson did accomplish during his lifetime of suffering was to translate the Bible into the Burmese language. Listen as Paul Borthwick relates the story of his own trip to Burma just a few years ago: "In a meeting with youth and youth leaders, we picked up a copy of the Burmese Bible. The Burmese script was unintelligible to us, but we noticed one English sentence on the title page: "by the Reverend A. Judson." A Bible translation that had stood the test of time - over 150 years! It stands as a testimony to Judson's scholarship and meticulous linguistic study. I took the Bible over to our host, the head of the Evangelical Fellowship. "Matthew" I asked, pointing to the English sentence, "Do you know who this man is—Judson?" " Yes!" he exclaimed. "Whenever someone mentions the name 'Judson' great tears come to our eyes because we know what he and his family suffered for us." He went on with great emotion, "We know about the sicknesses they endured. We read about the Death March and the Death Prison. We know about the wives who died, and the children who died, and the co-workers who died. BUT TODAY, THERE ARE OVER 2 MILLION CHRISTIANS IN MYANMAR, AND EVERY ONE OF US TRACES OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE TO ONE MAN—THE REVEREND ADONIRAM JUDSON."* Later in the 19th century, one of Adoniram's only surviving sons, Edward, speaking at the dedication of the Judson Memorial Church in New York City, summarized his father's story: *Suffering and success go together. If you are succeeding without suffering, it is because others before you have suffered; if you are suffering without succeeding, it is that others after you may succeed.* [Paul Borthwick, *Mission Frontiers*, May/June 2012, p. 7-9] If you're facing opposition and suffering today, think of Jesus. Heb. 12:3 says, *Think of all the hostility HE endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.* I leave you with the words of James 5:10-11: *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Remember them, think about them, and persevere as they did and you will be blessed!*

JONAH: RESISTING GOD OUTLINE

I. Resisting Outwardly In Disobeying Chs. 1-2

1. the path of disobedience 1:1-3
2. the process of discipline 1:4-17
3. the path of repentance Ch. 2

II. Resisting Inwardly While Obeying Chs. 3-4

1. God's use of obedience Ch. 3
2. God's dealing with resistance Ch. 4

III. Irresistible Lessons from Jonah

IV. Unmistakeable Symbols In Jonah

JONAH: RESISTING GOD 1:1-3 The Path of Disobedience

If I were to ask you what the book of Jonah was all about, the #1 answer would be "It's the story of a man who got swallowed by a fish!" And that's all most people remember. Now that's in the book but it's not what the book is all about. It's the story of a man who resisted God. His name was Jonah and he lived in the region of Galilee in a town called Gath-Hepher about 760 B.C. He was a man who worshipped and loved our God; in fact, he was a prophet which means that God would speak directly to him and give him messages to preach. 2 Kings 14:25 tells us that God did in fact use him in that ministry near the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the time of Jeroboam II. But this book is the record of only about 5 weeks' worth of his life. It is the story of what happened to him on the one occasion when he decided to resist God's orders. And later God had him write it down in a book for all the generations of believers to come so that we could understand the folly of resisting God. Now there are two ways to resist God and Jonah tried them both. In fact, you see him:

- I. Resisting Outwardly In Disobeying Chs. 1-2
- II. Resisting Inwardly While Obeying Chs. 3-4

See, you can just plain disobey God by not doing what He commands or you can obey outwardly and still be resisting Him in your heart. Today we're going to concentrate on the matter of outward resistance or disobedience in chapter 1. The first thing we must consider is:

I. The Reasons for Disobedience (1-3) God commanded Jonah to go and preach His message in the city of Nineveh. Why didn't Jonah want to go? Well, the reasons Jonah didn't want to obey are probably the same reasons that we choose to disobey God in our lives:

1. reluctance to expend what is required Nineveh was located 550 miles east over on the east side of the Tigris River. Because Jonah didn't have bus fare, that probably meant about a month of walking. Further it was a large city for its day, having a number of smaller towns in its environs and requiring 3 days' worth of walking to go all through it and preach his simple message. How would you feel if I told you to walk to Washington DC and preach a message to all its inhabitants all by yourself? Many times we don't want to put out the effort to do what God wants us to do. There is a cost involved and we're not willing to pay it. It's not that what God wants is a bad thing; it's just that I'm not willing to pay the price to do it. For example, I sense God calling me to missions but I'm not ready to leave family and home and the security of living in the USA. That could have been Jonah's problem but it wasn't.

2. fear for personal well-being Nineveh was one of the chief cities and at times the capitol of the Assyrian Empire. The King lived there. The Assyrian Empire was the greatest empire on earth at this time and it was known for violence, cruelty, and atrocity. In historical records we find that Assyrian kings bragged about their conquests and how they would make pyramids out of the heads of the slain and skin people alive and stretch the skins on the city walls. If I was Jonah, I'd be thinking, "This is a suicide mission! Me march into the capitol city of the most violent empire on earth, our enemies? Not me, I'm scared!" Sometimes fear is what keeps us from obeying God. We're afraid of failing, of getting hurt, of being rejected if we obey God. We're afraid if we give, we won't have enough; if we try to talk and settle our differences the other will get mad; if we stand up against the boss, we'll lose our job. So we disobey. Jonah may have felt like that but that wasn't his real problem.

3. rejection of God's obvious will If you're reluctant or afraid, that's one thing and God is patient and will help us over those hurdles. But sometimes we just plain reject what we know is God's will. Compare **4:2**. Jonah knew if he went and preached God would spare Nineveh and Jonah didn't want that to happen. He hated Assyria. They were the enemy. They were violent and cruel. They had attacked Israel during the reign of Jehu and made them pay tribute for some years. Jonah didn't want God to save the Ninevites; he wanted them to get what they deserved! He was deliberately pitting his will against God's, saying "NO" to God. And that, my friends, is what really gets us into trouble. "No, God I won't forgive that person even though you say I must...no I won't work on my marriage; I'm going to drop this partner and get another even though you say no... no I won't apologize..." Now let me tell you there's a fine line between "I just can't" or "I'm afraid" and plain "I won't". God has a way of one by one taking away all your excuses, all your "I can't" and "I'm afraid" and leaving you standing at a crossroads where the bottom line is either "I will" or "I won't". Jonah had a predecessor whom God also sent to a faraway land to something he didn't want to do. In Ex. 3 God told Moses to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go and lead them out to Canaan. First Moses asks for more information, but then the objections begin. Compare Ex. 4:1, "I'm afraid" they won't believe me. So, God gives him three miraculous signs to use to prove himself and erases that objection. In verse 10 he says, "I can't" do it because I can't speak well, I have no ability. So, God calmly tells him "I made your mouth, I'll put the words in it, I'll tell you every word to say". Now he's reduced to ground zero in verse 13, "It is not my will; I won't!" and that's when God gets angry. Fortunately, Moses was smart enough to know he was in big trouble so he quickly gave in and went! But Jonah didn't! Jonah deliberately chose his "I won't" over God's "you must". He resisted God and disobeyed. Now when you disobey God, that is usually not the end of it. It follows a path or a pattern and so we look at Jonah's life to discover:

II. The Route of Disobedience Now it begins very simply with:

1. a declining to do what God wants (3) The Hebrew and KJV say, "But Jonah rose up to flee..." When God spoke to Jonah in verse 2, He said "rise up and go." Literally Jonah must have been sitting or lying down when God spoke to him. Perhaps it was in a vision at night. Now do you think that instantly Jonah sprang to his feet and took off at a dead run for Joppa. No, this took a little planning. He sat there and thought about it, mulling over what to do. How long we don't know. He may have waited hours or even days before he decided to go to Tarshish. But in the meantime, he simply declined to do what God had said, which was to rise up and go to Nineveh. That's how disobedience starts, with simply doing nothing, not moving. If there's something you're supposed to do, the first step in disobeying is just continuing for a while not doing it. If there's something you're supposed to stop doing, the first step is not changing, simply keeping on as before. It is mostly a mental step. Your mind is torn between two. You know what God wants and you mull it over, trying to make sure you are ready to actively disobey and in the meantime, you just do nothing different; you simply decline to move. That's what makes disobedience so easy many times. But it never stops there. It becomes:

2. a doing of things contrary to what God wants Now Jonah could have just stayed where he was forever and done nothing but instead, he rose up finally and, instead of going to Nineveh which is 500 miles east, he walked down to the Mediterranean coast to Joppa and got on a ship to sail to Tarshish which is on the coast of Spain, 1200 miles due West. In other words, he did as much the opposite of what God had told him as he could. He headed twice as far in the opposite direction, actually about as far as he could go in the known world of that day! When you decline to obey God, you very seldom just stay like you are. Somebody said that spiritually you're always moving, either forwards or backwards but you never stand still. Very soon you find yourself actively doing things contrary to what God wants. You find yourself starting to dabble in sin and if it continues, you may find yourself involved in things you never dreamed you would be, things as far from God's will as you can get. Look at David: you can't tell me that the urge to commit adultery with Bathsheba just flashed upon him totally unexpectedly when he walked out on the palace roof. First came lust. I would guess he had noticed her before; after all she was his next-door neighbor and wife of one of his top military men. But even then, as he stood there watching her bathe, he declined to do God's will in dealing with his own wrong thoughts. Eventually the mental wasn't enough and he sent messengers to get her and committed adultery. But it didn't stop there; he started doing deceitful things to cover it up. He called Uriah home from battle and tried to get him to go home to his wife and it didn't work. So, in desperation what started as wrong thoughts turned to a planned murder in battle. Disobedience is a road, a path and once you start it leads to other things until you break the chain and get back on the right road. Now the other thing that happens is:

3. a desire to flee the Lord's presence (3, 10) Literally, he fled from the face of the Lord. And the word flee, interestingly enough, is used in Hebrew in almost every case to mean fleeing from an enemy. Knowing he had disobeyed, he didn't want to be in the Lord's presence as before, so, foolishly, he thought he would run somewhere where God would let him alone. Now God did not seem like the close friend and loving Father as before; he seemed like the enemy, the Judge, the one to avoid. And what happens to you when you start to disobey? You stop reading your Bible, praying, going to church. Why? Because you don't want to be around God since every time you are, there's this awful feeling "What about this thing.. you must deal with it?" And so even though you are saved, you grow farther and farther from God as you try to hide from Him. Even Adam and Eve tried that. But it doesn't work, as Jonah found out. You can't run from God because He comes along! Jonah found Him there at work in the boat on the ocean and if he would have made it to Tarshish, he would have found God there. Compare **Ps. 139:7-12**. You can't escape God. Yet if you persist

in trying, if you continue along the path of disobedience, God begins to institute the process of discipline. Ordinarily a few hours or a few days of being in a disobedient state is enough and you feel miserable enough about it that you turn and confess your sin and correct your actions and your spiritual life continues on in a forward direction. But when it doesn't and you persist in following the path of disobedience, God begins to bring His discipline to bear on your life. And that's what the rest of the chapter is about.

Let me close by telling you there was a time in my life when I tried to resist God. When my pastor tried to talk to me about considering going into ministry, instantly my mind said "No way pal!" That led to praying about it, but in my mind, I already knew the answer. And "I can't" and "I'm afraid" soon evaporated and I was praying "Lord, I don't want to; change your will!" I kept on with my spiritual life but I began to thrust around in this and that trying to see if I could be happy without doing God's will. And no matter where I was, God kept me miserable for six months. In college, at home, in all my favorite hobbies, at work, everywhere, I was miserable. There was no peace, no rest, no real joy. Until one night I got down on my knees and said, "OK God, you win, I'll be anything you want me to be, what's next". Friend, you'll never be happy resisting God, and you can't win anyway. If there's anything you're resisting about today, anything to which you're saying "NO" or "I can't" or "I'm afraid", let go of it before God has to use discipline!

JONAH: RESISTING GOD

1:4-17 The Process of Discipline

How does God deal with us when we resist Him? Does He just let us go and forget about us? No, fortunately He doesn't. Jonah resisted God by not going to Nineveh and fleeing to Tarshish instead and God didn't just forget about him. God brought something to bear in his life: the process we call discipline. Now before we look at it in Jonah's life, we had better be clear about just what discipline is.

I. The Definition of Discipline: child-training - Heb. 12:5-6 To most of us the words *discipline* and *punishment* are synonymous. When I do something wrong, God punishes me and that's discipline. That's a very simplistic view and if you raise your kids with that understanding, then they'll have some problems! The Greek word *discipline* is *paideia* which means child-training. True discipline is the whole process of training up a child in the way that he should go. So, if you think about it, discipline has two sides:

1. positive discipline is giving growth experiences You put a child through certain positive experiences that will cause him to grow and mature. You send him to school. You have family devotions. You let him have to do some difficult things like go to a funeral or earn the money to buy something he wants. And all of that is part of child-training, of discipline. And so God does with us. His discipline is not only when we're resisting Him. God is constantly child-training us to be mature by the experiences that come our way. The Christians to whom this letter is addressed weren't necessarily being disobedient. They were suffering hardship and persecution (3-4). The NIV of verse 7 states the point. Hardship is child-training, preparing us for maturity. But then there is also:

2. negative discipline is correction I try to instruct and teach and train my children, but when they disobey, I have to deal with them in a negative sense, to correct them. Here's how it works:

a. verbally rebuking when disobedient (5) First, you tell the child and see whether that's enough. That's where God starts with us. When we disobey, He speaks to us through the Word, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and our conscience. And many times, even most times, that is enough. After we clearly hear His voice, we confess our sin and correct our behavior. But if disobedience persists, then we must be:

b. physically correcting as necessary In verse 6 *punishes* is literally *whips*. Now I'm sure that doesn't mean flogging within an inch of life! Different cultures have had different methods of correcting kids. The Hebrews used the rod, a tap from the shepherd's staff in the appropriate place. The Roman culture used a whip or we might say a belt or a switch, in the same way. And there is something about a sharp tap that often does what standing in a corner or being denied a privilege doesn't quite accomplish. It teaches that when I disobey it's going to hurt me! So, if we persist in disobeying, God begins to work in the circumstances of our lives to cause enough pain to drive us back to Him. Now before you think of discipline in a totally negative light, please note:

II. The Promise of Discipline - Heb. 12: 5 tells us this is a word of encouragement, not discouragement! You see:

1. it is a benefit of our relationship with God (7) An undisciplined child left to go in his own way by a parent is headed for a miserable life and probably for an eternity in hell because it will be very hard for God to deal with them. Discipline is a benefit. The Lord disciplines those He loves. If God left us go our own way, it wouldn't hurt Him, except in his sorrowing over us, but it sure would hurt us. God loves us too much to settle for letting us go. He's committed to growing and maturing us, conforming us to the image of His Son. So:

2. it is exercised for our good (10) God never makes a mistake. I know as a parent, I do! Sometimes I mete out discipline in anger or put my kid through something unreasonable. Not God. Every step, positive or negative, that He

takes in child-training us is always for our good and is aimed at making us more holy, more like Him. Now with all this in mind, let's go back to Jonah's life and see:

III. The Illustration of Discipline - Jonah 1:3-17 Let me ask you a question to see if you understood me. In what verse did God's discipline of Jonah start? Verse 4? No, it started in verses 1-2! The very first thing you see in Jonah is:

1. God's positive discipline through obedience (1) Jonah had been obeying God and preaching His message in Israel. But Jonah had a problem in his life as we said last week. He hated Assyrians. He hated them so badly he'd rather see them die than be saved. So God started out to put Jonah through a growing experience, "Go to Nineveh and preach!" God has a way of making you face the things you don't like in yourself. He puts you in spots where, if you're going to obey, you have to deal with them. But Jonah refused. He disobeyed and ran away. And when we do that, when we refuse God's will and enter the path of disobedience, then God has to begin to use corrective measures:

2. God's corrective discipline of disobedience You can see here two ways He does it:

a. through the circumstances of nature (4) Your car breaks down. You get sick. You lose your job. Your ship starts to sink. It's all the same thing. God has such control over the circumstances of life that He can bring them to bear on you and stop you in the path you're going, until you realize that you can't make it going on in your own way and you're ready to turn around and go His way. But He also corrects us:

b. through the actions of men (13-15) It was the sailors whom God used to finally deal with Jonah. Reluctant though they were, they were the ones who put him into his final disciplinary circumstance; they threw him overboard. And God will often use the actions of people both positive and negative to turn us around. It may be the love of a friend who sticks by us or the hatred of an enemy who attacks us. It may be a spouse or a child. But the point is that God even uses other people to correct us. Now let's examine in Jonah's life more closely:

3. the painful experience of corrective discipline What is it like when you persist in resisting God? How does it hurt? Well:

a. you expend more effort (3) Tarshish was twice as far away as Nineveh. And sailing was dangerous at best, even years later in Paul's day. As much effort as it would have been to obey God, it was a lot more effort to go the other way! It's hard to resist God! And in the verses are two reasons why:

b. you must find your own direction Out of all the options, Jonah had to choose his own. He could have traveled in any direction to any land, gone down to Egypt, north to Asia Minor, anywhere. You see it was always: God led and he followed. God said "Go and do" and he went. But now he was on his own; the decisions were left to him, no more guidance. God's not going to guide you when you're resisting Him and so you make wrong choices and end up in trouble often. Further:

c. you must pay your own way Jonah paid the fare. If Jonah hadn't already had it stored away, do you think God would have provided for him and paid his way to Tarshish? No way. God's not going to support rebellion against Himself! If you want to resist God, you're on your own. You've been living by trusting God and praying for your needs. Don't expect that to work when you're going in the path of resistance! Another thing that happens is:

d. you become insensitive to God's working (5) Here's Jonah, a violent storm comes up and all the while he's been lying down below deck sleeping. He's in another world somewhere while his life is in great danger. Somebody has to come and wake him up and say, "This is a god doing this and maybe it's your god!" As you persist in resisting, there's a sense in which your heart gets hardened and all these circumstances come upon you but it takes a while for you to see that this is God! God is working, stopping you, pointing you back the other way! And often you have to suffer longer until you wake up like the prodigal son and come to your senses and run back to Father! Now the worst part of resisting God is:

e. you trouble and endanger others (5-12) You see, the others were in trouble because of Jonah. Because of his disobedience they had to endure the terror of the storm and the loss of the ship's cargo. Their lives were affected by his. And so often when you disobey, the consequences do not fall on you alone. Your wrong choices endanger your wife, your family, your parents, your friends, others you care about. You can't sin in a vacuum. Until you wake up, others will be hurt. However, there is a good side to this:

f. your discipline is used by God (13-16) God used this storm, as horrible as it was, to teach those sailors that He was the true God! Jonah was not big on the conversion of Gentiles but God worked through his disobedience to convert a few anyway! It's kind of like Ananias and Sapphira. God took them home when they resisted Him and that struck fear into the community; it showed them He was real. God will use you, one way or another, either as a servant or an example!

g. you may incur great suffering (17) Have you ever been close to drowning? Think of the terror of it. Compare 2:3, 5, 6. God put Jonah through some horrible suffering. Then think of what it must be like in the gloppy stomach of a great fish, dark and surrounded by ooze and still alive for 3 days. Now God doesn't always do it this way but if that's what it takes, He may put you through great suffering, through physical pain or mental anguish. And:

h. you may even face death (2:1) Jonah was dying and if he hadn't cried out to God, no doubt he would have. You know there are times when God takes it that far. Compare 1 Jn. 5:16. There is a sin unto death, a rebellion against God of such magnitude that God has to take us off this earth to heaven to prevent us from dishonoring His name any further. I think of Samson who after his licentious life finally betrayed God to the point where God let him die with the Philistines.

Do you see the bottom line? You can't win anyway! You have the freedom to try to resist God. But God will use you in spite of yourself or else He'll take you home. In any event you can't have it the way you want it. You can't make God just go away and let you alone and let you live peacefully in your rebellion. He's going to win. When my son was young, sometimes when he would get a swat for something, he'd get really angry and go to his room and slam the door and yell at the top of his lungs "Go away, go away, let me alone!" And keep it up for 15 minutes! And at that moment that's what he wanted, me to go away and let him do whatever it is he had his heart set on. Isn't that what we all want when we're resisting God on some issue or other? But he was usually pretty glad a little later that dad didn't go away when we would hug and make up. I don't know about you, but I'm sure glad God doesn't give up on me. I would think, "Son, why do you put yourself through all this. If you would just obey in the first place, you could have saved an hour's worth of feeling terrible." Isn't that what we learn from Jonah? If we would just obey and grow through God's positive child-training, we could save ourselves so much sorrow. Won't you learn from Jonah?

JONAH: RESISTING GOD

Ch. 2 The Path of Repentance

So far in Jonah's life we have seen why we disobey God and we've examined how God disciplines us when we resist Him. Today we want to focus on the path back to fellowship with God, repentance. But no matter how much I'd like to get on with that, I can't get away from the fact that Jonah's repentance occurred underwater in the belly of a fish! So, we'd better talk first of all about:

I. The Problem of the Fish (1:17-2:1) These two verses have been the subject of an incredible amount of controversy. Unbelievers love to point to them and say, "Now there is proof that the Bible is simply a collection of legends; no man could be swallowed by a whale and live for 3 days!" Of course, they say the same thing about Noah's ark or the resurrection of Christ or any of the other miracles contained in the Bible. Liberal Christianity, which does not hold that the Bible is inerrant, answers, "Jonah is simply a story told to illustrate a point; it doesn't have to be true!" If that is the case, then Jesus was ignorant because He said with His own lips that Jonah was in the belly of the fish. Friends, Jonah was literally swallowed by a huge fish and lived. It's a miracle. I don't have any trouble believing in miracles. If our God can't do things that go beyond normal occurrences, then He's not very much of a God, just a glorified man! Now I don't think it is necessary or even possible to explain how a miracle happens, but so you can be intelligently informed, I would like to clear up some lies about Jonah that you will hear from unbelievers. Actually, the book of Jonah is filled with one miracle after another and in these two verses there are really four miracles:

1. the miracle of circumstance Some of God's greatest miracles are simply timing. At the very time and place that Jonah was thrown into the sea, God had a fish ready and waiting to receive him. This and #4 are the real miracles here. It was no fluke of nature. God provided the fish; it was part of His plan.

2. the miracle of swallowing You will hear from critics, "a whale cannot possibly swallow a man, nor is there a fish large enough to." In the first place, the Hebrew and Greek never say anything about a whale. The Hebrew says "great fish"; the Greek where Jesus refers to Jonah in Mt. 12:40 does not say whale or fish but *ketos*, a great sea creature or sea monster, that is, a large ocean creature. But even if it was a whale, there are a whole class of whales, to which humpback and finback whales belong, that have no teeth and do not chew their food but could very easily swallow a man. They also feed on objects floating on the surface and have large air chambers in their heads that would be accessible from the mouth. Further there is official record of them swallowing creatures, for example, a dog that was later recovered alive. So, a whale could have swallowed Jonah but while we cannot rule out a whale, the language seems to indicate a fish. Well, there is a species of shark known as the whale shark or rhinodon. It also does not chew its food and would be quite capable of swallowing a man whole. In fact, there are verified instances where an intact skeleton or body has been found in a whale shark's stomach. So, it is not even beyond credibility to believe that a fish swallowed Jonah. It remains a miracle that God had the fish there and that the fish did swallow him.

3. the miracle of preservation This is the greater miracle. Physically a man could easily be swallowed, but could he live? Obviously, it is not very likely. Yet there is even a verified case in the last century of an English sailor who was swallowed by a whale shark; it was killed 2 days later and the man was recovered from its stomach alive! If this could

occur simply by natural coincidence, could not the God of the universe preserve His prophet inside the belly of a great fish for 3 days!

4. the miracle of release (10) Here is an even greater miracle. The fish regurgitated Jonah back on shore and presumably the shore of Palestine. It carried him back where he started and spit him out. That is a miracle. And yet it is known that the sulphur-bottom whale has an air chamber as big as a small room and when it ingests an object too large for it to swallow, it thrusts the object up into the air chamber, swims to shallow water near land and ejects it! Again, my point is this: I believe Jonah's story because the Bible says it happened and the Bible is true. It is a miracle of God. But the miracles that God does are not like cartoon magic or fairy tales, not incredibly ridiculous like changing a man into a frog. They are usually interruptions of or changes in the course of natural laws and processes, timed to suit God's purpose and God very often leaves enough evidence either in the area of archeology, history, or biology to convince the skeptic that they are at least possible and to assure the Christian that he has nothing to fear from the world of science. No fact of Scripture has ever yet been objectively disproven by science; on the contrary science has time after time confirmed facts hitherto referred to only in Scripture!

II. The Process of Repentance Here we have Jonah's account of what happened to him from the time he hit the water, what went on in his mind, and how he prayed to God inside the fish. Let's read it straight through now. Let's pick out of it the different elements that there were in Jonah's path of repentance because the same elements are found in our path of repentance when we disobey God. It all begins with:

1. distress (2) The Hebrew word means narrow, confining; it is like the nautical term "a strait", a narrow passage where you are hemmed in to only one path by surroundings. That's what God does with us through His corrective discipline. We're His children, He can't let us go, so He begins to hedge us in with circumstances, to apply pressure from this side and that side until there is only one way to go, His way! For Jonah, it was repent or die, go God's way or drown. Now once we come to that place where we are in distress, where God has us pointed back to Him, there is:

2. remembrance (7) Jonah had tried to forget about God until the storm came up. Now floating in the waters, he remembered God once more, remembered that God could help, that God was a forgiving God who would still help him though he was at the brink of death. I know man who knew the truths of the Bible and attended church as a youngster but forgot all about God and lived for self until he was in a serious wreck and lying on the pavement. Then he remembered God and gave his heart to Christ. And in the instant when you remember God once more, there is also a:

3. realization There is a waking up, a coming to your senses. It's like a light turns on. There's a change in your mind. In fact, the New Testament Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* which means literally to change your mind, to have it set in one direction (against God) and to swing it about 180 degrees towards Him. Now there are three things that you realize all of a sudden:

a. of separation from God (4) There has been a break in fellowship. It's not that God left me; I left Him by choosing to disobey and resist and so He banished me or drove me away into these circumstances. All of a sudden Jonah can see what God is doing. He thought he was running from God but in reality, God was driving him to the end of himself. His sin had separated him from the fellowship that he once had.

b. of salvation only from God (9c) Salvation is a very broad word in Scripture. Sometimes it's talking about the salvation of our souls. Sometimes it looks ahead to the return of Christ when we join Him. And sometimes it refers to the rescue of our bodies. But no matter which, it is all of God. Jonah realized, "There is nothing I can do; I can't help myself; I can't run my own life and get myself out of this; deliverance can only come from the Lord; He's the only one who can help me!" And along with this is the realization:

c. of stupidity in continuing (8) Literally, "those who pay heed to vanities of emptiness..." It's not just the actual worshippers of idols who are ignorantly missing the grace they could have; it is the believer who is pursuing his empty course of disobedience, trying to struggle through life his own way. He's missing the good things he could have! The prodigal son woke up in the pig pen and he thought, "Even the servants at home have food; I'm so stupid; I've been missing that!" When I realize how foolish it is to keep going the way I am, then I'm ready for the thing that automatically follows:

4. prayer (7) Once you wake up, once your mind changes, you pray and normally there will be two elements to your prayer:

a. a cry for help (2) That's the first thing. Once you know what a fool you've been to disobey and all it has cost you and that only God can help you, you cry out, "Help Lord". You say, "I know what a fool I've been; I've been going my own way, please forgive me and help me!" That's all God wants; He's been just waiting to hear it. Yet there's more:

b. a commitment to God (9b) Jonah evidently made God a vow and I don't think it would take much to guess what it was, "Lord, if you get me out of this, I'll obey; I'll go to Nineveh!" Repentance can never be only "I'm sorry, get me

out of this (but I'm still not going to obey!) That is not repentance at all; that's persisting in the same way. Repentance says, "I've learned my lesson; you are Lord; I am your servant, I will do what you want!" And once we pray like that from the heart comes:

5. God's answer Really it has two aspects:

a. hearing (2) First, God hears us! His ear is always open to our cry, no matter how far down the path of disobedience we've gone. His ear never grows hard of hearing! And then comes:

b. deliverance (6) His life was spared in the fish and then in verse 10 he was put back on land. No matter how far down you've gone, God always has a way for you to start right from there to follow His path. Then come two more important things:

6. thanksgiving (9a) I'd sing too if I was drowning and a fish came along and saved me and spit me up on dry land! After you repent and begin to obey, don't forget to thank God. He deserves it! But there's one more step:

7. testing (3:1) Now God says "OK, now we'll see if you meant it; go to Nineveh!" You can rest assured that once you commit yourself to obey God, He will relatively soon give you a chance to demonstrate your obedience! So be ready!

God put Jonah through an awful lot to learn what he should have already known. *A young lamb and its mother passed by a pigpen each morning on the way to pasture. Watching the pigs wallow in mud seemed like fun, and on one hot day the lamb asked his mother if he could wallow in the cool mud too. "No", she replied, "Sheep don't wallow." The lamb was indignant and hurt. So, as soon as his mother was out of sight, he ran to the pigpen and jumped the fence into the cool mud. After a few moments he decided he'd better go back to his mother, but he was stuck; mud and wool don't mix. His pleasure had become his prison. He cried out and was rescued by the farmer. When cleaned and returned to the fold, the mother said, "Remember, Sheep don't wallow."* The next time you take off for your own pigpen, remember to cry out for God the heavenly Farmer. Change your mind quickly before the mud gets deep. But an even better thing to learn from all this would be simply to heed God's command in the first place: Christians do not wallow.

JONAH: RESISTING GOD

Ch. 3 God's Use of Obedience

Beginning the second half of the Book of Jonah is like starting over, only you're starting now with a different Jonah. He's been through the belly of the fish and has learned his lesson: you don't outwardly resist God by disobeying. He hasn't yet learned that you can't resist God inwardly while you're obeying either, but that comes in chapter 4. For now, God commands Jonah and Jonah stands ready to obey. So, let's examine:

I. The Task of Jonah (1-4) It sounds simple enough: Go to Nineveh and preach. What for? Why did God want Jonah to go there and preach? Well compare 1:2. The Ninevites had become extremely evil and wicked and violent and it had not escaped God's notice. God was going to do something about it. First, God was going to send Jonah to preach against it, and I'm sure his message was more than the one line that he recorded for us here. I'm sure he told them why God was going to destroy the city, their wickedness and violence. Then he told them that the destruction was going to wait 40 days. Now why do you think that was? Why didn't God just destroy it after Jonah finished walking through it in three days? Do you think all God wanted was to tell the Ninevites who was killing them so that while they were dying, they would know who was responsible? NO, God was sending Jonah as an opportunity for them to repent. Jonah's ministry was to be for the purpose of bringing this city to its knees in 40 days! Think about:

1. the seeming impossibility of it Let me refresh your memory again about Nineveh. Nineveh was a great city. 4:11 says its population was at least 120,000, and that probably doesn't include children. It was one of, if not the, largest cities in the Near East of its day. It had a circumference of 7 miles. It had two walls, with a 150 foot moat. The inner wall was 100 feet tall and 50 feet thick with 20 story towers on it! It was an impregnable fortress. Small wonder that it was the residence of the King, who would have been the Emperor of the whole Assyrian Empire. In later years it became the capital city of that Empire, the most powerful army in the world of its day. It was so great that to travel through all the portions and suburbs of it as Jonah did required three days. In fact, verse 3 literally says Nineveh was "great unto God," which everybody translates "exceedingly great" or "very important". Maybe it means simply "great like God", strong like Him, powerful like Him, unassailable like Him, big like He is big! Doesn't it seem a bit impossible to you that the people who live in this impregnable fortress are going to believe a skinny little Hebrew prophet who says that his God is going to wipe it out? In 40 days? In those days sieges of walled cities lasted for years and sometimes many years, but 40 days? With no enemy in sight? What kind of crazy assignment is this, anyway? It's like sending David to fight Goliath or trying to catch a whale with a string and a bent pin! But look at:

2. Jonah's response to it (3) Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh! God didn't ask Jonah to sit and calculate the odds or get the advice of others before going. He told him to go, impossible or not. And this much I have to say for Jonah: like it or not, he went! Would you? Of course, you would, if you'd been swallowed by a fish! That's what God

wants of us, not excuses why we can't and why it's not a good idea, but obedience. But the point I want to make is that if we will simply decide to obey God no matter what, then what happens is His business and just look how miraculously He can use our simple obedience. Now look at:

II. The Repentance of Nineveh (5-9) If I were to ask you, "What is the greatest miracle in the book of Jonah?", what would you say? The fish? No, my friend, the fish is very minor compared to what happened here. The repentance of the city of Nineveh is the greatest miracle recorded in this book (though quite a number are there); in fact, it is among the greatest miracles in the whole Old Testament. How wonderful is:

1. the miracle of repentance Now to me the first part of the miracle is:

a. they believed Jonah's story Jonah did not simply preach; he told the story of what had happened to him. Compare Lk. 11:30. Jonah himself was a SIGN to the Ninevites. You know what a sign is, something that clearly indicates the hand of God, a miraculous thing. What was miraculous about Jonah's preaching? Nothing, but in Mt. 12 Jesus explained that the sign of Jonah was the fact that he was three days and nights in the belly of the fish! You see the reason the Ninevites believed what Jonah preached was because they knew he had been miraculously swallowed and delivered! He told them his story and they believed him. Why? I don't know. It's unnatural. Maybe the ship's crew returned to port and met Jonah and went with to verify it, though I doubt it. In the one case I told you of last week where a sailor had been swallowed by a whale shark and lived, it affected his skin pigmentation in blotches and his hair was all removed through the digestive juices of the fish. Maybe Jonah was scarred like that. But at the bottom line it was of God! God worked in their hearts and they believed his story. And because of that:

b. they believed God's message that Nineveh would be destroyed. Now remember Jehovah was not their god. They normally put no stock in the God of Israel. Yet now they figured if Jonah's God could do that with a man in a fish, He could punch a hole in the walls of Nineveh or rain fire from heaven. So, though they had absolutely no human reason to, they believed that God would destroy them and:

c. they changed their behavior This is the most miraculous part of the miracle. They quit their violence and greed and extortion and vile immorality. They put on sackcloth and ashes. They humbled themselves before God and fasted, from the least to the greatest. The King himself, the Emperor of Assyria mind you, fasted and prayed and made a decree for the entire city to follow! Can you see that happening in Philadelphia? Picture it! No more violence and crime; you can walk the streets, every church full. It's too incredible to imagine, yet it happened in this city! Now because of the vivid picture we have here of unsaved people turning to the Lord, let's take a moment to examine:

2. the nature of repentance I know last week we examined the steps in repentance for a believer who is resisting God in chapter 2. Here is what happens when an unsaved person comes to Christ. First, he has:

a. a change of mind concerning God Verse 5. They now believed God. They accepted the fact that He, Jehovah, is indeed the true and living God. Before this, they had ignored Him as a powerless factor in their lives, even if He was real! The first step is realizing that God is real, alive, and powerful. Then comes:

b. a change of mind concerning sin Before they did whatever they felt like. But verse 8 says suddenly they saw that their ways were evil and violent, that they were wrong, they were sin. They were no longer fun and pleasure. They were death! And when their mind changed about their sinful actions, they stopped doing them! Repentance is not penance! It is not doing two nice things to atone for every bad thing you do. Repentance is a change of mind about the nature of what you're doing. It is sin; it is wrong and therefore, you stop doing it, not so that God will save you but because now that you have believed God you know you cannot continue it! But there is also:

c. a change of mind concerning self Verse 5 says they put on sackcloth. They humbled themselves. Once they had been proud and haughty, feeling invincible, like they had they world by the tail. Now they realize that they are just humble creatures in God's hand that He can do with as He pleases. That's what happens when a person comes to Jesus Christ. He has a change of mind about God, about sin, and about himself. And you know something? It's still a marvelous miracle when that kind of change happens even today! I can't produce that in somebody! But if I obey God and do what He tells me, then He can use me in the lives of others to produce this miracle in their lives, not just once, but again and again, in person after person. Yet the Ninevites were not the only ones who changed their minds here. We have also:

III. The Relenting of God (10) The Hebrew and the KJV say, "God repented". He said He would do something and then did not do it. He said in 40 days He would destroy the city. Now that He spared it, isn't that a lie? Hasn't God changed His mind? The answer is no and here's why:

1. God offered opportunity by sending Jonah We already saw that in the very act of sending Jonah with this message, God is telling Nineveh that she has opportunity to repent and avert disaster. I think the Ninevites understood that from the start. Compare verse 9. They felt God might spare them out of His compassion and that's why He'd sent Jonah. You see:

2. God operated consistently by His principle Look at 4:2. Jonah knew what God was like! He has always been a God who forgives sin. Compare Jer. 18:7-10. Here's how God deals with nations. When a nation becomes totally vile, He sets his hand against it. When it changes, He changes His position against it. He's very consistent and was simply doing with Nineveh what He always does! In fact, the sad part of this story is that:

3. God continued to act consistently - Nahum 1:14 Nineveh's repentance was short-lived. A few years later Nineveh was back to her old ways and steeped in sin. 30 years later she carried Israel off into captivity. And a hundred years later God decreed her destruction and, this time, carried it out because she did not repent. The story is interesting. The city was under siege by the Babylonians. It was, of course, impregnable. Except for one thing. It was built on a river and God did a very simple thing. There was rain and then a flood and an entire section of the huge wall washed away. And of course, the enemy army came in and did everything that God's next prophet to Nineveh, Nahum, said.

You see, God can do miraculous things. And the greatest wonder of all is that He can do them through us if we just obey!

JONAH: RESISTING GOD

Ch. 4 God's Dealing With Resistance

One of the great discoveries I have made as a parent is that I can make a child do something, but I can't make them like it! I can make them apologize when they've done something wrong, but I can't make them mean it. I can make them eat their peas, but I can't make them enjoy the peas, despite all my lectures on nutrition and taste! You see, my kids have learned that they can resist me in two ways: either outwardly by disobeying, for which they suffer the consequences, or inwardly while they are obeying without getting punished. Jonah found that same thing. After the fish he was not about to disobey again, so he went to Nineveh and preached like God wanted him to, but the whole time he was doing it, he hated what he was doing and he hated the effect of what he was doing. He was still resisting God on the inside. So let's look at:

I. Jonah's Obstinate Problem (1-5) The whole city of Nineveh repents at his preaching and is spared from destruction and he's angrier than a wet hornet. Most preachers I know would be floating through the air with joy. But he was angry! And here's why:

1. he had a wrong view (1a) The Hebrew says literally, "But it was a great calamity to Jonah's eye". He had a wrong view of the whole thing. Remember the Assyrians, that is, the Ninevites, were the enemies of Israel and on their way to world conquest. Both Amos (5:27) and Hosea (10:6) were Jonah's contemporaries and predicted obviously that Israel would be conquered by Assyria in punishment for her sins. Jonah knew that. He knew the Assyrians were going to be God's instrument of punishment on Israel and he hated them for it. To see their destruction meant the sparing of the lives of his people. To see them repent and be spared meant disaster! It didn't matter to him that these Ninevites had eternal souls and would be lost. He didn't see things from God's view. He looked at them from the point of view of his own obvious worldly benefit. In other words, he wanted what felt good and seemed good and looked good to him, no matter what God wanted! So:

2. he had a wrong reaction (1b-2) He got hot, set on fire! And he wasn't angry at the Ninevites for repenting; he was angry at God. Isn't that how you feel when you have to do something you really don't want to do? You get angry at the person who makes you do it! Boy, do I see that at work at home! I even get an "I hate you Dad!" once in a great while just for enforcing bedtime! And sometimes we're obeying God but we don't like what He's making us do and we're angry at Him and we get huffy and we complain. Most times we get over it quickly, but Jonah's case developed more:

3. he had a wrong desire (3) He now wanted to die. Funny how he didn't want to when he had the opportunity back in the sea! He doesn't see any reason for living any longer. He'd rather die than continue living this way, being forced to do what he didn't want to do and watch things happen that he didn't want to happen. Life had become misery for him and that's what happens for us when we're living in the same state, obeying God but not liking it and being angry with Him for it. You're miserable; you want to escape and sometimes dying seems better than living.

4. he ignored the Lord's rebuke (4-5) Now just as God doesn't let you alone when you're disobeying, He also doesn't let you alone when you're resisting Him inside. And He begins the discipline process now the same way as when we disobey, by speaking to us. God spoke to Jonah and said, "Do you have any right to be angry?" Haven't you heard the Lord's voice that way? Oh, not in audible words but in the thoughts of your mind, "You know you shouldn't be feeling like this; you know the Lord's right; you know it's not right to be angry at God like this!" God works on us just like He did on Jonah but:

a. he didn't listen to the Lord's voice He didn't even answer the Lord, much less ask forgiveness and make it right. Further:

b. he wouldn't accept the Lord's will This seems to me rather childish but he went outside the city and built himself a little lean-to out of sticks to shade himself from the hot sun and sat down to see what would happen to the

city. He has seen the repentance of the city and he knows God what God is like, that He relents from sending calamity, so he knows God has rescinded that promise of destruction, but he's going to sit and hope against hope that somehow Nineveh will be destroyed anyway. Even though he knows God's will, he won't accept it; he keeps clinging to his own will desperately! And when you do that, when you don't listen to the still small voice and you refuse to yield your will, then God has to do something more so we have:

II. God's Object Lesson (6-9) While Jonah's sitting there under his lean-to pouting:

1. God provided a lesson right there where he was through his circumstances. God has a way of doing that, of arranging the circumstances of our lives to teach us a lesson that just gets right at the root of our problem. Here's what God provided:

a. the vine - something Jonah valued (6) God made a broad-leaved vine grow up over Jonah's shelter, probably a castor bean plant. It grew up rapidly and Jonah really came to appreciate the shade that it provided from the sun. He came to really value it. But then God provided:

b. the worm - destroyed what Jonah valued (7) The next morning he had a little bug come along and chew a hole in the plant's stem which killed it. So all day long he had to sit there and watch the thing he had come to appreciate so much, slowly wither and die. God took away what Jonah valued slowly and painfully. And then God provided:

c. the wind - emphasized Jonah's loss (8) God blew in a heat wave and just scorched Jonah. Why? To really emphasize how great the loss of the plant was to him, how much it really meant to him. So God provided the lesson and:

2. Jonah proved God's point by his reaction (8-9) Now after these things had happened to him, Jonah's ready to die again and God speaks to him another time and asks the same question on a smaller scale, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" You see:

a. he came to feel the plant was his He came to look at it as HIS plant, that grew up for HIS purpose, to shade HIS head. And so:

b. he was angered by its destruction He was really angry that the worm destroyed it, that he had to watch it wither and die. He didn't want that plant to be destroyed; he valued it, so much that he is angry enough to die (or so he says). He loved that little plant as much as what there was left of his own life. Can't you see what God is saying? "If you care so much about something of yours that you lament its destruction this much, don't you see that's how I feel about Nineveh! I love them as much as my own life; I don't want to see them destroyed." Jonah was living out in this small thing the same feelings that God had toward Nineveh. God has a beautiful way of doing that, of putting us in a situation where we have to feel like HE feels so we learn to yield. I remember as a young adult being alone at a camp in New York and feeling sorry for myself and lonely and Lord brought a song to mind, "Jesus walked this lonesome valley..." And it spoke to me to know that He had experienced loneliness for me so it was OK. There have been many times when God has allowed someone to do something to me and it brings to mind, "But this is what I do to you sometimes, Lord, isn't it?" God's in the business of providing lessons, so let's see what we can learn here:

III. God's Obvious Principles (10-11) Here's what God is trying to teach Jonah and also us through this book:

1. His right over His creation to do as He pleases Jonah didn't plant the plant or tend it or make it grow. It was not even his. He had no right to be angry about the plant. But God did plant Nineveh and tend it and make it grow. It was His creation just like the plant was. Jonah had no right to tell God what to do with His creation; God had every right to do with it as He pleased. If He in His love and grace chose to spare it, then He as the creator had the right to do so! That's a tremendous lesson. There are lots of times when we wish from our human perspective that God would do things some other way. And we get angry with Him over the way He's doing them. But He has the right to do what He wills with what is His. That's a hard lesson for us to learn, but until we do, we'll find ourselves resisting Him a lot.

2. His rightful concern over the people of Nineveh God was right in caring about the people of Nineveh and warning them of their sins and sparing them from destruction, even if they were Israel's enemies and even if it wouldn't change the eventual course of their city. Here's why He was right:

a. the infinite worth of an eternal soul The plant sprung up overnight and died overnight. It was only temporary, just a simple plant. But Nineveh was people, human beings, and human beings last forever; they are eternal. So many times we, like Jonah, get all wrapped up in the temporal things, in the things we own, the job we have, the hobby we enjoy and care more about those things which will all pass away than about people. Jonah wanted to die for a plant. I want to tell you: people are so valuable to God that Jesus died for them! He didn't just wish it; He did it! God is not so much concerned whether His will is most enjoyable to you, but whether it will be the most effective in ministering to people!

b. the great number of those people 120,000 of them and the Hebrew literally says *men*, so that might mean many more with women and children. There were so many who would die and perish forever in Nineveh. Should God allow that, just to make Jonah happy, just so he wouldn't have to feel like a traitor to his country?

c. the great ignorance of those people They weren't illiterate but they were spiritually ignorant. They had no light. They didn't even know that the sin and violence they were doing was vile and wrong and that there was a God in heaven who would punish them. Should God let them die in their ignorance? Isn't it wonderful that in His love and grace God could see that if they only knew, they would repent!

Folks, the greatest lesson of the book of Jonah is that around us there are people by the hundreds of thousands, committing sin, living in ignorance, not knowing anything of salvation in Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ has given us a commission to take them the message of the Gospel, yet so many of us are sitting in our little earthly shelter, worrying about our little creature comforts, waiting for God to destroy them because we know that we're saved. But God's heart cares about people. Does yours?

JONAH: RESISTING GOD

Irresistible Lessons From Jonah

We have finished our verse-by-verse exposition of Jonah but we are not done yet. We have looked at the trees but now we need to step back and look at the forest, the whole book. There are lessons here that this book teaches, important lessons, lessons so obvious that we often take them for granted, lessons so clear that they are irresistible; they have to be considered in any study of the book. I have grouped them in two major categories:

I. Lessons About God The book of Jonah teaches us a great deal about what God is really like, about His nature and character. There seem to be at least four major characteristics of God that come through loud and clear. The first is:

1. the great concern of God for lost people (4:11) Nineveh had 120,000 people or more and they were all lost, all unable to find their way to Him, all bound for destruction here and torment for all eternity. And God was concerned about it. He pitied those people in their desperate condition. That's why He sent Jonah in the first place; that's why He retrieved Jonah when he tried to run away and made him go anyway. His heart had pity on those lost souls. Jesus looked out over the multitude one day and Mark says He had compassion on them because they were like sheep with no shepherd, helpless, defenseless, bound for starvation. So He taught them! Listen, just because people ignore God does not mean that He has forgotten them. He cares about every Chinese, every Buddhist in Nepal, every Muslim in Iran, every spirit worshipper in the jungle of Papua New Guinea. God cannot sit by and nonchalantly watch the world go to hell, one at a time, without doing something about it! That's why He sent Jonah; that's why He sent His Son; that's why His Son sent us to go into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. The book of Jonah is the missionary manifesto of the Old Testament; it is the book of Acts of the Old Testament where God teaches His people to go to the Gentiles, the lost sheep outside the fold.

2. the great sovereignty of God in the world The word sovereignty simply means control. As you read the book of Jonah you cannot help but be impressed by the degree of control that God has over every aspect of both the world and the people in it. The book is filled with so many seemingly impossible things that God did; just look what He can do:

a. He can command His creation (2:10) In chapter 1 He sent a storm and He provided a great fish. In chapter 4 He made a vine to grow and caused a worm to eat it and then sent a scorching wind. But nowhere is the concept clearer than here: God commanded the fish! Literally, He "spoke to the fish". Now fish don't have ears and neither do winds and waves for that matter. The point is that God has absolutely omnipotent power that can control anything and everything in creation and make it do what He wills! And that says to me there are no accidents in my life! Chance is not blowing me back and forth at will. The things happening in my life are happening under God's control and supervision!

b. He can preserve us in peril (1:17) Here's Jonah in the middle of the sea in a great storm and sinking fast. There is no coast guard! The nearest ship is the one that threw him overboard. and He's sinking, going under water, seaweed wrapped about his head. What can anybody do to save him, even God? Simple! God has him swallowed by a fish! I want to tell you that if God can rescue Jonah and bring Him through that, then He can preserve you through any kind of trouble you might face, whether its physical, or financial, or marital. I once saw a little sign that said, "God is bigger than any problem I have!" Don't despair; don't give up; don't cash in and quit! God is a sovereign God!

c. He can use us while disobedient (1:16) God touched these sailors through Jonah's very disobedience. He uses even the wrath of man to praise Him. We think sometimes that we can resist God and we can stop His objectives. Jonah thought he could destroy Nineveh by resisting. But God used him in spite of himself. Don't ask me why,

but sometimes God chooses to work through Christians living totally backslidden lives to touch others. You can't stop God from using you; He does it anyway!

d. He can mold our lives to His plan (3:3) Remember the story Jesus told about two sons whose father told them to go work in his field. The second one said "NO" but went anyway. And Jesus indicated that that son, "did the will of the father". Notice how Jonah made up his mind he wasn't going to Nineveh. But he ended up in Nineveh, didn't he? Who won, him or God? Whose will got done? Now God doesn't always force us to do His will but He can! He has total control over our lives to work them out according to His plan.

e. He can touch the hearts of sinners (3:5) Even heathen, hardened, violent, wicked Ninevites, even kings. There is nobody beyond His reach, nobody whose heart is beyond His touch, nobody so low His grace cannot save them. Don't give up on anybody; keep praying. God is able! That's the kind of God we have. He's sovereign; He's in control!

3. the great mercy of God with people (4:2) What a tremendous description of God! For a God who can do whatever He wants, He is a God full of mercy and compassion. He is patient and slow to anger and often holds off on giving us what we deserve.

a. with sinners who deserve destruction (1:2) Let me emphasize again that the people of Nineveh were wicked. They were like Sodom and Gomorrah. God was going to wipe the whole city out simply because of its low moral state. Listen, there are plenty of people walking the face of this earth today who don't even deserve to be alive, but in mercy God extends it to them. He holds off and gives opportunity after opportunity. But he also does it:

b. with saints who deserve discipline (2:4) Jonah knew he didn't deserve to be rescued. He knew he didn't deserve to have his prayer heard. He had rebelled against God. He should have been left to drown. But God was merciful and patient with him and eventually got him to Nineveh. Oh, God has been patient with me! I have failed Him over and over again. What mercy that He spares me discipline and picks me up again each time. And we can't talk about His great mercy without talking about:

4. the great willingness of God to forgive God is far more forgiving than man could ever be. It is part of His nature. He stands like the father of the prodigal son just waiting to do it with arms open wide. Jonah shows us God is willing to forgive:

a. sinners who are wicked (3:10) He forgave these wicked Ninevites after all their sins. Listen, there is nobody who ever needs to feel, "God could never forgive what I've done!" Not a murderer, a rapist, a homosexual, a thief, or an adulterer. Paul said, "I was the chief of sinners and Christ saved me!" But it's not only for unsaved people; it's for:

b. saints who disobey (3:1) God forgave Jonah. He spoke to him a second time. He's the God of the second chance! He's willing to forgive us and use us, even after we blow it, even after we disobey and resist Him. Oh, beloved what a wonderful God we have. And we see Him painted in the pages of the book of Jonah for us so vividly. But there is another portrait there, another set of lessons:

II. Lessons About Ourselves If we're honest, we'd have to admit that Jonah is a lot like us. The things we see in him, we can find in ourselves as well. Jonah reminds us of:

1. our callousness to the plight of the lost The Ninevites are dying and Jonah could care less. He's more worried about the little plant that shaded his head! You know, people are dying without Christ, going out into eternity apart from Him every day. Our neighbors, our friends, the people we work with, many of them are headed down that path. To be without Christ is like being on death row; sooner or later the sentence will get carried out unless there's a pardon. And many times, we don't care! And God help me, sometimes I don't care much either. I'm content to worry about my kids and my hobbies and my car and my nice things. But God is concerned for the lost!

2. our willingness to resist the Lord I'm well aware how much Jesus did for me. I know I'm bought with a price. I know He shed His precious blood to save me. But there's a lot of Jonah in me still. I'm sometimes willing to say no to God, to refuse to do what I know is His will. I know He wants me to teach that class but I don't want to. I know He wants me to give myself to missionary service but I don't want to. I know He wants me to forgive that person but I don't want to. And if you're honest, that same willingness to resist is in you too and what's worse is:

3. our stubbornness to persist in resisting Jonah kept on resisting God in his heart even after getting swallowed by the fish. How stubborn, we say, to persist in resisting in the very face of Almighty God. But I daresay we can be pretty stubborn too! It's in us to ignore gracious discipline and persist in our own way. What wretched creatures we are sometimes!

A little boy about eight or nine, who liked to have his own way, one day was told by his father, "Philip, you ought not to want your own way." He dropped his head as if he had been given a big problem to solve. After thinking a while, he said, "Father, if I choose the will of the Lord and go His way because I want to, don't I still have my own way?" The Bible says Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Why? Because if you delight in Him, your desires will be the same as His desires. Your way will be His way. Or more accurately, His way will become your way. Try it!

JONAH: RESISTING GOD

Unmistakable Pictures In Jonah

We cannot leave the Book of Jonah without noticing that it seems to point beyond itself. It points to things to come. There are some unmistakable pictures or types here in the Book and we have that on the authority of Jesus Christ Himself, who referred to this book and said it pointed to Him. There are two real pictures here and both of them are in the man Jonah himself. First of all:

I. Jonah Is A Picture of Israel That is to say, Jonah's life pictures for us in a remarkable way what God has spelled out in other scriptures concerning the nation of Israel as a whole. Now just think with me about what happened to the prophet Jonah:

- He rebelled against God and rejected God's plan for his life.
- God had him cast into the sea and nearly perish.
- God miraculously preserved his life through the great fish.
- Jonah turned back to the Lord, was reinstated to a place of service and then went to the Gentiles.

Do you realize that in those four sentences I just summed up for you the whole basic outline of Israel's history from that day to this and beyond into the future? Jonah's rebellion pictures for us:

1. Israel in rebellion You see, God had always had a plan and purpose for Israel. It was expressed to Abraham. Gen. 12:3 says, "all peoples on earth shall be blessed through you. Compare Deut. 4:5-8. Through Israel's righteousness and obedience God wanted to use her to draw all nations to faith in Him. But there were two problems. The first was the one Jonah had; they came to hate the other nations, to despise and look down on them and Jonah's hatred of the Ninevites only proves it. The second problem, Jonah also had. He rebelled against God and disobeyed Him. Compare Rom. 10:21. Israel was continually disobedient, not only in her attitude toward Gentiles but in breaking God's law. She rebelled against God and went the other way time after time. And the final culmination of it was obviously this: God sent His Son to them and they rejected Him and crucified Him! Israel as a nation rebelled against God's plan for them. And what happened? God had Jonah cast into the sea and similarly you find:

2. Israel cast into the sea of nations Look at what Jesus said in Lk. 21:24. Now compare Deut. 28:63-65. The key word is *scatter*. Israel would be scattered among the nations of the world where she would live a miserable existence. In 70 AD the Roman General Titus destroyed Jerusalem and from that day to 1948, Israel had not even had a homeland. And despite the 4 million Jews in Israel today, millions more still remain scattered among the nations of the world. Their history has been one of misery and persecution wherever they have gone, except America! Just as God disciplined Jonah, so God has dealt severely with His people Israel, many times bringing them near to death and extermination. But God preserved Jonah by providing a great fish and so we see:

3. Israel miraculously preserved Let me ask you. Do you know any Babylonians? Do you know any Hittites? Do you know any Philistines? No, those races of people are dead and gone, but the Jew is still here! Time after time rulers like Haman in the Book of Esther have set themselves to destroy the Jews, but in the end, none have succeeded and most have been themselves destroyed in the attempt. Compare Rom. 11:5. There is still a remnant by God's grace, both of those Jews who accept Christ as their Messiah and those who don't. It is nothing short of a miracle. But Jonah was more than preserved; he was restored to God and so we see:

4. Israel restored to service God is not done with Israel yet. She is still floating in the sea, away from Him. But one day after the church is raptured out and the Tribulation begins, there will be:

a. the national conversion of Israel - Rom. 11:26 At that time they will look on the one they pierced and they will recognize Him for who He is and they will turn to Him and be restored to God. A nation will be born in a day, the prophet said. And then as Jonah, after being restored, went to Nineveh to minister to the Gentiles, we see:

b. the ministry of Israel to the Gentiles These converted Jews will be God's testimony to Christ in the world. Remember Mt. 25:31-46, the story of the sheep and goats. When Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation and sets up His Kingdom, the individual Gentiles will be judged by their relationship to "His brethren", that is, the Jews. These converted Israelites will have a role in leading many, many Gentiles to faith in Christ during that awful time when, as with Nineveh, there are just a few days before destruction comes! What a marvelous book we hold in our hands? Isn't it amazing how God has built into one seemingly simple story such a vivid picture? And yet there is an even more striking picture here because:

II. Jonah Is A Picture of Christ Someone said you can find Christ on every page of the Bible and you can certainly see Him here in two ways:

1. Christ's life is pictured in Jonah's life - Mt. 12:39-41 Jesus made it very clear that Jonah's experience in the fish was a picture of what was going to happen to Him. And if you stop to think about it, that comparison goes deeper than you might realize. First, in Jonah chapter 1 Jonah was:

a. condemned to death by Gentiles It was an unbelieving, idol-worshipping ship's crew that cast Jonah into the sea. Obviously, it was to kill him and quell the disturbance of the sea which they faced. And it was the unbelieving, idol-worshipping Romans who condemned Jesus to death and nailed Him to the cross. Why? Because it was politically expedient to calm the storm of public sentiment! And even as the Gentiles who threw him in later glorified and worshipped God, so the centurion at the foot of the cross exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God"! Then in chapter 2 we see Jonah:

b. crying out to God while dying We've already studied his cries of despair as the waves compassed him about and he sank to the depths. Look at Ps. 22:1, 11-21. These are the feelings of Jesus on the cross, the mental conversation that Jesus had with the Father as He hung there, put into the mouth of David ahead of time. The Lord Jesus too cried out to God while he was dying, but, like Jonah, God did not just rescue him by picking him up instantly out of the water or off of the cross. Instead, like Jonah, He was:

c. buried three days in the tomb Jonah nearly died; he was buried alive in the fish's belly under the sea, down at "the roots of the mountains". Jesus actually died and was buried in a stone tomb in the heart of the earth. But the most wonderful thing about Jonah is that he didn't stay in the fish. Instead, the fish spit him out unharmed on shore and so we find Christ:

d. rising unharmed the third day That's what Jesus was pointing at. "Jonah only stayed in the fish three days; you're going to kill me and I'm only going to stay in the tomb three days! I'll rise again!" And He did. The stone was rolled away and the Risen Christ stepped out of death's door onto the shore of life once again! And one more thing. After Jonah's "resurrection" experience we find him:

e. taking salvation to the Gentiles In chapter 3 Jonah went to Nineveh and preached and brought in a great harvest of Gentiles. After Jesus' resurrection, He commanded His church to make disciples of "all nations", to go to "the uttermost parts of the earth" and they did and brought a great harvest of Gentiles into the Kingdom that continues even today! What a marvelous picture of Christ's life is laid down for us 750 years ahead of time in Jonah's life. But there's more:

2. Christ's purpose is pictured in Jonah's ministry - Mt. 16:4. The Pharisees wanted Jesus, according to verse 1, to produce a sign from heaven to verify what He said. Jesus said, "I will give you only one sign from heaven, the sign of Jonah." Now compare Lk. 11:29-32. Jesus is saying more than that Jonah's life pictured His own life. He's saying that the way God used Jonah is a picture of the way God was using Him. Jonah himself was a sign from heaven to the people of Nineveh and so:

a. Christ was a sign from heaven to Israel Let's explain that a little further:

(1) rescued Jonah was a sign to Nineveh I told you this before in our studies. In what way was Jonah a supernatural sign to the Ninevites? He didn't do any miracles. He simply preached that the God of Israel was going to destroy Nineveh in 40 days. What was supernatural was that he had been rescued from the fish! He himself was living proof of the power of God. If God could rescue him from death through the fish, then God could do what Jonah preached. His own person standing there alive was convincing proof of the truth of what he said. And just so:

(2) resurrected Christ was a sign to Israel They wanted a sign from heaven. He said, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up!" When Peter got up to preach on the day of Pentecost he said to the crowd of Jews, "You were wicked and slew God's chosen Messiah, but this Jesus has God raised up!" And they were pricked to the heart and cried, "What must we do?" See, the fact that God had raised Christ from the dead was a sign from heaven that showed them that the Christians were right and they were wrong and multitudes came to faith. Everywhere the apostles went, they preached the same thing, "God raised Jesus from the dead". Just as Jonah's rescue is the sign on which the Ninevites faith was built, the resurrection of Christ is the sign on which our Christian faith is built. One last thing:

b. the Ninevites are a sign of rebuke to Israel - Lk. 11:32 The Ninevites believed God's sign to them, but the Jews did not believe the sign God gave them. Oh sure, some did. But as a whole, the nation, rather than accepting the sign, began to actively persecute Christians and try to rub out the name of Christ. So, one day at the Great White throne when it is time for sentence to be pronounced on the Jews who lived in that generation, the repentant Ninevites who believed God and are in heaven will rise up and say "amen" at their condemnation. They believed the little sign that God did in Jonah, but the Jews rejected the greater sign of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And where does that leave us today? Standing in one of two places. Either we stand with the Ninevites who received Jonah or with the Israelites who rejected Jesus. If you came today and you've never received Jesus, what are you waiting for? What more sign would you require? God raised Him from the dead! He lives and is waiting to come into your heart. Let Him in right now. And if you have received Him, thank God for the wonderful pictures in His book, an inexhaustible gold mine of spiritual truth.

The Story Of Nineveh: God's Love For A People

God Sends Nineveh A Messenger Jonah 1:1-3

If I were to ask you what the book of Jonah was all about, the #1 answer would be "It's the story of a man who got swallowed by a fish!" That's all most people remember. Would it surprise you if I told you that the book is not about Jonah; it's about a city called Nineveh? You see, much of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is in narrative form. It records stories of people and events that actually occurred in history. And there are:

I. Three Levels In Understanding Of Bible Narrative Stories The first I'll call the:

1. information level This is where **we learn the basic facts of what happened** and that's how many of us were taught Bible stories in Sunday School or from our parents. We learn the story of Noah, the story of Abraham, the story of Moses and the Exodus and, of course, the story of Jonah. Others of us may be only learning these stories now, but the point is that we first learn THAT they happened without much real understanding of what God is telling us through those stories. Then as we approach the stories when we are a little more mature, we begin to look at them on what I'll call the:

2. application level, that is, **we try to derive personal life lessons from the story** We want to be people of faith like Abraham and trust God when He doesn't tell us where we're going and be pure like Joseph who refused Potiphar's wife. Like we've been taught as good Bible students, we ask ourselves, "What does it mean to ME?" The last time I preached through the Book of Jonah in 1993, that's the level I focused on; we focused on the person of Jonah and called it "Resisting God". Never resist God like Jonah did; He has serious ways of convincing you to obey! But as I've been discovering over the years, there is an even deeper level of understanding these stories; I'll call it the:

3. meaning level We need to look deeper and more closely and focus on God and not ourselves. We need to discover **what God intends to convey by giving us the story**. For instance, when we read the wonderful stories in the Book of Daniel, the three young men in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den, we focus on being bold and unwavering in our faith like they were and we totally miss the point, which is that God used these events to broadcast to the entire Babylonian empire and the entire Persian empire that He, Jehovah, the God of Israel, was the true and living God! The point of the Exodus story is that Jehovah God is the greatest God in all the world, the only true God. Likewise, God did not give us the story of Jonah simply to show us how He disciplines disobedient servants; He gave it to show us His great love for Nineveh! So let's begin at the beginning and ask the question:

II. Who Was Jonah? (1) The only other mention of Jonah in the Old Testament outside of the book that bears his name is **2 Kings 14:25**, if you'll turn there. Now from this verse we learn several important things. First of all, in this period, Israel was divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah and:

1. Jonah lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel His home was the village of Gath Hepher, a little town about 16 miles west of the Sea of Galilee and north of Nazareth where Jesus grew up, in the tribal territory of Zebulun. And he lived **in the time of King Jeroboam II**, which would probably date the events of the book of Jonah as occurring around 760 BC. You'll see why this is important later on, but we also learn here that:

2. Jonah was a prophet Israel at this time had been led by her kings into gross idolatry for many years. Some 50 years earlier, God Himself told Elijah near the end of his ministry that there were only 7,000 people in Israel who had not worshipped Baal. Jonah, Amos and Hosea were all prophets that God sent to his people about that same time. To be clear, a prophet is **a messenger whom God sent to deliver His Word to others**. He would speak His message to the prophet and send the prophet where He chose to deliver it. Now what this verse tells us is that:

3. Jonah was a true and proven prophet He had delivered God's words before and they had come true. We have no record of it, but evidently, he had declared that God would restore Israel's territory to its original boundaries and this God actually accomplished through King Jeroboam. My point is that Jonah 1:1 was not the first time God had given Jonah a message to deliver. He was used to doing that and to seeing God's words come true. He believed God. He knew God was the only God. He knew that God was powerful and could do mighty things. And He was committed to serving God by delivering His message, which was not a very popular thing to do in Israel, by the way. Now look at the assignment God gives him this time in **(2a)**. OK, so let's ask the question:

III. What Was Nineveh? God says it was a *great city*. That means that:

1. Nineveh was an extremely important city in the world of that day, in the same way that Rome would become great in a later era. Nineveh was built in the earliest days of human civilization. We read in Gen. 10 that Nimrod built a cluster of four cities on the banks of the Tigris River; their ruins lie on the opposite bank from modern Mosul in northern Iraq. Nineveh proper was one of the four, but it appears that the cluster of cities was connected and often collectively called Nineveh [*Keil and Delitsch*] and it covered a large area, roughly 25 by 15 miles, about twice the land area of Philadelphia. Look at **3:3b**. For its day:

a. it had a very large population - 4:11 says Nineveh had more than 120,000 persons who didn't know their left from their right. If that literally means children, as some believe, then the total population could have been as large as 600,000. It was probably the largest city in the world in its time. But in Hebrew *exceedingly great* in verse 3 is literally *great unto God*. That seems to denote its position in the world in God's eyes. He saw it as great because:

b. it was the center of the world's most powerful empire in that time. At the height of its power the **Assyrian empire** came to stretch from Persia (modern Iran) on the east to the borders of modern Turkey on the north, to and including the land of Egypt on the west. It ruled an area that extended more than 2,000 miles in either direction. It was the world superpower of its day due to the vast might of the Assyrian army. Now God goes on in verse 2 to indicate that:

2. Nineveh was an extremely wicked city For one thing:

a. it was the world's center of idolatry Its heritage was the idolatry of the Tower of Babel and the Ninevites worshipped all kinds of gods. It was the center of the sex-filled worship of the goddess Ishtar, and also had temples to Sîn the moon god, Ashur the chief of the gods, Nergal the god of the underworld, Shamash the sun god, Ninurta the war god, Tammuz the god of agriculture, Nabiu the god of wisdom, and Nisroch whom nobody even remembers what he was god of! Nineveh was proud of her gods and, because of her military victories, considered them superior to the gods worshipped by other nations. And on top of its idolatry, Nineveh was wicked because:

b. its army practiced incredibly inhuman cruelty Their kings boasted about their awful practices, making stacks of the heads of their enemies, gutting them like animals, actually skinning them, sometimes alive, and tacking their skins on the city walls. They had a scorched earth policy toward enemies who fought them, killing men, women and children, leaving none alive. The Assyrians were the terrorists, the ISIS, of their day. And, needless to say:

3. Nineveh was the enemy of God's people Israel had already been threatened by its power three times in earlier years and King Ahab had allied to fight with other nations against Assyria ninety years earlier. A decade later, King Jehu of Israel was already a vassal of Assyria and paying tribute. And even though at the moment Assyria was engaged in battles elsewhere, there was no telling when they would come against Israel once more, as they eventually did. They were definitely enemies of God and His people.

Well, enough background. Here's:

IV. The Situation: God's Time To Judge Nineveh Had Come (2b) With that phrase, *their evil has come up before Me*, God is portraying Himself in His role as Judge of all the earth. He rules all the nations of the world whether they realize it or not, and He's saying, "The evil of Assyria has grown serious enough that it has My attention and I HAVE to do something about it!" It reminds you of what God said to Abraham, ...*"Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."* - **Gen. 18:20-21**. In other words, "The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah has reached a point where I have to do something about it; we'll see whether there is still any hope for them!" And you know the outcome of that! Evidently:

1. God limits the iniquity of wicked nations Look with me at **Jer. 18:7-8**. God does not allow nations to pursue a course of evil and grow in wickedness forever. He sets a limit and when the culture reaches that limit, He acts to destroy, to overthrow, to put a stop to it. He has done that all throughout Scripture and throughout history. The days of regimes that oppose righteousness and exalt wickedness are always numbered, and that includes America! We have taken the lives of more than 58 million innocent unborn babies since 1973 simply because we don't want them. That is no different from the Romans abandoning unwanted babies to the elements centuries ago! As a culture we have said that men can marry men and women can marry women and that homosexuality is a normal lifestyle, in spite of the fact that God says in His word that it is unnatural and an abominable practice! We run after the idols of pleasure and materialism and worship at the altars of sensuality and immorality, just as ancient pagans did. But know this: one day God will have to say, "ENOUGH! For the sake of order and justice in the world, I can't let this continue! I can't let America continue to be the most powerful nation on earth and export all this stuff!" Now I fervently hope and pray that revival comes and that our nation turns back toward righteousness and if it does, God has promised in His word that He will relent from the disaster we deserve. But we must pray and work fervently to win people to Jesus if we expect to see that happen! But what we miss in the story is this:

2. God loved the Ninevites enough to send Jonah to warn them of destruction and give them the opportunity to repent, as hopeless as that thought may have seemed! Now there are three things here to learn about God. First of all, we learn that:

a. He seeks worshippers from EVERY people without exception Jonah couldn't conceive that God could possibly love the Assyrians and want their worship, but He did! And if He cares about the Assyrians, then He cares about ISIS and about the strictest states of the Muslim world that persecute believers; He cares about North Korea and all the other nations who persecute believers. Paul told Timothy that He ...*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* - **1 Tim. 2:4**. God doesn't just want us and people like us! He loves the whole world;

there are no people that He does not want to save, regardless of the depth of their evil behavior! We are so narrow minded when we think that God only loves us, the privileged few! Second, we learn that:

b. He has compassion on great cities filled with people Look at **4:11**. Did you know our world today has 34 cities with more than 10 million people in their urban areas? The largest, Tokyo, has almost 38 million! Our world is rapidly being urbanized; all over the globe people are moving to the cities and that is creating huge slums and urban poverty and all kinds of problems. Now I'll be frank. I'm a country boy; I really dislike cities. I hate the noise and the traffic and the busyness and confusion and the dirt and the crime and the poverty and all that goes with large cities. But God loves them and around the world He is moving people into cities, I assume to make them easier to find and to reach with the Good News. So, if we are to be like Him, we must have heartfelt compassion on huge cities full of people and be at work in them! That says something about how to focus our missions outreach but it also spells out the heart that God wants us to have for the large city of which we are a suburb and why some of our brave folks go down to Cast Your Cares twice a month! A team from WEC was just down on the streets in Kensington and under the bridge among the drug addicts this past week. How does God want us to love our city? Finally, here we learn that:

c. He takes no pleasure in destroying His enemies Yes, Nineveh deserved to be destroyed and God would have done it if necessary, but He didn't want to; that's why He sent Jonah. Listen to God's own words in **Ez. 33:11**, *...As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?* God could wipe ISIS off the map and He would have no joy in it. He didn't create people to be destroyed and lost forever. Maybe on the news in past years you saw Saddam Hussein of Iraq being hung for crimes against his people or Muammar Qaddafi of Libya's body being desecrated by a maddened crowd. I'm sure many people took great pleasure in seeing them get what they deserved, but God didn't. He wants every person, no matter how wicked, to turn to Him and live.

And that brings us to:

V. Jonah's Reaction To God's Command (3) Jonah didn't go to Nineveh; he ran away. Why? Because:

1. he wanted the destruction of the enemies of his people Look what he says to God in **4:2**, "I knew if I went and preached that they would repent and You would change your mind and not destroy them!" Jonah hated his enemies, the enemies of his people. He didn't want them to have a chance so:

2. he disobeyed by fleeing as fast and far as he could in the opposite direction Tarshish is on the southern coast of Spain and was about as far to the west as you could go, some 2000 miles, while Nineveh lay 600 miles northeast. And the fastest way to get there was on a ship, so he rose up as quickly as he could, found a ship, paid the fare and set sail. Why? To get away from God! The verse says it twice! Well, did he actually think God wouldn't be in Tarshish when he got there? I doubt it. Rather, his action was saying, "God, I quit! I will not be Your prophet anymore! I'm getting as far away from anything connected to You as I can. I mean it; I won't do it!!" So:

3. he refused to serve God and tried to distance himself from being used by God. He let his hate and prejudice toward enemies rule his life, destroy his ministry and tried to make sure there was no way that God could possibly use him to save his enemies.

Now lest we be too quick to condemn Jonah, what thoughts come into your mind when I tell you that there are 200,000 Muslims in Philadelphia or that 5% of England's population is Muslim? What goes through your head when you're in a restaurant or a department store and see groups of women wearing Muslim veils or when you see a dark-skinned black bearded man on your plane who looks like he's from the Middle East? What fears rise up in you when you hear someone say that the United States ought to open their arms and receive more of the several million refugees flooding into Europe from Syria and Iraq? September 11, 2001 was for us a watershed moment like Pearl Harbor was for an earlier generation. It was the day we all woke up and realized that we had radical Islamic terrorist enemies out there who hated us and wanted to kill us wholesale. And every terrorist incident since has reinforced that fear and anger. It's hard for us to accept that these few radicals don't represent the majority and it's easy to develop an attitude of wanting to keep them out or "send them back" to their own countries, or at least of avoiding them as much as possible. But if we do that, how will they ever find Jesus? How will God ever rescue them from His eternal judgment? Jesus tells us to love our enemies; He sends us to people whom we don't like, to people who don't like us. He sends us to tell them that HE loves them, that HE wants to know them and have them live with Him forever, that HE died for their sins. And WE are His prophets, like Jonah, the messengers He has sent to deliver His message of life that they might not die! *David Crabb shared this story just a week ago: Javad is an Iranian former Muslim living in Athens, Greece. He first heard the gospel via satellite radio while living in Iran. He didn't have a Bible, and he didn't know any Christians. But when he came to Greece, a roommate asked him to come to an Iranian church with him. He didn't even realize it was possible for "Iranian" and "church" to be put together! Because it was an entirely new concept, he accepted the invitation out of curiosity. There, in a small, nondescript room on a rented street corner, he heard the message of life and gladly surrendered to Christ. [Now] Javad is a remarkable evangelist. Every day he goes to the park, refugee camps, or coffee shops to share the gospel with Iranian and Afghan refu-*

gees. He told me that he knows of at least two to three Muslims who have trusted Christ nearly every day since he arrived in 2008. He works in a refugee center that provides food, clothing, and practical help to newly arrived refugees. Through the ministry of this center alone, over two thousand Muslims have trusted Christ in the last eight years. In Javad's church, approximately four hundred people have trusted Christ in the last few years, and nearly two thousand Farsi Bibles have been distributed to Iranian seekers. [However] like the apostle Paul, many of these converts once persecuted Christians themselves. Javad was preaching in a park one afternoon and proclaimed, "Jesus is the Son of God." A Muslim woman who was entirely veiled except for her eyes, cursed him loudly and intensely. A few weeks later, he was preaching again at church, and after the service a woman — with no veil — came up to him and said, "I heard you preach in the park a few weeks ago and cursed you, but now I have eyes to see that Jesus is the Son of God." This woman is now part of a church plant in Germany and regularly shares her faith with Muslim refugees. [\[http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/new-glory-in-the-ancient-city#modal-705-mt7hr6cd\]](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/new-glory-in-the-ancient-city#modal-705-mt7hr6cd) THAT is the kind of thing God wants to do and can do through us if we cooperate with Him! The question is, do we have a hard heart like Jonah or a willing heart like Javad?

The Story Of Nineveh: God's Love For A People God Gets Glory In Spite Of His Messenger Jonah 1:3-16

Last week I told you that the Book of Jonah is not really about Jonah; it is the story of God's love for the people of the city of Nineveh, the Assyrian people, a people who were not only prolific idol worshippers, but the most cruel and inhuman enemies of God's people. The time had come for God to destroy their city because of their great wickedness, yet God loved them so much that He commanded Jonah to go there and warn them, giving them the opportunity to repent before Him. But Jonah hated the Ninevites and, as we saw at the end:

I. Jonah Ran Away From Nineveh And From Serving The Lord (3) Now it's time for a bit more background information. Jonah:

1. he ran to the Phoenicians at the port city of Joppa Phoenicia was a small kingdom that lay to the north of Israel. Their chief cities were Tyre and Sidon, cities built right on the seacoast with natural harbors. Because Phoenicia could not develop inland, they took to the sea and:

a. they were the great mariners of the ancient world They built the biggest and the fastest ships of their day. And they, of all the peoples who lived around the coast of the Great Sea, were the bravest and learned to sail the farthest. They established colonies far away, all along the coast of North Africa and Spain. And they became the traders of the ancient world, hauling cargo back and forth and exchanging goods between all the nations at a profit. Now Joppa was the coastal seaport for Jerusalem, now part of modern Tel Aviv. King Solomon had the King of Tyre float cedar logs for his palace and the Temple down to Joppa by sea and took them up to Jerusalem. Phoenician ships were always coming and going in the major seaports so Jonah went to Joppa looking for one. Now not only were the Phoenicians a great seafaring people:

b. they were the great idolaters who introduced Baal worship to Israel A century before Jonah, King Ahab made a marriage alliance with Phoenicia, ...*he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him.* And that officially introduced and promoted the Baal worship that plagued Israel for generations. He was the chief of their gods. To the Phoenicians, Baal was the sky god, known as *lord of the heavens*. As the storm god, he was known as *he who rides on the clouds*. [Encyclopedia Britannica]. He was also the fertility god of agriculture and his worship involved all kinds of sexual rites. So, wherever the Phoenician sailors went, the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, his female consort, was spread throughout the Mediterranean world. Now to flee from God, Jonah sought out the Phoenicians in the biggest port nearby and:

2. he found a ship leaving for Tarshish, his desired destination Tarshish was a Phoenician colony on the south coast of Spain more than 2000 miles west. Keep in mind that most ships in that day were small and never sailed far out of sight of land. Only the Phoenicians were brave enough to launch into more open ocean and sail as far as Tarshish. And ships going there were undoubtedly few and far between. So, when Jonah arrived at the harbor of Joppa and found a ship that was actually going there:

a. he must have felt God accommodated his desire It was a miracle in itself to find such a ship immediately and he could not have missed that. It must have seemed to him as though God had arranged specifically to give him exactly what he wanted. In fact, He did! Only God didn't intend for Jonah to complete the voyage with the ship! I'm reminded of another ship, the one that was taking Paul under arrest to Rome. Turn to Acts 27. Paul had wisely given the crew advice to put the ship into harbor for the winter where they were, but the pilot and the owner of the ship had their own desire, **Acts 27:13**. They thought they were getting what they wanted, but soon found out differently. Jonah thought God was giving him what he wanted, and went down into the ship's hold to hide away from everyone else.

b. he was completely indifferent to the lostness of the sailors who obviously did not know the true God whom he served. True, they weren't enemies like the Ninevites; they were allies and friends of Israel who could be trusted in commerce and daily life, yet they were just as steeped in false worship and stood under the condemnation of

God. But Jonah didn't care; he was completely absorbed in his own problems. Now I can't resist making a point of application here. I wonder whether in life WE aren't sometimes like Jonah, going wherever WE want to go and seemingly succeeding in it, and in the process, working with and studying with and doing business with and living next to the Phoenicians in OUR lives who each worship their own god and have no idea who Jesus, the True God, really is, and that they ought to worship Him. And the saddest part is that so often we're so wrapped up in our own lives and our own problems like Jonah was, that we don't care about them! May God help us to wake up and see the eternal plight of those we live among!

At any rate, here is Jonah safely on his way to Tarshish, he thinks, but he didn't get very far because:

II. God Sent A Severe Storm Upon The Sea (4-5a) We don't know how long the ship sailed before the storm came up, but I'm assuming at least a couple of days because it took that long for the fish to swim Jonah back to land and spit him up! So somewhere out there in the middle of the ocean far from land, probably above Egypt, this horrible storm came up. The waves were so high and the winds so violent that:

1. the ship was in grave danger of sinking It was being smashed back and forth by the waves like a toy. The crew threw the cargo overboard to lighten it so it wouldn't sink and this probably was not an hour-long thunderstorm; it continued and continued without letting up and it grew worse, just like the storm that the ship carrying Paul to Rome ran into, if you'll look back to **Acts 27:14-20**. That's the kind of storm that Jonah was in, one so severe that the crew was sure that the ship was going to sink and they would drown. And notice that:

2. these seasoned mariners felt tremendous fear for their lives They had seen storms before; they were used to storms; they even expected storms at sea, but this one was so terrible that even THEY knew they would die if it continued. So, through this storm, God not only stopped Jonah from fleeing:

3. God created a spiritual opportunity to reveal Himself These sailors did not attribute such a storm to being a normal phenomenon of nature; they attributed it to the wrath of a god! Only a god who was angry could create such a tempest! So they prayed to Baal and they prayed to Ashtoreth and they prayed to Dagon and whoever else. Each one prayed and prayed to the god to whom they were most devoted but the tempest did not stop. Their gods seemed powerless to help. They were desperate to find out what god was doing this and how they could appease him and save their lives! What an opportunity for God to show Himself to them! God will often use a crisis to create a spiritual opportunity for people to experience His reality. A crisis may harden some people against God, but many times it produces an openness for people to seek God because they are desperate. A sickness, an accident, the death of someone dear, a job loss, a fire or flood, those are the times in life when people realize they are helpless and need God and their hearts may open to Him. But God needs someone to be there in that crisis with them and tell them about Himself so they can know Him, someone who isn't asleep and indifferent to their plight like Jonah! Well, on this boat there was no one else, so in spite of his rebellion:

III. God Used Disobedient Jonah As A Witness To Himself (5b-6) Can you imagine, all this storm tossing the boat and Jonah's still asleep; they unload the ship's entire cargo which is down inside the hold (think how noisy that must have been!) and Jonah's still snoring, so finally:

1. the captain woke and chastised sleeping Jonah He said, "What's wrong with you, man! We're all going to die and you're sawing logs! Get up and if you have a god, pray to him! Maybe YOUR god would be willing to notice us and do something to help us; we're desperate!" Talk about a perfect opportunity to share your faith! You know, I'm thinking about another time when some very experienced sailors were caught in a storm and the boat was taking on water and they were afraid for their lives while somebody was asleep. Look with me at **Mk. 4:36-38**. The disciples wake Jesus up and say basically the same thing, "Don't you care that we're going to die in this storm?! Only Jesus wasn't sleeping because He didn't care; He was sleeping because He was in control! I still remember the line from the old song that I used to sing with a boys quartet 50 years ago which said, *No water can swallow the ship where lies, the Master of ocean and earth and skies!* Listen, in whatever crisis you may find yourself, Jesus may not seem to you to be doing anything, but He is not unaware and uncaring. He is resting confidently in control of the whole thing and He expects you to understand who He is and trust Him! And while you're at it, share your confidence with someone else; Jesus would surely use it! Yet Jonah still didn't speak up, so:

2. God specifically identified Jonah as the source of their trouble (7-8) This was a superstitious crew; they believed in omens and signs and so they got out their little box of lots; they drew straws asking the gods to show them which one of them had provoked their anger. And God even took control of that process and had the lot fall on Jonah! Last Tuesday I heard the story of a woman in Uzbekistan who was a shaman, a witch doctor, and every morning she would get up and first thing go through her black magic practices to read her horoscope for the day. And one day as she read the signs, they said, *Isa Masih (Jesus Christ)*. She was taken back and the next day the signs read, *Isa Masih!* Three mornings in a row her signs told her, *Isa Masih*, so she called up a person she knew who had become a believer and said, "I'm going to church with you!" Long story short, she was saved, quit her occult practices and became a radiant believer. Oh, the lengths that God will go to, the circumstances He will arrange to draw people to Him-

self! But in this case, it rattled Jonah out. It put him on the spot; the sailors began to barrage him with questions, "Who are you? What are you doing here? What kind of person are you?" So now he had no choice and:

3. Jonah testified to the sailors concerning his God, Jehovah (9-10) Let me remind you that when you see the word LORD in all caps in an English Bible it is a respectful way of writing God's personal, proper Name, which in Hebrew is four consonants, YHWH; for centuries English speakers have pronounced it Jehovah. Jonah says, "I am a Hebrew and I worship JEHOVAH! And if you want to know who He is:

a. He is the God of heaven. Baal is not the sky god, Jehovah is! Baal is not the lord of the heavens, Jehovah is! Baal is not the one who rides on the clouds, Jehovah is; check out the Psalms! In fact, it was Jehovah **who created the sea** as well as the dry land, **so He controls it!** Now that really shook them and made them afraid. Their gods couldn't stop the storm; they were powerless. So here is Jehovah, the most powerful God there is, and He's mad at them and is going to kill them in this awful storm! And in the process:

b. Jonah confessed his own disobedience to Jehovah He told them, "I'm His prophet and I'm running away from Him!" And they said, "Are you nuts, man? What have you done? How could you disobey such a God? You're going to kill us all!" But the sailors didn't know anything about Jehovah; they didn't know how to approach Him and they only had one person to ask, so, disobedient or not:

4. the sailors appealed to Jonah for help in approaching his God (11-12) You see:

a. he knew the storm was God's discipline and that he was endangering them all. Whether that was his prophetic gift, his guilty conscience or just common sense, he knew that he knew that this storm was from God, that this has come upon them because of him and now that he's wide awake and confronted with it, he does an unbelievable thing:

b. he tells them executing God's sentence of death on him will save them I could be wrong, but I don't think for one moment that he thought God would spare his life. He had no clue there was a fish waiting under the surface to save him. He knew that directly refusing to obey the God of all the universe is deserving of death and he felt that if they would believe God and honor Him by executing His judgment and throwing Jonah overboard that God would spare them! Suddenly he becomes willing to die to save them and in that moment:

(1) for us he becomes a picture of Christ, doesn't he! The whole human race under the wrath of God, all of us idolaters, about to sink into death that is eternal and be banished from the presence of God forever and ever, and Jesus says to us, "Kill me and I will save you! Take My life and God will give you yours! Nail me to a cross and I will take the sins of the world upon myself so that you can be forgiven for all your transgressions!" In this one shining moment, Jonah finally becomes the sacrificial witness that God wants him to be, not expecting to live through the process. But in making that offer, he is in reality doing something else:

(2) he is setting up a power encounter between their gods and Jehovah Their gods couldn't stop the storm; their gods couldn't control the wind and the waves. He says, "Throw me in and you'll see Who the true God really is!" A century earlier Elijah called all the prophets of Baal to Mt. Carmel and proposed a test. "Let's both prepare a sacrifice and call on our gods to send fire. The god who answers by sending fire, HE is God!" Baal's followers couldn't get the smallest spark, but when Elijah called on Jehovah, fire came down from heaven and consumed his sacrifice all at once. And the people fell down on the ground in worship saying, "Jehovah, He is God! Jehovah, He is God!" That's a power encounter. That's what Jonah is doing here, "The God who stills the storm, HE is God!"

Listen, this is not something that God has quit doing. All around the world today where people worship false gods, God uses this method of challenging the power of false worship to show that He is the true God. It happens all the time in India. The evangelists of Hebron Believers Assembly, our partners there, go into village after village and it seems that in every village God will do some act of power. He will heal a sick person in answer to prayer or cast out a demon from someone or make a lame person able to walk and when He does, everyone sees that Jesus has power that their gods do not have. They come to believe that He is the True God and give their lives to follow Him. *Earlier this year, on the island of Madagascar, a missionary named Myndert Bloem and his team came to a village to show the Jesus film. When they arrived, a local pastor told them, "The daughter of a family is near death from malaria. Please, the parents have begged us to come with you and your team to pray for their child!" They had already taken the girl to witch doctors who were no help and their last resort, a medical doctor, said her malaria was too advanced and there was nothing he could do. She would be dead in two hours. But a large crowd had gathered to watch the film and the team felt they had to start, so Myndert told the audience about the desperate situation, prayed publicly for the child and started the film, all the while praying intensely in his heart for the child. At the clinic, the girl stopped breathing and lay lifeless for two hours. She was dead. When the film was over, the team quickly packed up and rushed to the clinic, but the pastor met them at the door with tears of joy. While the film was playing Jesus raised the girl from the dead! After 2 hours she suddenly took a breath and came alive! Now she is well and the hearts of the whole village and surrounding villages want to know about Jesus and the church is being planted in that area! [Jesus Film Project Report 8/3/2016].* Friends, we serve a God of power! Don't be afraid to tell

people that you will pray for their crisis and boldly ask Jesus to do mighty things to show that He is real to them! Well, through this power encounter:

IV. God Brought Idolatrous Phoenician Sailors To Faith In Him (13-14) They didn't want to kill Jonah and tried their hardest to avoid it, but:

1. when they became desperate, they prayed to Jehovah and obeyed They themselves called out to the True God, asked forgiveness for having to take Jonah's life and did what He had told them to do. And when they did:

2. God miraculously calmed the storm (15) That sounds remarkably like **Mark 4:39**. Jesus merely spoke to the wind and the waves and commanded them to stop and they did! And look at the reaction of the disciples - **Mk. 4:40-41**. In other words, they realize, "God Himself is standing right here in front of us in a human body!" His power revealed His identity and it did the same for these sailors. Because of this miracle:

3. they exhibited genuine faith in Jehovah as the true God (16) The Hebrew is *fearing they greatly feared...* They revered Him. They knew without a doubt that Jehovah was the true God, offered a sacrifice to Him and made vows to worship Him!

You see, while Jonah was sleeping, God was pursuing the hearts of a crew of idol-worshippers traveling with him to bring them to Himself. That's what He is always doing, pursuing the lost. *Ehsan, his wife and 6 year old daughter were in a crowded inflatable boat in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Greece, driven from their home by war and ISIS. It was night and there was a fierce wind. Icy waves were crashing over the bow of the boat soaking the passengers and tossing it about. Ehsan had already decided he was done with Islam after all he had experienced. He knew there was a creator God out there somewhere but he didn't know His name so in desperation he simply cried out, "Save us!" Suddenly, their corner of the sea became calm and still. Amazed by the miracle they continued on to shore safely. Weeks later they were in a church in Germany and after receiving aid, they were invited to stay and watch a film. It was the Jesus film in their own language and as they watched Jesus stand up in the boat and command the waves to be still and the sea became calm, light flooded into Ehsan's soul. Instantly he knew that JESUS was the God who had heard his own cry and saved them. Tears of joy ran down his face; now he knew God's name! A few days later he and his family with dozens of others were back in the church, this time to be baptized as new followers of Jesus! Before the crowd Ehsan testified, "God moved me from complete darkness into the light of Christ! [Jesus Film Project "Changing Lives", Issue 3, 2016] Hallelujah! That's what Jesus is doing; He's out there in the storms of life constantly pursuing the souls of people lost in darkness and about to die! Are we awake and aware and praying and deliberately joining with Him in pursuing the hearts of the lost who surround us or, like Jonah, are we disobediently sleeping and unconscious while those around us are perishing?*

The Story Of Nineveh: God's Love For A People

God Disciplines His Messenger Jonah 1:17-2:10

Thus far in the story of Nineveh, the capitol of the Assyrian Empire, we've seen that her idolatry and her wickedness had become so great that God had determined that it was time to destroy the city. Yet out of his great love, He commanded His prophet Jonah to go and warn the city, giving them a chance to repent. But Jonah hated his enemies, refused to go and got on a ship sailing west to run away from his commission, so God sent a huge storm on the sea that not only stopped Jonah, but led the whole Phoenician crew of the ship to faith in Jehovah, the God of Israel! They threw Jonah overboard, at his own instruction, and the huge storm immediately calmed, so they believed! Jonah honestly thought he was going to die, but God was not finished with him yet, so:

I. God Did A Miracle Using A Great Fish (1:17) Now this verse has been the subject of an incredible amount of controversy. Nonbelievers love to point to it and say, "Now there is proof that the Bible is simply a collection of ancient myths; no man could be swallowed by a whale and live for 3 days!" Of course, they say the same thing about Noah's ark or Jesus walking on water or any of the other miracles the Bible records. Liberal Christianity, which does not hold that the Bible is without error, answers, "Well, Jonah is simply a story told to illustrate a point; it doesn't have to be true!" If that is the case, then Jesus Himself was ignorant because He said with His own lips that Jonah was in the belly of the fish. Friends, Jonah was literally swallowed by a huge fish and lived; it's a miracle. I don't have any trouble believing in miracles. If our God can't do things that defy our normal experience of life, then He's not much of a God! Actually, the book of Jonah is filled with one miracle after another and in this event, God really did four miracles. First of all:

1. His "appointing" of the great fish was a miracle Some of God's greatest miracles are miracles of timing. At the very moment and at the very place in the Mediterranean Sea that Jonah was thrown overboard, under the water God had a great fish ready and waiting to receive him. And that word *appointed* tells us something. God *sent* the fish. He commanded the fish to be at that place at that very time. How did He do that? Look at 2:10a. God *spoke* to the fish and the incoherent fish obeyed just as the inanimate wind and waves obeyed when Jesus spoke to them! God's word is powerful; He merely speaks and without understanding, the creation does His will! Of all the places that fish could have been, it was right there where God appointed it to be! Listen, there are no coincidences in your life! Regardless of what you may think, God is always right on time and He has appointed the things He needs to sustain you! Secondly:

2. Jonah being swallowed by the fish was a miracle Scientifically minded critics say, "a whale cannot possibly swallow a man, nor is there a fish large enough to. In the first place, neither the Hebrew of the Old Testament or the Greek of the New Testament say anything about a whale. In verse 17 the Hebrew says "great fish"; the Greek where Jesus refers to Jonah in Mt. 12:40 says neither whale nor fish but *ketos*, a great sea creature or sea monster, that is, a large ocean creature. Yet even if it was a whale, there is a whole class of whales to which humpback and finback whales belong, that have no teeth and do not chew their food but could very easily swallow a man. They also feed on objects floating on the surface and have large air chambers in their heads that would be accessible from the mouth. Further, there is official record of them swallowing creatures; for example, one swallowed a dog that was later recovered alive. So, a whale could have swallowed Jonah but while we cannot rule out a whale, the language seems to indicate a fish. There is a species of shark known as the whale shark or rhinodon. It also does not chew its food and would be quite capable of swallowing a man whole. In fact, there are verified instances where an intact skeleton or body has been found in a whale shark's stomach. So, it is not beyond ordinary credibility to believe that a fish swallowed Jonah; it IS a miracle that God had the fish there and that the fish did, in fact, swallow him and that is what saved his life! Thirdly:

3. Jonah being preserved alive in the fish was a miracle Physically a man could easily be swallowed, but could he live inside the fish? Obviously, that is not very likely to happen and if it does, it is a miracle of God. However, there is even a verified case in the last century of an English sailor who was swallowed by a whale shark; it was killed two days later and the man was recovered from its stomach alive! If this could occur simply by natural "coincidence", could not the God of the universe preserve His prophet inside the belly of a great fish for three days! And finally:

4. Jonah being spit out on shore where he started was a miracle (2:10) The fish regurgitated Jonah back on shore and, presumably, the shore of Israel, so it carried him back to where he started and spit him out. That is a miracle! Yet it is known that the sulphur-bottom whale has an air chamber as big as a small room and when it swallows an object too large for it to swallow, it thrusts the object up into the air chamber, swims to shallow water near land and ejects it! So, it could occur naturally, but this great fish spat Jonah out because *God spoke to the fish!* HE made it happen!

All of these things were miraculous acts of God and they declare His glory; they display how great He is. However, the miracles that God does are not like cartoon magic or fairy tales; they are not incredibly ridiculous like changing a prince into a frog. Often they are interruptions of or changes to the course of natural laws and processes that are timed to suit God's purpose and God very often leaves enough evidence either in the area of archeology, history, or biology to convince the skeptic that they could be possible and to assure the Christian that he has nothing to fear from the world of science. No fact of Scripture has ever yet been objectively disproven by science; on the contrary science has time after time confirmed facts that were beforehand referred to only in Scripture! However, the real reason we believe they literally happened is because the Bible says they happened and the Bible is the Word of God Himself! Now in chapter 2 we have Jonah's account of what happened to him from the time he hit the water, what went on in his mind, and how he prayed to God inside the fish. Of course, He wrote it down later on as a Psalm and I want us to read it straight through (2:1-9). There, underwater:

II. Jonah Repented Of His Disobedience to God. You see:

1. God put him in a position of ultimate distress (2) The Hebrew word translated *distress* means *narrow, confining*; it is the nautical term for "a strait", a narrow passage where you are hemmed in to only one path by your surroundings. That's what God often does with us when we disobey Him. We're His children and He can't let us go our wrong way forever, so He begins to hedge us in with circumstances, to apply pressure from this side and that side until there is only one way to go, His way! Jonah was in the ultimate "strait"; only God could help him now because:

a. he kept sinking more and more deeply He couldn't stay afloat; the waves beat him under and the undertow sucked him down. Seaweed was wrapped around his head and in those brief moments as he was sinking rapidly to the bottom and becoming faint from lack of air:

b. he knew he was at the point of death by drowning He knew this was it; there was no way out, that he was literally descending into a watery grave. And just as he was at death's door, the fish snapped him up. If he was conscious and could see, it must have been terrifying to slide down into its gullet, but suddenly he found himself in an air pocket where he could breathe again. And as he gasped for breath there in the slime, verse (7) says:

2. Jonah turned his heart toward the Lord Jonah had testified to the sailors about God but had not sought God for himself and asked forgiveness and begged Him to save the ship. He had resigned himself to dying instead. But now, deep beneath the waters, as he found himself miraculously able to breathe again, he *remembered* God, that is:

a. he realized his own situation before God There was a change in Jonah's mind, a waking up, a coming to his senses, if you will. It's like a light turned on in his mind. Instead of running away from God, his heart now ran toward God. In the New Testament, the Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* which means literally to change your mind, to have it set in one direction (against God) and to swing it about 180 degrees towards Him. Whenever we disobey God, whenever we sin against Him, even as believers, that's what needs to happen. God may hedge us in with cir-

cumstances to drive us to Himself, but we need to wake up, realize what we've done, and run in His direction. In that moment Jonah realized three things, first:

(1) that he was separated from God (4) There has been a break in fellowship. It's not that God left me; I left Him by choosing to disobey and resist Him, so He banished me or drove me away into these circumstances. All of a sudden Jonah could see what God was doing. He thought he was running away from God but in reality, God was driving him to the end of himself. His sin had separated him from the fellowship that he once had. Second, he also realized:

(2) that only God could save him (9c) Salvation is a very broad word in Scripture. Sometimes it's talking about the salvation of our souls. Sometimes it looks ahead to the return of Christ when we join Him. But sometimes it simply refers to the rescue of our bodies. But no matter which, salvation is the work of God. Jonah realized, "There is nothing I can do. I can't help myself. I can't save my own life and get myself out of this. Deliverance can only come from the Lord; He's the only one who can help me!" And along with this came the realization:

(3) that it was stupid to continue rebelling against God (8) Literally it says, *those who pay heed to vanities of emptiness forsake their own mercy*. It's not just the actual worshippers of idols who are ignorantly missing the grace they could have; it is the believer who is pursuing an empty course of disobedience, trying to struggle through life his own way. He's missing the love and grace he could be having! The prodigal son ran off from his father to do what he wanted but ended up starving in a pig pen and there he came to his senses and thought "Even the servants at home have more than enough to eat; I'm so stupid; I've been missing all the blessings of my father's love!" When we wake up and realize how futile and foolish it is to keep going the way we are, then we're ready to do what Jonah did:

b. he prayed to the Lord (1-2) Of course:

(1) he cried out for help That's the natural thing to do. "God help me! God save me!" Once you know what a fool you've been to disobey and see all it has cost you and realize that only God can help you, you cry out, "Help Lord! I know what a fool I've been; I've been going my own way. Please forgive me and help me!" That's all God wants; He's just been waiting to hear it. But Jonah didn't stop there:

(2) he vowed to obey God (9b) Jonah evidently made a vow to God there in the belly of the fish and I don't think it would take much to guess what it was, "Lord, if you get me out of this, I'll obey; I'll do what you tell me to do; I'll go to Nineveh!" Repentance can never be only, "I'm sorry, Lord, get me out of this (but I'm still not going to obey!)" That's not repentance at all; that's persisting in our own way. Repentance says, "I've learned my lesson. You are Lord; I am your servant; I will do what you want!"

And when Jonah prayed like that:

3. God delivered him from death!

a. He heard Jonah's prayer (2) Isn't it wonderful that God hears us! No matter how far we've sunk, literally! His ear is always open to our cry, no matter how far down the path of disobedience we may have gone. His ear never grows hard of hearing! And He not only heard the prayer, He answered it:

b. He spared Jonah's life (6) His life was spared first by being inside the fish and then in verse 10 he was put back on land, safe and alive. Listen, no matter how far down we've gone, God always has a way for us to start right from there to follow His path. He has the power to deliver us and take us through to what He has planned for us next. However, please notice that:

c. He tested Jonah's promise (3:1-2a) Immediately God says, "OK, now we'll see if you meant what you promised; go to Nineveh!" You can rest assured that once you commit yourself to obey God, He will relatively soon give you a chance to demonstrate your obedience!

But notice that God's plan, God's purpose has never varied. What is it? He wants to save the people of Nineveh, to rescue them because they have been running far from Him. He wants to call them back to Himself. And, in fact, while Jonah has been sitting in the belly of the fish and we have been focusing on God's working in Jonah's heart, God was doing something much bigger than that. By having Jonah thrown into the sea and rescuing him by means of the great fish, God was actually acting to save the Ninevites. How? If you'll look with me at **Lk. 11:30, 32**, Jesus told us that:

III. God Made Jonah A Sign To The People Of Nineveh Jonah himself became a SIGN to the Ninevites. You know what a sign is; it's something that clearly indicates the presence of God, a miraculous thing. You see, Jonah did not simply preach destruction; he told the Ninevites the story of what had just happened to him and:

1. his miraculous deliverance proved the power of Jehovah The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, but what was miraculous about Jonah's preaching? Nothing! In Mt. 12 Jesus explained that the sign of Jonah was the fact that he was three days and nights in the belly of the fish and God brought him out alive! The reason the Ninevites believed what Jonah preached was because they knew he had been miraculously swallowed by the fish and delivered by

Jehovah! He himself was living proof of the power of God. If Jehovah could rescue him from death through the fish, then Jehovah could destroy Nineveh as Jonah preached. His own person standing there alive was convincing proof of the truth of what he said. They believed his story. Why? I have no idea. Who would believe it? But they did! In the case I told you of earlier where the sailor had been swallowed by a whale shark and lived, it affected his skin pigmentation in blotches and his hair was all removed through the digestive juices of the fish. Maybe Jonah was scarred and disfigured like that in a way they could see. Who knows? But at the bottom line, God worked in their hearts and:

2. the Ninevites believed his message that Nineveh would be destroyed **because of this experience**. Now remember, Jehovah was not their god. They would normally put no stock in the God of Israel. But now they figured if Jonah's God could do that with a man in a fish, He could break the walls of Nineveh or rain fire from heaven. So even though they had absolutely no human reason to, they believed that God would destroy them and repent. My point is that God was saving the people of Nineveh at the same time that He was rescuing Jonah! Whatever He's doing in our lives personally, it's all for His bigger purpose of bringing others to faith! Your testimony of God's working in your life is meant to be the sign to others that He is real and that He wants to save them! He didn't do it just for you! He did it so your life could be a sign to the world that He loves them! But God even used Jonah's experience beyond his death; centuries later:

3. God also made him a sign to unbelieving Israel in Jesus' day - Mt. 12:39-40 The Jewish leaders demanded a sign from Jesus. He said, "Remember how Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the fish and God brought him out alive? That's what God is going to do with Me! I'll be three days and nights buried in the heart of the earth and God will raise me to life!" By the way, don't get caught up worrying about the "three days and three nights" phrase. In rabbinic understanding any part of a day counts as a whole day, so Jesus being buried on Friday and raised on Sunday was three day/night units. Wouldn't it be something if Jonah was thrown into the sea on Friday afternoon and spit out on the shore on Sunday morning?! We have no way of knowing that, of course, but it would be just like God to make the picture of Jesus fully complete!

At any rate, whatever God is doing in your life, it is not just for you! He is doing it for the greater purpose of using it and you to advance His Kingdom, often in ways you could not imagine. *Some of you are old enough to remember Chuck Colson; he was a former top aide to President Nixon and was known as his "hatchet man". He was involved in the Watergate Scandal in 1972 that ultimately led to Nixon's resignation, but in 1973 he gave his life to Jesus and made the public statement, "I've been born again and given my life to Jesus Christ". In 1974 he voluntarily pled guilty to obstruction of justice and was sentenced to 1-3 years in Alabama's Maxwell Prison. He was released after 7 months, but in his best-selling book, Born Again, he wrote, "I found myself increasingly drawn to the idea that God had put me in prison for a purpose and that I should do something for those I had left behind." Colson emerged from prison with a new mission: mobilizing the Christian church to minister to prisoners. As a result, he founded Prison Fellowship in 1976, which has become the world's largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. He died in 2012 but Billy Graham eulogized him this way, "For more than 35 years Chuck Colson, a former prisoner himself, has had a tremendous ministry reaching into prisons and jails with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. When I get to heaven and see Chuck again, I believe I will also see many, many people there whose lives have been transformed because of the message he shared with them. He will be greatly missed by many, including me. I count it a privilege to have called him a friend."* God sent Chuck Colson to prison to save thousands of prisoners. God buried Jonah in a fish for three days to save thousands of Ninevites. Whatever God has done in your life, even if it doesn't seem very dramatic, He has done so that you can share it with others and He can use it to draw them to Himself. Realize that and cooperate with the process. You'll be amazed at what He will do!

The Story Of Nineveh: God's Love For A People

God Changes Nineveh Jonah Ch. 3

As we continue to look at the story of God's love for the ancient city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, beginning at chapter 3 of the Book of Jonah is almost like starting the story over again the way it should have gone the first time. The difference this time is that God is starting now with a different Jonah. He's been through the belly of the fish and has learned the lesson that you don't deliberately disobey God; God has a way, sometimes a painful way, of turning your life back in His direction! So now, God commands Jonah and Jonah stands ready to obey Him **(1)**. Before we go on with the story, this time when I read those words a *second time*, I realized they were not merely stating a fact. You see:

I. God Gave Jonah A Second Chance When we disobey God and refuse to do what He wants, He doesn't say, "Well, that's it; I'm done with you!" and throw us away. He pursues us and hems us in with circumstances until we repent and change. But then as far as serving Him goes, He doesn't say, "Well, you had your chance and you blew it! I can't use you anymore!" He gives us new opportunities to serve Him. They may not be the SAME ones we had previously (or they may - Jonah's was!), but no one needs to say, "Well, God can't use me anymore; I blew it and now He won't do much with me!" Our God is a God of second chances! John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey and at first Paul strongly didn't want to give him a second chance to serve. But God did and eventually he and Paul served together once again and God used him to write the second Gospel in our New Testament. David disobeyed God in the most seri-

ous ways possible and still God forgave him and used him again, not only as King of Israel, but to pen all those wonderful Psalms we have in Scripture that glorify Him. But how many times can we let him down before He gives up on us? Well, how many times did Jesus tell us that we have to forgive our brothers when they sin against us in **Mt. 18:21-22**? Seventy times seven, an infinite number! Would we expect less of Him? *When Thomas Edison was working on his very first prototype of a "light bulb", it took a whole team of men 24 straight hours to put just one together. The story goes that when Edison was finished with that one bulb, he gave it to a young boy helper, who nervously carried it up the stairs. Step by step he cautiously watched his hands, obviously frightened of dropping such a priceless piece of work, and promptly dropped the bulb at the top of the stairs. So it took the entire team of men twenty-four more hours to make another bulb and when at last Edison was ready to have the second precious bulb carried up the stairs, he gave it to the same young boy who dropped the first one. [James Newton, Uncommon Friends: Life with Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Alexis Carrel and Charles Lindbergh, 1989, p.22]* That's what God did with Jonah! And that's what He will do with us; if we are willing, He will give us not only a second chance, but a third and a fourth and a seventh and a hundredth opportunity to serve Him! Now on to verses **(2-4)**. It sounds simple enough: *Go to Nineveh and preach!*, but it is important to realize that:

II. God Sent Jonah On A Formidable Assignment In the first place:

1. the task he was assigned seemed humanly impossible because:

a. it was too large Nineveh was a great city. In fact, it was one of, if not *the* largest city in the Near East of its day. 4:11 says its population was at least 120,000, and if "not knowing their right hand from their left" is a reference to children, it was probably more like 600,000. Either way, that's an impossible number for one missionary to speak to! Yet it's strikingly similar to the statistic that among the 2.84 billion persons in the unreached peoples of the world today, there is 1 missionary for every 278,000 people! Sharing the Good News with them all is a humanly impossible task without God! Furthermore, Nineveh was geographically large. Its inner wall had a circumference of 8 miles, but simply to travel throughout the four attached cities and suburbs that made up Greater Nineveh as Jonah did required three days. It would be like me walking and preaching trying to cover all the city limits of Philadelphia. Impossible! The unreached peoples of the world live in an area that stretches from Indonesia to the west coast of Africa, an immense geographical area; covering it all seems humanly impossible. Secondly, Jonah's task seemed impossible because:

b. it was too dangerous I described for you the nature of the Assyrian Empire in our first message. Remember, they had the largest, most powerful army in the world and they were ruthless, cruel warriors who would not only kill their enemies but torture them to death. The Assyrians invented crucifixion! How likely is it that they would listen to some skinny Hebrew prophet? Furthermore, Nineveh had 2 walls. The inner wall was 100 feet tall and 50 feet thick with 20 story towers on it and a 150 foot moat around it. It was an impregnable fortress. Small wonder that the residence of the King was there! Who could destroy that? Sending Jonah to them was like sending me to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, to demand that he and his army repent and turn to Jesus! What is the most likely outcome of that? Unless God intervened, it was a suicide mission! The remaining unreached peoples of the world today are the most resistant and difficult ones. Many of them live in repressive societies where any public knowledge that you are a Christian, let alone a missionary, can get you kidnapped or killed! Unless God moves, reaching many of the remaining peoples is far too dangerous! And finally, Jonah's task seemed impossible because:

c. the time was too short God said He would *overthrow* the city in 40 days; that word seems to imply that it would be conquered by an enemy. Well, in those days sieges of walled cities lasted for many months and sometimes several years. But to say this would happen in 40 days and with no enemy in sight? Why would the Ninevites ever believe they would be overthrown? God would have to literally rain fire from heaven to defeat them like He did on Sodom and Gomorrah! And let me just mention here that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, says *in THREE days*. It's probably a copyist's error mixing up similar numerals, but that would make it seem utterly impossible, even though it would make sense that Jonah didn't have to camp outside the city for over a month waiting to see whether God destroyed it in chapter 4.

Well, despite how impossible and formidable his assignment must have seemed to him and how much he desperately didn't want to do it, *Jonah arose and went to Nineveh* anyway and in doing so:

2. his obedience to God is a great example to us Would you have gone? Of course you would if you'd been swallowed by a fish first! Seriously, this week I heard a speaker share that God had spoken to him about becoming a missionary and he was praying about where he was supposed to go. And one Tuesday morning in September of 2001 he was on the Staten Island ferry heading to his job in the city when he saw the first World Trade Center tower streaming fire and smoke and he had the funniest feeling that this might have something to do with where he was supposed to go. Well, it was not long before the whole world knew that the Sept. 11 attacks were launched from Afghanistan and very shortly God made it clear, "I want you to go to Afghanistan, to *THESE* people!" Would you have gone to a violent people who were your enemies, to such a dangerous place? This fellow did and so did Jonah:

a. he did exactly what God told him to do He went to Nineveh and he began to preach as he went through it all day long on the first day. He was like Esther who said, "I will go in to the king and if I perish, I perish!" And notice that:

b. he said exactly what God told him to say "Within 40 days Nineveh will be overthrown!", a message of unlikely doom. And I'm sure he said more than this simple line; it only stands to reason he told them the message was from his God, Jehovah and that He was going to overthrow the city because it was evil and sinful before Him. I told you the other week about the lady who was a shaman in Uzbekistan and God had her black magic horoscope spell out *Isa Masih (Jesus Christ)* each morning. The worker who witnessed to her was scared to death but prayed about what to say and told her, "What you are doing is evil and you are going to hell! And you are leading other people there! She got out Deuteronomy and showed her the passages that say a witch must be killed. Not exactly your most likely strategy for winning somebody, but it worked. Instead of becoming angry, the lady sighed and said, "I know I am doing evil" and soon received Jesus!

When Jesus appoints us to go and make disciples of all the peoples of the earth, including those right around us, that's what He wants of us, to go where He sends us and say what He tells us, no matter how formidable or outrageous or impossible it may seem. He doesn't want excuses why we can't go or why it's not a good idea, or why it would be better to say something else. He doesn't need advice from us; He simply wants obedience. And if we will simply decide to obey God no matter what, then whatever happens as a result is His business and just look what He did with Jonah's radical obedience:

II. God Brought About A Miraculous Repentance in Nineveh (5-9) The repentance of the city of Nineveh is the greatest miracle recorded in this book and, in fact, it is among the greatest miracles in the whole Old Testament! Now what we don't know and what Jonah himself didn't realize was that:

1. God had prepared the Ninevites to receive Jonah's message In this specific era of time, around 760 BC, King Asshur Dan III of Assyria was involved in a prolonged war against the mountain tribes of the kingdom of Urartu and its associates who were advancing against them from the north. Their enemies at one point had made it to within 100 miles of the gates of Nineveh. With this threat and fear of defeat hanging over their heads, it is no wonder they listened when Jonah appeared with a message from his God declaring their overthrow! Wherever God sends you, He has already been there and has been at work in people! Whatever God tells you to say, He already knows exactly what the person needs to hear and how they will react. But Urartu is not the main reason the Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching. As I told you last time:

2. they believed God's word because of Jonah's experience Jesus said in **Lk. 11:30, 32** that Jonah himself was a *sign* to the Ninevites. His own miraculous experience of being swallowed by the fish and spit out again alive convinced them that his message was true and that his God was powerful. So they believed the word of Jehovah concerning their own overthrow and because they did:

3. they displayed evidence of genuine repentance When crowds of people repented at the preaching of John the Baptist and came to be baptized, he warned them all, *Bear fruits in keeping with repentance...* - **Lk. 3:8**. In other words, if your repentance is genuine, your life will change. Your changed behavior will be the fruit of the heart change that happened inside. Notice three things about the Ninevites. First:

a. they realized their guilt before God Before, they did whatever they felt like, but suddenly they saw that their ways were evil and violent, that they were wrong, they were sin. Even their king openly confessed that fact in verse 8. The awful behaviors they reveled in were no longer fun and pleasure; they were death! Repentance is a change of mind about the nature of what you're doing; it is a realization that it is sin, it is wrong and therefore you must stop doing it! Second:

b. they grieved over their sins and the punishment they expected and, in that culture, here's how you grieved. You take off your nice robe, put on a piece of rough burlap sackcloth for clothing and sit down in a heap of ashes, covered with dust. You humble yourself to the lowest position. You fast; you give up eating and drinking out of your sorrow. It's like somebody died; you mourn before God, grieving that you have done such awful things and that now you will have to die for them! And third:

c. they forsook their evil behavior They quit their violence and greed and extortion and vile immorality immediately. The message spread like wildfire as Jonah kept walking further and further into the city and as people heard it repentance began and they spread the message to their friends and multiplied and multiplied until:

d. the repentance thoroughly permeated the city It reached from end to end geographically and from the least to the greatest of them vertically. It seems like every Ninevite who heard Jonah's message had the same amazing reaction. Instead of anger and unbelief, everyone repented. And it wasn't long before the king was told the message and instead of being angry and proud:

(1) their king himself repented Keep in mind that this was not some two-bit ruler of a small city, but the very Emperor of Assyria himself! For days he put on sackcloth and sat on a heap of ashes and fasted and prayed for forgiveness! Oh, that our country's leaders would be willing to do that! And that our whole nation might follow! What's more:

(2) he issued an official decree of repentance that was binding upon all the people. Now please understand that the people were already repenting on their own, long before this could have been written and circulated. But this decree made it official. The king spoke and acted for the whole city, declaring their guilt and mourning over their sins and ceasing from violence and sin!

Now why did they do all of that if God had declared their doom was immanent? Because:

4. they hoped that God MIGHT pardon and spare them Verse 9. Because God had sent Jonah to warn them, they felt maybe there was yet hope to appeal to His mercy and avert His pronouncement of judgment. They had no assurance that He would; the king said, "Who knows?" But just maybe Jehovah is a god who can forgive! Especially since He forgave Jonah for disobeying and running away! Aren't you glad we have a clearer view of who God is and a clearer promise from Him? **1 Jn. 1:9**, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Our God is a faithful God! He will ALWAYS forgive us and cleanse us! We don't have to wonder whether our repentance is acceptable to Him; we simply believe what He has said about Himself! And because He IS such a gracious God and wanted to from the beginning:

III. God Changed His Plan To Destroy The City And Spared It Instead (10) The Hebrew literally says that "God repented". He changed His mind; He said He would do something and then did not do it. He said that within 40 days He would destroy the city and then He spared it. So wasn't his declaration a lie? Does God just change His mind about things? The answer is no and here's why:

1. He offered the hope of change by sending Jonah We already saw that in the very act of sending Jonah with this message, God is telling Nineveh that she has opportunity to repent and avert disaster. I think the Ninevites understood that from the start and so did Jonah. He even says to God in 4:2, "I KNEW if I went You would forgive them and not destroy them!" So from the first God seems to be implying that this pronounced destruction was conditional and we can clearly see that:

2. our response to His Word impacts His action in our lives Our individual choices change what God does. Jonah's running away caused God to have to create a storm and send a fish and delay His announcement to Nineveh by some time. If Jonah hadn't obeyed the second time, He might have had to send a different messenger. In like manner, the Ninevites' repentance caused God to change what he was about to do. However, if they hadn't repented, within 40 days Nineveh would have been a heap of ruins! If we obey, He does one thing and if we disobey, He has to do another. That is the price He pays for allowing us to have free will. Of course, none of our choices take Him by surprise; He is always in control and causes all things to work out according to His perfect will. But He graciously makes allowance for our choices and incorporates them into that plan. In this case it is obvious that:

3. God acted consistently by His own principle He has always been a God who forgives sin and gives second chances. We already read Jer. 18:7-8, where He says plainly, *If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.* That is God's principle for dealing with nations. God was simply doing with Nineveh what He says He will always do!

You know, it is so hard for us to believe that God can actually change a whole city like that. But He is still doing it. *Roughly 400 years after Christ St. Augustine recorded this: "A few years ago when Arcadius was Emperor at Constantinople (what I say, some have heard, some of our people were present there,) did not God, willing to terrify that city in order to amend, convert, cleanse, and change it, reveal to a faithful servant of His (a soldier, it is said), that the city would perish by fire from heaven, and warned him to tell the Bishop! He told it. The Bishop did not despise it, but addressed the people. The city turned to the mourning of penitence, just as Nineveh of old. Yet lest men should think that he who said this, either deceived them or was deceived, the day which God had threatened, came. When all were intently expecting destruction with great fears, at the beginning of night as the world was being darkened, a fiery cloud was seen from the East, small at first then, as it approached the city, gradually enlarging, until it hung terribly over the whole city. All fled to the Church so that the place did not hold all the people. But after that great fear, when God had accredited His word, the cloud began to diminish and at last disappeared. The people, freed from fear for a while, again heard that they must leave, because the whole city should be destroyed on the next Sabbath. The whole population left the city with the Emperor; no one remained in his house. That multitude, having gone some miles, when gathered in one spot to pour forth prayer to God, suddenly saw a great smoke, and sent forth a loud cry to God. At last, they felt peace and, trusting the predicted hour was over, returned seeing, without exception, all the walls and the roofs standing. All of them had intense joy as they returned home again. No one lost anything out of his house, they found everything just as they had left it. [Augustine, "The Destruction Of Rome", Ch. 6; English translation in E. B. Pusey's commentary on Jonah, 1806, underlined portion my paraphrase from original.]* Friends, God CAN destroy a whole city, anytime He chooses, and He CAN change a whole city and spare it. Let's pray that God will do that with OUR city here, our country, and with all the evil empires of the earth. Within the past few decades, we've seen Him fell the Iron Curtain, saving thousands of Russians and Central Asians, build the largest church in the world in communist China in the midst of persecution and now He is tearing the wall of the Muslim world

apart in its very heartland and rescuing thousands of refugees. Untold millions have been swept into the Kingdom before our very eyes. God can do the impossible; He CAN change the world. The question is, will we obey Him and follow His orders to do our part in it?

The Story Of Nineveh: God's Love For A People

God's Heart For Nineveh Jonah Ch. 4

To summarize the story thus far: God sent Jonah to Nineveh, he preached the message that God would destroy it throughout the city, the whole city repented of their sins, and *when God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.* - 3:10. Most prophets or preachers I know would be delirious with joy if they saw an entire city repent at their preaching! Wouldn't that be the natural reaction? But it wasn't Jonah's! Look at:

I. Jonah's Reaction To God's Relenting (1) Now I'm not sure how Jonah knew God had decided not to destroy Nineveh. Some feel he obviously must have waited 40 days and seen that it did not happen; others feel God revealed it to him. The story doesn't tell us, but either way Jonah knew and that little verse contains the root of his reaction:

1. he felt that not destroying Nineveh was a grievous evil It's not simply that Jonah was displeased or upset. The Hebrew expression used here is much stronger than the English. It says *it is grievous unto Jonah--a great evil*. Jonah felt it was a horrible atrocity, a gross miscarriage of justice, for Nineveh to be spared. Why? Remember the Ninevites, that is the Assyrians, were the enemies of Israel who had attacked and dominated it earlier and they were the cruel terrorists of the near eastern world. The prophet Hosea was Jonah's contemporary in Israel and he predicted clearly in 10:6 that Israel would be conquered by Assyria in punishment for her sins. Jonah probably knew that the Assyrians were going to be God's instrument of punishment on Israel, so for multiple reasons he hated them. To see their destruction would mean sparing of the lives of his own people! To see them be spared meant disaster and was horribly wrong in his eyes and so:

2. he became furiously angry that God did not destroy it He literally got hot, set on fire! And he wasn't angry at the Ninevites for repenting; he was angry at God for caring about them and sparing them! You see, it didn't matter to him that these Ninevites who were about to die had eternal souls and would perish without knowledge of the True God. He didn't see them as having any value. He was not looking at things from God's viewpoint, but, like most of us, only cared about the people that directly mattered to him in this world. Most of us don't care about drug pushers or gang members or thieves or other people like that. If one of them gets shot or murdered or imprisoned for life, we think, "They deserve it!" We don't care about the Taliban or the insurgents fighting us in Afghanistan. Look how they blow up our soldiers! So we watch with glee a video of a drone dropping a bomb on a few of them and seeing them disappear in a puff of smoke, because, "they should get what they deserve!" Fidel Castro, the elderly longtime dictator of Cuba, died this week and Cubans in Miami danced in the streets for joy! Hatred is not foreign to any of us and it's easy to see why Jonah got so angry at God for sparing his enemies when they were so close to getting what they deserved! It's like seeing the court declare the person who murdered your daughter not guilty for some technicality and watching him walk free. That's why:

3. he boldly rebuked God for sparing the city (2) He went straight to God in his anger and essentially said, "I knew You were going to do this; that's why I ran away in the first place!" In other words, "How could You do this!" Now you have to give Jonah this much; He didn't abandon His faith in God. Rather:

a. he showed faith in going directly to God as one who knew Him. He still knew that God was the True God and in control of the whole situation. Hey, when you're angry at God because He doesn't do what you want, go to Him! Tell Him how angry you are and how much you hate what He has allowed to happen! He's got big shoulders; He can take it and He won't squash you like a bug for expressing it! He loves you and He is gentle with His children, just like you are with yours when they say, "I hate you!" because they didn't get their way. He knows our view is often self-centered. But Jonah also showed faith in **being sure of His character**. He quoted God's own words back to him. God had declared His own nature as gracious and forgiving repeatedly in these words, to Moses in Exodus and through David three times in the Psalms. Jonah believed them; he believed with all his heart that God was merciful and would forgive people who didn't deserve it and so do we! We're counting on that, because WE didn't deserve it! We boldly declare, even when we're angry at God, that He is a forgiving God who does not destroy people for their sins when they repent and turn to Jesus. Yes, Jonah still had genuine faith, but:

b. he was irreverent in condemning God's behavior Whenever we tell God that He's wrong to do what He does, that He's wrong to allow what He chooses to allow, that He's made a mistake or done something evil, it is not HE who is wrong, but WE. God is righteous; He always does what is right. He is too just to tolerate evil and unable to condone wrongdoing (Hab. 1:13). He CANNOT do wrong; it's impossible, so in his anger, Jonah was being irreverent toward Him. And in concluding his short prayer:

4. he actually asked to die (3) Why? He wanted to die **out of anger at the non-destruction of Nineveh**. In other words, he would rather die himself than see them live! He'd rather not live and see things happen that he hated to see happen. That's not uncommon. Many people have those same feelings; they want to die when God does or allows something that they consider so grievous that deeply impacts their lives. But notice that Jonah is not thinking of suicide; he respects God's sole right to take his life; he's asking God to take it. Sadly, many people choose to take God's right into their own hands. Last April the New York Times reported that *the overall suicide rate rose by 24 percent from 1999 to 2014*. Almost 43,000 people died from suicide in the US in 2014, the highest number in 30 years, so it's worth saying this: there may be times in life when you may feel like dying, but only GOD has the right to terminate your life. You have no right to do it yourself! God wasn't done with Jonah yet and He's not done with you either! Put it in your brain now as one of those non-negotiable principles that govern life so you're not tempted when the feeling occurs: suicide is NEVER an option! Anyway, in his anger, Jonah wanted to die, but:

5. God gently questioned his right to be angry about Nineveh (4) He didn't treat Jonah harshly or punish him for his irreverence. He was gentle. He simply asked a probing question for him to think about, "Is it really right for you to be this angry about this? Is your burning anger a good and proper thing?" That's a good question, a penetrating question, that God wants us to ponder when we are as upset and angry as Jonah was.

During a memorial service--on the rim of the Grand Canyon--for the victims of a tragic midair plane collision, an angry young man yelled out, "Where was God when this happened?" The minister in charge of the service asked, "Did everyone hear the question? The young man asked where God was when this life-consuming tragedy happened." Then ...[he] answered, "God was in the same place He was when cruel men took His only Son and crucified Him on a cross." [A Time for Mourning by Joyce Landorf. Fleming H. Revell, 1974.] If you're ever angry and upset and want to die, just look at the cross. Ponder deeply what both the Father and the Son endured to give mercy to you and it will melt away. We can't possibly understand what God is doing in the long run; His ways are higher than our ways. What God wants is for us to realize that He always does right and trust the love He demonstrated once for all at the cross. But Jonah was not about to give up that easy, verse (5). He stomped out of the city, took some branches and palm fronds and made a little booth for shade and sat down to watch what would happen. Maybe he was thinking his tirade in prayer would change God's mind again somehow; I don't know, but what's important is:

II. God's Reaction To Jonah's Hatred God is determined to get Jonah to understand His heart so right there in his little spot:

1. God provided an object lesson for Jonah Seemingly out of nowhere:

a. He grew a plant which became something Jonah treasured (6) Just as He had appointed the great fish to save Jonah, now God appointed a plant to grow up over Jonah's shelter. The Hebrew points to the ricinus or castor oil plant, from the seeds of which we get both castor oil and the poison ricin. Interestingly, the Romans called it the *palma Christi* because its leaves were said to resemble the pierced palms of Christ. St. Jerome says it *...grows very abundantly in Palestine, and chiefly in sandy places. If placed in sowing land, being quickly nourished, it grows up into a tree, and in a very few days what you saw as nothing but a herb you now look upon as a small tree.* [Keil and Delitsch] So God made this plant grow rapidly and, lying there for a couple of days, Jonah really came to appreciate the shade that it provided him from the sun. He came to treasure that plant. In contrast, he was as happy about it as he was angry at God. But then God:

b. He sent a worm which destroyed what Jonah treasured (7) At sunrise the next day God appointed a little bug to come along and chew a hole in the plant's stem which immediately killed it. In a matter of hours, the leaves withered and fell off. The shade it provided was no more. God suddenly took away what Jonah treasured and then:

c. He sent the wind which emphasized how much Jonah treasured it (8a) That scorching east wind is a phenomenon known in that region as a *simoom*, a strong, dry, dust-laden wind that moves in circular fashion and produces on humans and animals a suffocating effect. Although it may only last 15 minutes, temperatures in a *simoom* have been known to exceed 129° and it often causes heat stroke. So now Jonah has no shelter left, his temporary happiness has fled and he's really angry that the plant is not there to shade him. So:

d. Jonah now asked to die once again, but this time we find out that it is **out of anger at the destruction of the plant (8b)** And now:

2. God explained His point to Jonah (9) Once again:

a. God gently questioned his right to be angry, this time **about the vine**. "Is it a good thing for you to be this angry about the death of a plant?!" And he goes on in a moment to add, "about a plant that you didn't even plant, that you didn't tend and cause to grow, a plant that only lasted a day?" And, of course:

b. he strongly asserted his right to be angry. "Yes, I do! I'm angry enough to die; now I'm so hot I'd rather be dead!" Why did he say that? **Because he cared deeply about the plant!** So now God springs the punch line in verses (10-11a). His point was that:

c. Jonah cared deeply about a simple plant that he hadn't even made and God showed him how deeply he cared so that he would understand how:

d. God cared deeply about the Ninevites whom He had made! In other words, He's saying, "If you care that much about the death of that simple plant, how much do you think I care about all those people who live in Nineveh! I created them. I have sustained them. They are Mine and I want them to know Me! I would hate to see them destroyed far more than you hate seeing this little plant die! Look at it from MY point of view, will you?!"

And the story ends right there; it's a cliff hanger! We never know how Jonah answers or how he responds. We'd like to think he repents and says, "God, you're right and I'm wrong!" but we're not told. Maybe he finally got the lesson; maybe he didn't and there is no reliable record of the rest of his life to tell us. But what's really important here are:

III. The Lessons Which God Wants To Teach Us Let's read (10-11) again, this time for ourselves, not Jonah. First of all:

1. God has the unquestionable right to do what He wishes with His creation Jonah had no right to tell God what to do with His creation; God had every right to do with it as He pleased. If He chose to destroy Nineveh, He had right to do so. If in His love and grace He chose to spare the people of Nineveh, then He as Creator had the right to do so! The pot has no right to tell the Potter what to do or to question what He does. That's a hard lesson, but we must learn it. Even though there are many times when we wish from our human perspective that God would do things some other way, and even times when we get angry with Him over the way He's doing them, God still has the right to do what He wills with what is His. Somehow, we must get to the place where Job ended up after chapters of complaining, *I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ...Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ...I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* - Job 42:2-6. When we're in that place of humility, accepting that He is God and we are not, then He can use us to glorify Him. The second major lesson here for us is that:

2. God has tremendous compassion for ALL the people of the world It is vital that we understand that in His economy:

a. people are of infinite value compared to everything else The plant sprang up overnight and died overnight. It was only temporary and had no lasting value. But Nineveh was a city full of people, human beings, and human beings last forever! They are eternal; one soul is worth more than the whole world! So many times, we, like Jonah, get wrapped up in the temporal things, the things we own, the job we have, the hobby we enjoy, even the food we eat, and we care more about those things which will all soon pass away than about people. Jonah wished to die for a plant, but Jesus did die and He died for people! God has compassion from the depths of His being for people and we must learn to conform our value system to His! We must learn to love people and to care about the fact that unless they hear about and come to know Jesus, they will perish eternally! Now the second part of that lesson is that:

b. there are a huge number of people that He cares about as much as you Even Jonah knew that God cared about his own people, Israel, but somehow he didn't understand that God cared about the people of Assyria or of Moab or Philistia or any of the neighboring nations just as much. But the Apostle John did; he said that Jesus died *...not for our [sins] only but also for the sins of the whole world.* - 1 Jn. 2:2. God didn't just so love US that He gave His son; He loved the whole world. Right now, that is 7.4 billion people and counting and He loves every one of them just as much as He loves you. He cares about their suffering just as much as He does yours. Sure, some of them are not very nice, like the Assyrians or ISIS today, but the vast majority are just ordinary folks like you and I trying to somehow survive on this planet and care for their families, hoping somehow for a better life after this one. And God cares about every one, good or bad! Further, think about this:

c. a great many of those He cares about are children Nineveh had more than 120,000 persons who didn't know their right hand from their left. Many interpreters think the obvious meaning of that is young children. God is saying to Jonah, "What about all the children?" Right now, there are 2.2 billion children in the world and 1.9 billion of them live in what we used to call the "third world", and 1 billion of them live in poverty! Your kids may be safe and sound and have medical care and schooling and all the opportunities in the world. But out there are untold numbers who will grow up to repeat the lifestyle of their parents and be hungry a lot of nights. And God says, "I care about the children!" But, on the other hand, other interpreters feel that same phrase is talking, not about children, but about people who don't have any knowledge of God.

d. the majority of people in the world live in spiritual ignorance He made every one of them so that they could know Him, yet the tragic thing is that, as I keep telling you, nearly 3 billion of them have no realistic opportunity to ever hear of Him because there is no one near them who will tell them! They live among unreached peoples where barriers of geography and language and race and caste and prejudice keep them from hearing, just as those things stood between Jonah and Nineveh. They will never learn of Jesus unless we who already know Him pray fervently for them, give sacrificially to reach them and send some of our own to tell them. They'll never hear unless we to-

gether heed God's call to go to Nineveh, to make disciples of ALL the peoples, not simply of those who are like us. If we refuse His call to get involved and make a difference, in a very short time death will come upon them and they will know a destruction even greater than that of Nineveh! And the last line of the book is interesting, ...*and also much cattle*, that is, livestock. God says, "I care about them and even about their animals!"

We may not know how Jonah responded, but we can choose how we'll respond. Recently a number of us heard Jim Rhodes of Cru tell about his visit to Westminster Abbey. Touring Westminster Abbey is like re-living the history of England; all its famous people are either buried or memorialized there. As he flowed with the crowd in a circle around the interior walls there were numerous Kings and Queens, writers and poets like Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare, political leaders like William Wilberforce who led in the abolition of slavery and Winston Churchill who carried England through the awful War. And at the end of the tour in the very center of the Nave was a stone that everyone had stopped to look at. He was surprised to find that the name on it was David Livingstone, the well-known missionary who had pioneered Africa for Christ. When David Livingstone died, they found him on his knees in prayer beside his cot in his mud hut. His followers literally took out his heart and buried it there in Africa because he loved them so much, then they embalmed and carried his body a thousand miles to the coast where a ship carried it back to England for burial. His stone read in part, "BROUGHT BY FAITHFUL HANDS OVER LAND AND SEA HERE RESTS DAVID LIVINGSTONE, MISSIONARY, TRAVELLER, PHILANTHROPIST, ...DIED MAY 1, 1873 AT CHITAMBO'S VILLAGE, ULALA. FOR 30 YEARS HIS LIFE WAS SPENT IN AN UNWEARIED EFFORT TO EVANGELIZE THE NATIVE RACES, TO EXPLORE THE UNDISCOVERED SECRETS, TO ABOLISH THE DESOLATING SLAVE TRADE, OF CENTRAL AFRICA..." And there beside the inscription on the stone are these words from John 10:16, *Other sheep I have, which are not of this Fold: Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my Voice*. Jesus' heart was compelled by love for the *other sheep*; Livingstone's heart was compelled by love for the *other sheep*. The story of Nineveh tells us that God the Father's heart is compelled by love for the *other sheep*. Jonah's was not. Will yours be?

The Story Of Nineveh: God's Love For A People What Ever Happened To Nineveh?

Now we have studied together the story of the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, as it was recorded for us in the book of Jonah. And there we saw God's amazing love for this proud warlike people and the great lengths that He went to warn them of impending destruction through Jonah. We also saw the tremendous miracle of their repentance as a whole city and how God revealed His heart of love for all peoples to Jonah in the end. But that's not the end of the story. Nineveh and Assyria appear in many other passages in the Old Testament. So today let's answer the question, *What Ever Happened To Nineveh?* The sad fact is that their repentance and turning to God around 760 BC was only temporary; it did not last and their desire to dominate and rule the world became stronger and their warfare more fierce. In fact:

I. 40 Years After Jonah's Visit God Used Nineveh To Discipline Israel Through the prophet Isaiah who began his ministry just after Jonah:

1. God predicted He would use Assyria as His instrument *The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.* "In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures. In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also. - **Is. 7:17-20**. And it was not long before He fulfilled His Word. In **722 BC**:

2. God allowed Assyria to carry Israel away into captivity Look with me at **2 Kings 17:1-6**. That was the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. Its capital of Samaria was besieged and conquered and the majority of its people, the 10 tribes who lived there, were carried away as prisoners to Assyria. Now why did God allow that? First of all:

a. because she persisted in worshipping other gods (7) From the first moment Israel was established as a separate kingdom after Solomon's reign, she worshipped other gods. Her very kings led her into the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth and the false gods of the nations round about. And secondly, He allowed it:

b. because she persistently refused to heed God's warnings (13-14) God sent them prophet after prophet, but they would not listen! They refused God's warnings time after time after time and eventually God said, "That's enough!" and used Assyria to literally "shave the land like a razor" and remove its people. However, what happened was:

3. Assyria then resettled her own people in the land of Israel (24) They didn't want to leave the conquered territory uninhabited so they planted settlers from among their own people who would be loyal to them and colonized the land. Of course, these Assyrians eventually intermarried with the poor Jews who were left in the land and:

a. they became a mixed race We read about them in the New Testament as **the Samaritans of Jesus' day** who were so despised by the "pure Jews" who lived in Judea. And not only did they mingle their bloodlines through intermarriage:

b. they developed a syncretized religion (27-29, 33-34) They worshipped the idolatrous gods from their Assyrian background and tried to "add in" the worship of Jehovah to it as though He was one among many gods. And:

c. their idolatrous influence persisted for generations (41) Several centuries later the Samaritans actually gave up the worship of the idolatrous gods, but in the process, they created their own rival form of Judaism. They built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim, anointed their own priests and created their own version of the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible, rejecting all the rest. That's why when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, she said, *Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.* - **John 4:20**. That half-breed Samaritan religion continued well beyond the time of Jesus; in fact, there are still about 1800 Samaritans living in Israel and the West Bank, practicing their religion, and there are no known believers in Jesus among them. What a sad story! But in the story, we can find a:

4. Lesson: We stand on the eve of a new year, 2017, entering it with a new leader in place in our nation, after a serious clash of ideologies during the recent election. It might be a good time to ask the question, "What will happen to America? What will the future hold for us? What will it be like for our children and grandchildren?" Well, the first lesson we can apply to ourselves from the history of Nineveh and Israel is that **God uses the interaction of nations to serve His purposes**. It doesn't matter how powerful our army is or how much wealth we've got. God is the judge and HE puts down one and lifts up another (Ps. 75:7). We have developed a pretty long catalog of sins ourselves, just as Nineveh did. If we repent and turn in the direction of righteousness, He can spare us and continue to use us to bless other nations. But if we are stubbornly unrighteous, He can just as easily whistle for another nation to come and discipline us to drive us back to Him and His path. God is constantly at work using the interaction of nations, including our own, to advance His purposes in the world. The greatest example I can think of currently is the war in Syria and the rise of ISIS. That conflict has caused 4.8 million largely Muslim people to flee into neighboring countries where Christian workers have some opportunity to work among them and more than a million have fled into Europe where there is direct access to them. As a result, thousands of formerly unreachable people are now flocking to Jesus! It is one of the greatest spiritual harvests of Muslims in history. History is not merely nation rising up against nation randomly; history is HIS Story, the story of what God is doing among the nations of the earth to advance His Kingdom.

Well, it was not long after Assyria took Israel captive that she trained her sights on the southern kingdom of Judah. In **701 BC** King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah and conquered many of her cities, before sending his generals up to the locked gates of Jerusalem to demand her surrender. I'm sure you remember this familiar story of how:

II. God Defeated Nineveh When She Invaded Judah It's found in **Is. 36-37**, if you'll turn there. Listen to:

1. the arrogant pride of the King of Nineveh, the Assyrian King (36:1-2, 13-15, 20) He's not saying simply, "Our army is bigger than yours; you don't stand a chance!" He's saying, "Your God, Jehovah, isn't powerful enough to save you!" All through this passage he is directly insulting the God of Israel. Now on the other hand, listen to:

2. Hezekiah's deep trust in the Lord (37:15-20) Now there is true faith. He's not saying simply, "O God save us, we're desperate!" He's saying, "Save us to glorify Yourself, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that YOU alone are God!" God answered his prayers immediately, twice. Look at:

3. God's promise of Assyria's defeat (37:6-7, 33-34) God promised 1) that the Assyrian army would not besiege the city, not even a single arrow would be shot there, 2) that the king would return to his own land and 3) that there he would be killed with a sword. Well, Look at:

4. God's fulfillment of His Word (37:36-38) God kept His Word to the very details. He destroyed most of Sennacherib's army, he returned to Nineveh and his own sons assassinated him with a sword while he was worshipping his false god! What a miracle! But in this story, there's another:

5. Lesson for us: A nation's future depends on its attitude toward God. We have a choice. It's either arrogance and trust in self or humble trust in God. When we put ourselves in a place of ignoring His standards, saying He doesn't exist, discouraging our people from believing in Him and acting as though our god of science or power or wisdom is what will make our future, we are headed for defeat. When we trust in God and appeal to Him and confess our need for Him, as we have nationally during a couple of horrible World Wars, God hears the cries of the humble! Listen, the attitude that we instill in our young people today determines what the future of our nation will hold! If we raise up a generation that is arrogant and godless and materialistic, we are headed for a big fall, but on the other hand, if we raise up a generation who humbly love and seek God, they will surely know God's help and blessing as we have! Well, Assyria was able to restore its army and it went on being one of the vilest and cruelest aggressors the world has ever known, but:

III. God Eventually Destroyed Nineveh In **612 BC** the Babylonian army and their allies laid siege to Nineveh and it fell, but it was not their doing. In the Old Testament we have the book of a prophet named **Nahum**; I'll challenge you to find it! How many have ever read Nahum? **1:1**. The theme of all his three chapters is to predict the destruction of Nineveh. He wrote about **650 BC**, nearly 40 years before it happened and look what God **predicted** through him. God says:

1. she would be destroyed by a flood (1:8) Nineveh was an impregnable fortress with two walls. The inner wall was 100 feet tall and 50 feet thick with 20 story towers on it and a 150 foot moat around it. The Babylonian army could not break through; they could only try to starve them out. Ironically, a famous pagan oracle had been given that "Nineveh should never be taken until the river became its enemy." Well, after a three month siege, "rain fell in such abundance that the waters of the Tigris inundated part of the city and overturned one of its walls for a distance of twenty stades [some 2 miles]". It was this flood that ensured her doom, just as God predicted. Then He said:

2. she would be destroyed while her inhabitants were drunk (1:10) Diodorus Siculus wrote, "The Assyrian king distributed to his soldiers meats and liberal supplies of wine and provisions... While the whole army was thus carousing, the [enemy] learned of the drunkenness and made an unexpected attack by night." Just as God predicted. Then He said:

3. she would be destroyed by fire (2:13, 3:15) Archaeological excavations at Nineveh have revealed charred wood, charcoal and ashes. The temple of Ashur and the King's palace were burned and there is a layer of ashes two inches thick, just as God predicted. He also said that:

4. her inhabitants would be massacred (3:3) Diodorus again says, "In two battles fought on the plain before the city, the rebels defeated the Assyrians... So great was the multitude of the slain that the flowing stream, mingled with their blood, changed its color for a considerable distance." And finally, God said that:

5. she would be destroyed permanently (1:9, 14) Nineveh was NEVER rebuilt through the centuries. Its ruins lie today as part of the city of Mosul on the Tigris. *Will Durant* wrote: "Nineveh was laid waste as ruthlessly and completely as her kings had once ravaged Susa and Babylon; the city was put to the torch, the population was slaughtered or enslaved, and the palace so recently built by Ashurbanipal was sacked and destroyed. At one blow Assyria disappeared from history. Nothing remained of her except certain tactics and weapons of war ...In a little while all but the mightiest of the Great Kings were forgotten, and all their royal palaces were in ruins under the drifting sands. Two hundred years after its capture, Xenophon's Ten Thousand marched over the mounds that had been Nineveh, and never suspected that these were the site of the ancient metropolis that had ruled half the world. Not a stone remained visible of all the temples with which Assyria's pious warriors had sought to beautify their greatest capital. Even Ashur, the everlasting god, was dead." (*Will Durant, Our Oriental Heritage*, pp. 283, 284). [Sources for historical info in this section: *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 1495, <http://www.padfield.com/1996/nineveh.html>] God kept His Word to the letter! Surely there's a:

6. Lesson in this for us! **A nation can become so evil that God must destroy it.** All the great ancient empires fell, Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, one after another. Nearly a century ago Germany began to follow its new leader, Adolph Hitler, down a path of pride, brutality and violence that killed 6 million Jews and shook the world, but God brought that awful regime to a violent end that nearly destroyed the nation completely. It stands as a warning to us. If we ever let evil control us to the degree that it did these nations of the past, we will awaken the justice of God and lead ourselves to destruction!

But there is one last thing the Bible has to say about Nineveh. It's a word of grace and it's found in **Is. 19:23-25**. When Jesus comes and sets up His Kingdom:

IV. God Will Ultimately Redeem The Ninevites, the people of the land of Assyria or what we call modern Iraq. What God is saying is that:

1. believing Assyrians will share in Christ's millennial Kingdom In Bible times God's people Israel were caught between two enemy nations, Egypt and Assyria and she was constantly being overrun by one power or the other as rivals. But in that day both Egypt and Assyria will be God's people along with her, a trio of peoples who are special treasures to God. God is not done with either of these once enemy nations yet. Already today there are over 3 million evangelical believers in Egypt and some 79,000 in Iraq. And in that there is the final:

2. Lesson for us. There is always hope for America. No matter how evil we may become in future generations and even if God should have to destroy us, He will still leave Himself a believing remnant because the Scripture is clear that **ALL peoples will ultimately worship the Lord!**

So, as we enter this new year it is vitally important that we pray for change, for lasting, permanent change in America, that we pray for a revival that will transform the hearts of people across the nation and turn them to Christ. That is the only thing that will keep Nineveh's history from becoming our own. *America has a long history of awakenings and revivals.*

1) The first one began in 1734 when we were still British colonies. God moved through a pastor by the name of Jonathan Edwards and saw 300 people converted in 6 months in a town of 1100! In just a few years evangelist George Whitfield arrived on the American scene and his presence struck a match to the Great Awakening. 80% of America's 900,000 people heard him preach and thousands were converted!

2) Yet by the year 1800 only 1 in 15 of America's 5.3 million people belonged to an evangelical church. God began the Second Great Awakening in Logan county, Kentucky in camp meetings and for the next 25 years not a month passed without news of a revival somewhere. 100,000 were converted in Rochester NY alone! And by 1850 among our now 23 million citizens there were 3 million church members!

3) At the start of the Civil War in 1861 it seemed as though soldiers on both sides had left their Christianity at home, but the war turned the hearts of people toward God and an estimated 300,000 soldiers gave their lives to Christ on both sides by the end of the war!

4) By 1900 America had moved into a secular age once again. World War 1 came along and so did the "roaring 20's" and the great depression. The church was divided over whether the Bible was literally true or not. Yet in the midst of that an evangelist named Billy Sunday began holding great crusades, eventually speaking to more than 100 million people and seeing more than a million people give their lives to Christ!

5) Again after World War 2, God began to raise up the greatest generation of Christian leaders America has ever known. Bill Bright founded Campus Crusade; a raft of new mission agencies were founded and Billy Graham began holding crusades all over America and the world, with 180 million attending in person and many millions more by television.

<http://patrickmorley.com/blog/2015/6/23/a-brief-history-of-spiritual-revival-and-awakening-in-america/>

What I'm saying is this, it seems like every 50 years or so we fall away from God, yet in His great mercy, just like He sent Jonah to wake up Nineveh, He does something to wake America up and renew us and draw us back to Him by the thousands. This last half century has probably seen the worst moral decline that America has ever known. We have shoved God out of our schools and campuses and pursued the false gods of materialism and pleasure seeking. We live by the motto, "If it feels good, do it!" I say it's high time for God to do something to awaken us again!! And this time in a lasting way! There is hope, because He's done it before, consistently, but only if His people dedicate themselves completely to Him and pray, will it happen.

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Sing Habakkuk's Song - 3:16-19

The third chapter of the Book of Habakkuk is a Psalm, a song intended to be put to music and used in Temple worship as the last line implies, *For the choir director, on my stringed instruments*. But the tune he was singing is the tune we need to be singing as well in our lives every day. Let's read the last few verses: *Hab. 3:16-19 (NASB) I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise [who] will invade us. Though the fig tree should not blossom, And there be no fruit on the vines, [Though] the yield of the olive should fail, And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' [feet,] And makes me walk on my high places.* Does that sound like it would be a hit song today? Translated into the vernacular it would go something like, "I'm going to be destroyed and there's no way out but that's OK." Not a very popular theme. The text only hints briefly at:

I. Habakkuk's Situation, but let me explain what was happening. He probably wrote this right around 605 BC. At that time the Babylonian Army had just become the greatest power in the world. They had defeated the formerly powerful Assyrian empire. They had just defeated Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish and now they were rolling over the neighboring nations like so many scared rabbits. Their sights were set squarely on the nation of Judah where Habakkuk lived and served. And so, Habakkuk was facing two things:

1. defeat (16b) ...*I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise [who] will invade us.* They were being or about to be invaded by the Babylonian Army and Habakkuk knew they were going to lose. I'm sure it was clear to Him from the writings of the other prophets, if not directly from God, that Judah was going to be defeated and taken captive. God was not this time going to do something miraculous and bail her out of her troubles. I think there are times in all our lives where we face defeat, where we're just not going to get bailed out and we know it. And our older years tend to be a time that's especially like that. We face things we know we can't reverse, avoid or undo, like disease and failing health, like the loss of people close to us, and even like that fact that we're all ultimately going to die. That's where Habakkuk was. And he faced another thing:

2. destitution (17) Not only would the land be overrun and stripped by the Babylonians, but there was also a famine God had allowed as punishment on Judah for her unfaithfulness. All the crops would fail. There would be no figs, grapes, olives, wheat, or barley. What there was the invaders would eat. The animals would be taken or die. The people would be left with nothing. Sometimes that's how life leaves you, isn't it? Maybe your money's gone. Maybe your abilities have fled and you can't do the things you used to do. Maybe many of your favorite things in life are all gone. We all face that in life at some point.

But the question is, with what attitude? Many people become sad and bitter and start to sing a life-song whose title is something like, "Oh Poor Me". And they get all focused on themselves and their problems and wallow in self-pity and complaint. But knowing Habakkuk's situation now, I want us to look at:

II. Habakkuk's Attitude It had three basic characteristics:

1. waiting (16) Habakkuk says, *...I will wait quietly [patiently]* He waited patiently, quietly without complaint, for God to bring whatever was coming, to change the circumstances however He wanted to and to bring about whatever justice needed to be done. Folks, if there's one thing we need in tough times, it's the ability to wait patiently and trust God with our situation without complaining and moaning and becoming bitter towards Him. One of the fruits of the Spirit is in the KJV *longsuffering*. When the Spirit is controlling your life, you endure hardship and suffering with patience and quietness, without complaining and moaning and grumbling about it. We have to be willing to wait patiently for the Lord and endure whatever God has sent our way. But our attitude also needs a second component:

2. rejoicing (18) Habakkuk says, *yet [in spite of all this] I will rejoice in the Lord*. He rejoiced and was joyful. In what? In the fact that there were no grapes on the vines and no cattle in the stalls? No! He rejoiced IN SPITE OF that fact. He rejoiced in the Lord, in the person of His Lord and Savior and Deliverer. Here is the Phil. 4:4 of the Old Testament. Rejoice IN THE LORD always! Habakkuk could rejoice because he had a living and vital walk with the Lord, even in desperate times and the Lord, not his problems, was the central focus of His thinking! That's what our life is all about. Right now, we may not feel like we have any sheep in the pen or any figs on the trees. Right now, we may feel like our earthly things have been taken away; we feel defeated or destitute. But we have the Lord and He is ENOUGH! We are rejoicing in Him! Not in the thought of getting better or finding a solution to our problems! Not in the thought that my problem will get fixed. Even if it never gets fixed, I will rejoice. And here's the final component of our attitude:

3. trusting (19) *The Lord God is my strength...* In other words, He will give me the strength I need to endure this thing or whatever I face. I don't endure my defeat or destitution by gutting it out myself. I turn to Him for the strength to walk through that dark forest and He gives it, the strength to climb that steep mountain and He gives it. I have the confidence that whatever God sends me, He will strengthen me to endure! For *I have strength for all things through Christ who strengthens me!* And He will! Job, who faced the loss of everything, said, *Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!* Even if I have to die, He will strengthen me to face it.

That's Habakkuk's song! It's about a God who is bigger than my problems, who will strengthen me to face anything He allows in my life! The key verse of this three chapter book is 2:4, which says simply, *the righteous will live by his faith*. We generally think of that as being salvation. Paul quoted it in Romans and said in *Rom. 1:16-17*, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."* John Wesley was in a prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street and heard that verse and learned what it meant to be saved by faith. Righteousness is not something you can earn. It is something God gives you when you trust His Son Jesus to forgive all your sins and take Him as your Savior. *Eph. 2:8-9*, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast*. Paul, Habakkuk and I all want you to know that the very heart of the Gospel is that you can never be saved by trusting in your own good works; you must accept by faith the salvation Jesus bought for you at the cross with His own blood and offers you as a gift. When you trust Him, He makes you righteous. You are saved by faith alone!

But I also believe that Habakkuk meant that statement to be even more. It is a summary of the verses we have studied. The righteous one, the believer, will go through many things that would slay him, that would defeat him and leave him destitute, but he shall live by trusting completely in God. Trusting in God, rejoicing in God and waiting patiently for what He's going to do, that's the life song that will carry us through. That's the song we should be singing day by day. Paul said, *Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice!* I want you to know that these verses hang framed on the wall of my office as a reminder to me that I can turn to when things are tough.

Luther Bridgers began preaching at age 17 while he was a student at Asbury College in Kentucky. He was a young minister of unusual zeal and evangelism. In 1910 the future looked bright for the twenty-six year old preacher, who by then had a young wife and three children. The Bridgers family was visiting Mrs. Bridgers' parents in Kentucky. After the family retired for the night, a neighbor noticed flames coming from the house. He roused Mrs. Bridgers' parents and Luther, but the rest of the family members were beyond reach. The young pastor lost his wife and children. In the awful days of sorrow that followed, Luther remembered that God offered songs of comfort in the night (Ps. 42:8), and would never forsake him. It was during this period that Luther wrote the words and music to that old hymn that we sing so many times: "There's within my heart a melody, Jesus whispers sweet and low, fear not, I am with thee, peace be still; in all of life's ebb and flow." In the fourth stanza he referred to his own experience: "Tho sometimes he leads through waters deep, trials fall across the way, Tho sometimes the path seems rough and steep, See His footprints all the way. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; Sweetest name I know. Fills my every longing. Keeps me singing as I go." In the darkest night, in the depths of despair,

God gave an inward song to Luther Bridgers that blesses millions. Out of a pit of grief came a song of blessing. That's Habakkuk's song. Now it's up to you to choose which song you want your life to sing.

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

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BETWEEN THE Old AND New TESTAMENTS

I. World Empires That Ruled Over Israel

Assyria	722 BC	deported Israel	
Babylon	605-536 BC	took Judah captive	Dan. 1-5
Persia	536-334 BC	restoration and rebuilding	Dan. 2:31-43
----- Old Testament Completed 400 BC -----			
Greece	334-165 BC	conquest and oppression	Dan. 8:1-22
Syria vs. Egypt		Antiochus Epiphanes	Dan. 11:1-35
Jewish Independence	165-63 BC	the Maccabean period	
----- Apocrypha (non-canonical Old Testament books) written -----			
Rome	63 BC on	Christ and the church	New Testament

II. Important Happenings in the Religious Realm

1. the Diaspora - the spreading of Jews all over the world
 - Many fled Judah to avoid captivity; many never returned.
 - Many fled the problems of the area during Greek period.
 - The Roman era brought freedom of travel and trade; it especially helped establish Jewish populations in the communities of Asia, Macedonia, Greece, Egypt.
 - This was God's preparation of the world to receive the Gospel and plant the church.
2. the synagogue - a place of teaching and preserving the Word
 - In captivity Jews could no longer return to the Temple but met for worship and prayer; scattered Jews could not return like those in the land.
 - The captivity removed the Jews' bent to idolatry and replaced it with a desire to maintain the pure faith; they had no Temple but had the scriptures and without individual copies they had to meet for Scripture reading and commentary regularly.
 - They spread all over the world (10 men could form a synagogue) and became a platform for Paul and others to preach the Gospel.
3. the Septuagint - translation of Old Testament into Greek (250 BC)
 - With so many Jews now living abroad and using the Greek language of the world instead of Hebrew, the Jews of Alexandria, Egypt translated the Old Testament into Greek.
 - It is valuable for us in translating Hebrew manuscripts because we don't have existing copies dating back far into Old Testament times; the way they translated into Greek helps us verify just what the original Hebrew text read.
4. the oral traditions - later recorded in the Talmud
 - When prophecy (God speaking to man) ceased with Malachi about 400 BC, and with new emphasis on the Old Testament Law fed by the synagogue, Jews began to become very concerned about keeping the Law. But the law was not clear on many points, so they began to collect and memorize and pass on the sayings of prominent Rabbis or teachers which explained the Law and how to apply it. This mass of oral tradition was eventually written down in the first two centuries AD as the Talmud, in essence, a Jewish commentary on the Old Testament.

- In most cases these traditions used the adage "better safe than sorry" and added lots of specific rules to keep, in order to be sure to avoid breaking the Law itself. For example, purification (washing of hands and utensils), divorce (when they approached Jesus) and two schools of teaching. These traditions came to be regarded as sacred as the Law itself and were why Jesus was in constant conflict with Jewish leaders.

5. the sects - Pharisees and Sadducees

- Special societies arose within the Jewish nation after the Maccabean revolt.

- Pharisees (lit. separatists) were the legalistic fundamentalists of their day, concerned with absolute purity and keeping every part of both the Law and the traditions. They were followers of the scribes (experts in the Law) and put their knowledge into practice.

- Sadducees were the modernists of their day. They were priests, descendants of Zadok and members of the aristocracy. They rejected all that the Pharisees taught, the supernatural, immortality, and Divine control of events. They cooperated with the Roman government and were favorable to it.

- Essenes were the cult of their day. They lived together in their own communities, looking for Messiah, adhering to law but rejecting the Temple. They made copies of the scriptures but also their own writings which were discovered in the last century as the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.

In all of these things, God was preparing the nation and the world for the coming of Christ.