

*Great Principles
In the Lives
Of
Old Testament Saints
(#2)*

12 Lessons

*Prepared by:
Paul E. Cantrell*

2006

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Preface

The world is full of Heroes of all kinds—in sports, business, politics, in professional areas, as well as in Religion. In generation after generation, men and women are honored by their peers for their willingness to take giant leaps of action that has brought them acclaim. While all of these are often needed in every society and usually are a blessing, there is one source to which we can go for some of the great spiritual lessons in the lives of Old Testament personalities—**THE OLD TESTAMENT!** Romans 5:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11 both tell us to go to the Old Testament Scriptures and learn some very helpful lessons from the lives of Old Testament saints. These men and women made a difference in their period of existence, and their influence lives on because God had their actions recorded for our learning or profit!

This is the 2nd Bible Class Study Book on this subject. Please see also the first study book on this topic: **Great Principles in the Lives of Old Testament Saints (#1)**.

Paul E. Cantrell
(2006)

Table of Contents

“Great Principles in the Lives of O.T. Saints (#2)”

| LESSON | TOPIC | PAGE |
|--------|---|-------|
| 1 -- | "Methuselah: The Oldest Man" | 1-3 |
| 2 -- | "Joseph: The Dreamer and Forgiver" | 4-6 |
| 3 -- | "Jacob: The Prince of Israel" | 7-8 |
| 4 -- | "Joshua: The Optimist" | 9-10 |
| 5 -- | "Caleb: A Dependable Friend" | 11-13 |
| 6 -- | "Rahab: Blessed by God" | 14-15 |
| 7 -- | "Saul: A Man With Great Promise" | 16-18 |
| 8 -- | "David: The Measuring Stick for Kings" | 19-21 |
| 9 -- | "Naaman: The Motivation of Desperation" | 22-24 |
| 10-- | "Uzzah: Presumptive Action" | 25-27 |
| 11-- | "Jeremiah: Hope for Tomorrow" | 28-29 |
| 12-- | "Esther: For Such a Time as This" | 30-31 |

Lesson One

“Methuselah: The Oldest Man”

(Genesis 5:21-27)

Who was the oldest man that ever lived? Have you ever heard the expression: “*You are as old as Methuselah!*” Most people know the answer. How old was he? The Bible stated that he was 969 years old. I wonder if he ever desired to see 1000 years?

Another interesting question is: “*How did he die?*” The Bible does not tell us directly, but the answer would seem to be obvious—he died by drowning! His grandson (Noah) was saved, but Methuselah die in the flood. That is...if we can rely on the dates given in Genesis as being complete and how we use dating. According to the dates given in Genesis, Methuselah may have overlapped Adam 113 years. And, it is possible that he was 369 years old when Noah was born. Thus, Noah could have conversed with one who had conversed with Adam and Enoch (who had conversed with Adam).

My first reaction to this idea was—then, Methuselah was not a righteous man! But why should everyone want to get Methuselah to be righteous? Is it because he was the son of Enoch (who walked with God)? Is it because he lived so long? Or is it because he had more experience than anyone else? There is no statement in Scripture that indicates one way or another. He may have been a sinner and died like all the rest in the flood!

Methuselah was known for three things in particular: (1) He was the son of Enoch; (2) He was the grandfather of Noah; and (3) He was the oldest man who ever lived. We can learn at least three important lessons from him.

**There is more to life than just seeing
how long we can live**

The Bible indicates that man’s life was much longer before the flood, but afterwards began to cut back drastically. We don’t exactly know the reason for such, but man is continually trying to find an answer. It seems that today that it doesn’t matter what we do scientifically, we just cannot live much longer than 100 years.

It is not enough to just merely live to be 100 or more. Real living has more than length—it has breadth, height, and depth. It matters how a life is lived. If the best that could be said of us at our funeral was that we lived to be 100—it is a wasted life! We need to be concerned about using the time we are given on earth to the best of our ability (Eph. 5:14-18). Our life is here for only a short time (like a vapor) and is soon gone (James 4:13-17). How do we use our time? Is our life counting for something good and righteous? I don’t know that I really want to live to be 100 years old, but I do want to make my life meaningful, worthwhile, and that some good was accomplished because I lived!

Saving faith is not transferred from father to son by inheritance

Children inherit many things from their parents, but faith is not one of them. When I look at my children, I can see a little of myself or my wife in them. They have certain characteristics of each of us—looks, height, weight, and even diseases (unfortunately). Our children may also be the recipient of our influence, our environment, and even our training; but, personal faith has to be an individual matter. If a child could ride into heaven on the coattail of a godly parent—Methuselah would qualify! Enoch, his father, walked so closely with God that he was taken by God (into heaven?). He was a man of God if there ever was one. So, Methuselah had a godly father, but there is no indication that he was righteous.

We cannot inherit our parent's education, knowledge or their personal learning. We can certainly benefit from such if we are willing to apply ourselves and listen carefully to their instructions. Some people often expect the son or daughter of a famous parent to do as well as their parent; but, it just can't be past on by inheritance. A child must get it the same way that the parent did! A parent may be a great person, but we may be a coward! Our godly parents may want us to be saved, but they cannot make the right decisions for us all of our lives. God saves us as individuals and not as a family or group. We can be blessed to have righteous parents like Timothy, but that is no guarantee that we will be righteous (2 Tim. 1:5). Saving faith cannot be inherited—it must be gained the same way that our parents got it. We give an accounting to God as individuals (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 14:12).

The Truth of God does not come by Seniority

When God needed a prophet to speak against the false altar at Bethel, he did not use the old prophet that lived there, but sent a young prophet who would speak His Word to the people and speak against the idolatrous altar (1 Kings 13:1-11). It may be of interest for you to notice that God appeared to Noah and called on him to save a remnant of mankind, not Methuselah (his grandfather). Of all the people on earth, only Noah was righteous before God. Noah would hear and believe the Word of God and obey it. He built the Ark and preached to sinful and rebellious mankind to flee the wrath to come. For 120 years he worked, preached and pleaded! He was evidently ridiculed and marked off as a crazy man. (Gen. 6:1-8).

Where was Methuselah all the time that Noah was building and preaching? Was he among the mockers? Did he try to point out that he was much older and wiser than Noah? Did he remind Noah that in all his years he had never seen a flood? Did he remind Noah that he was just a young squirt who didn't know that he was talking about? Noah was right and the crowd was wrong—even the older heads. The flood came, calamity befell the mockers, possibly including Methuselah. He was older, but he was wrong!

When age and experience are pitted against the Word of God, they are wrong! Age has nothing to do with God's truth in this regard! Noah had an attentive heart to God's will—the others did not! Some times, young people have to go against age—against parents—against family in order to obey God.

Men, today, still mock and laugh about the wrath which is to befall mankind (2 Peter 3:3-13). This is not a matter of age or man's wisdom, but it is what the Word of God says. Men are being warned that God will not only destroy this present heavens and earth, but he will punish disobedient mankind in a place of everlasting torment (Matt. 25:31-33, 41, 46). To whom will we listen—the mockers or the Word of God?

Homework

- 1. Of whose lineage was Methuselah: Cain's or Seth's?**
- 2. Was Methuselah a righteous man? How do you know?**
- 3. How could Enoch be so righteous and his son not be?**
- 4. Was Adam still alive when Methuselah was born?**
- 5. Did Noah get to talk to Adam?**
- 6. How old was Methuselah when Noah was born?**
- 7. Do we know why people lived so long before the flood?**
- 8. Of what value is a long life?**
- 9. Why did God appear to Noah rather than Methuselah?**
- 10. Why should age be respected (Lev. 19:32).**

Lesson Two

"Joseph: The Dreamer and Forgiver"

(Genesis 30-50)

The story of Joseph covers some 20 chapters (from his birth to his death) and is one of the better known stories of the Bible. It has been preserved by God for the benefit of His people who believe in Him (both Old and New Testament people) (Romans 15:4). His story has the ability to hold our attention because of so many unusual things that happened in his life.

Joseph was truly a remarkable man—especially for his age and surroundings. He is known for his ability to deal with unusual problems in his life and come out ahead at the end. He rose from being a slave in Potiphar's house to be the caretaker of all that Potiphar owned. He also rose from prison to be next to the Pharaoh in power in Egypt. He never seemed to give up, but made the best of his situation. His life can easily be divided into four sections—as follows:

HIS EARLY YEARS

(Genesis 30:24; 35:24; 37:1-24)

His parents were Jacob and Rachel (35:24; 35:24). He was born (along with Benjamin) in Jacob's older years and were special to his parents. In fact, they may have been part of the reason for the resentment of his older brothers. Two incidents are given that help to cause the problem: (a) Being given a coat of many colors; and (2) the dreams that he had. His brothers came to despise him (37:5-11). They plotted against him to put him to death (37:12-20).

SLAVERY AND IMPRISONMENT

(Genesis 37:25-40:23)

Instead of slaying him, the brothers placed him in a pit and later sold him to some traveling merchants going into Egypt. They in turn sold him to Potiphar, who was the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard (37:25-36). Because of God's blessing and his diligence as a slave, he rose to a prominent position over Potiphar's house (39:1-6). Joseph was constantly being tempted by Potiphar's wife to have sexual relations with her. Finally on one occasion, the temptation was so strong that he had to flee. Being rejected, she falsely accused Joseph—causing him to be put in the jail where the king's prisoners were confined (39:7-20). Joseph found favor with the chief jailer by God's blessings and was placed over all the prisoners. His help to two of the king's prisoners enabled him to make a request of them. After he had interpreted the two men's dreams, he only requested that they remember him to the authorities (40:14-15). But he was forgotten for a period of time. But God had a plan and it was just a matter of time when that plan would unfold to help save Joseph from his false imprisonment.

JOSEPH'S ELEVATION

(Genesis 41:1-57)

God gave the king of Egypt (Pharaoh) two dreams—one was about fat and lean cows and the other about fat and lean ears of corn (41:1-8). His dreams bothered him constantly and he wanted someone that could "interpret" or give an understanding of his dreams. It was at this time that one of the men Joseph had helped in jail remembered that he had interpreted the dreams of the two men and they came to pass just like he had said. So, he told the king about Joseph (41:9-13). He interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh satisfactorily and was greatly blessed—being put in charge of all the land under the king. (41:38-44). He is given the daughter of the high priest to be his wife and has two children by her (41:45-57). He prospers and is beloved in Egypt.

HIS REUNION WITH FAMILY

(Genesis 42:1-50:26)

Just as Joseph had foretold there were seven years of plenty and then followed by seven years of famine. Joseph had supervised the storing of grain in large storehouses and as a result Egypt had grain to sell to peoples from other lands as well as their own people. It was when the famine began to weigh heavily upon the family of Jacob that he sent his sons to Egypt to secure grain (42:1-5). As Joseph observed the people as they came for purchasing grain, he noticed his ten brothers and realized that they did not recognize him (42:6-8). He remembered his dreams that his brothers had laughed off and could see them coming to pass just as he had dreamed them. He tested his brothers on this occasion, but sold them food. He kept Simeon as a prisoner until they returned with Benjamin. Upon their return with Benjamin, he was about to keep Benjamin and send the other nine brothers back home—but they were afraid that it would kill their father. They pled for Benjamin's release—and Judah asked to be kept in his place. (42:9-43:15). It was too much for Joseph, he broke down and wept—and afterwards revealed himself to his brothers. There was much gladness and rejoicing, and fears relieved by Joseph promising not to take vengeance upon them (43:16-45:28). He later sends the brothers back to bring his father and the rest of the people to Egypt (46:1-47:31). Both Jacob and Joseph died in Egypt (48:1-50:21). And Joseph made his brothers promise to take his bones back to Canaan because he was sure God would carry out his promise to give the land to Israel (50:22-26).

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

1. Deal with circumstances in life (good or bad) with faith in God. He strongly illustrated his faith in God. (Heb. 11:22)
2. One way to deal with temptation is to flee from it.
3. Forgiveness is better than being filled with hatred and enmity against others.
4. Love for an elderly father is illustrated in the lives of all of Jacob's children (finally).
5. Joseph's moral conduct, goodness, purity of life, self-control, devotion to duty, and wisdom makes him one of the best persons to emulate in the Old Testament.
6. Joseph was a model prisoner.
7. He gave God the glory for his interpretation of the dreams.
8. Joseph illustrates the providential care of God in His peoples' lives.

9. Joseph seems to have had a good attitude whether in bad circumstances or good.
10. What good work is God preparing us to do?

HOMEWORK

- 1. Why would God have had so much written about Joseph in the Old Testament?**
- 2. List some of the problems in life that Joseph had to deal with.**
- 3. What was it about the one dream of Joseph that caused his brothers to resent him so?**
- 4. What kind of an attitude would you have if your family sold you into slavery?**
- 5. Are all dreams that we have given to us by God for a purpose?**
- 6. How well could you handle being exalted to a high position?**
- 7. Was it right for Joseph to marry the High Priest's daughter?**
- 8. Why wouldn't Joseph's brothers have recognized him?**
- 9. How important is family to you?**
- 10. Why did Joseph want his body buried back in Canaan?**

Lesson Three

"Jacob: The Prince of Israel"

(Genesis 25-50)

The story of Jacob (from his birth to his death) is covered in 25 chapters in Genesis. It is a long and eventful story of a man who lived up to his name that was given at birth, but finally overcame his first name and was given a better name towards the latter part of his life. God chose Abraham to be the Father of the Israelite nation, but in reality it was Jacob's sons that composed the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's life will be viewed from three phases in his life, as follows:

JACOB'S BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS**(Genesis 25:19-28:22)**

Abraham and Sarah finally had a son of their old age that was named Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah and after a long while she had twins that were named Esau and Jacob. Esau came out first and was considered the first born. His interest was in hunting, while Jacob's interest was to tend sheep. Unfortunately, the parents showed partiality to their sons—Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. Upon one occasion Esau had returned from hunting and was extremely hungry. Jacob offered him food if he would sell him his birthright—which Esau did! Later, Rebekah helped Jacob to deceive his father into thinking he was Esau and received the blessing of the firstborn. Soon after this Jacob was sent away to his uncle Laban who lived in Haran (Paddan-aram). God appeared to Jacob in a dream as he traveled to Haran and made a promise to bless him; and Jacob in turn made a vow to God...calling the name of the place Bethel.

JACOB'S STAY IN HARAN (PADDAN-ARAM)**(Genesis 29:1-34:31)**

Jacob's first sight of Rachel was all it took—he "fell in love" with her. He was gladly received by his uncle Laban and a bargain was made for Jacob to work seven years for the hand of Rachel in marriage. The seven years ***"seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her."*** Unfortunately, his uncle deceived him into marrying Leah (the oldest), but arranged for Jacob to have Rachel as his second wife after seven days, but he had to work an additional seven years for her. Jacob wound up with two wives (Leah & Rachel) and two maids that later became "handmaids" (Zilpah & Bilhah). From these four women came 12 sons and one daughter (Dinah). From the twelve sons came the 12 tribes of Israel that made up the Israelite nation. It was time for Jacob to return to Canaan and he worked out an arrangement with his father-in-law to tend his flock in order to have monetary means to go on his own. Jacob was blessed and Laban became envious and was not friendly towards Jacob. God appears to Jacob and told him to return to Canaan; so, he left secretly with his family and goods. He was overtaken by Laban and was accused of stealing his gods. They made a covenant between them and Jacob was allowed to continue on his journey. One night (as they journeyed), an "angel" wrestled with Jacob and had his name changed as a blessing to him. Jacob was soon to meet his brother, Esau, and was not sure how he would react. He tried to protect his family, but Esau treated him well. As they

traveled, the men of Shechem humbled Jacob's daughter, Dinah. The sons of Jacob worked out a scheme to get even with the men and caused Jacob to fear for his family from other cities around them.

JACOB SETTLES BACK INTO CANAAN AT BETHEL

(Genesis 35:1-50:14)

Jacob is told by God to move to Bethel and live there for the time being. They were told to put away their foreign gods and only worship the one true God on the altar at Bethel. When they do what God requested, He repeats His blessing to Jacob as He had done to Abraham and Isaac. Rachel dies and is buried. They moved to Eder. Isaac dies at the age of 180 years. The narrative takes up the life of Joseph for many chapters. The book of Genesis ends with Jacob going into Egypt and dying there at the age of 147 years.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

1. God is able to use a person—even though he may not be what he should be at first—because he does not look at the immediate situation of a person's life, but the long-range situation.
2. God may bless a person He chooses to use, but at the same time allow him to suffer some of the consequences of his bad actions or choices.
3. Those who deceive others may themselves also be deceived.
4. Showing partiality to children can bring its consequences.

HOMEWORK

1. What does the name "Jacob" mean? (25:26)
2. How old was Isaac when the twins were born? (25:26)
3. What is a birthright? (25:31-34)
4. What was the blessing Isaac gave to Jacob? (27:27-29)
5. What was Jacob's vow at Bethel? (28:20-22)
6. What relation was Rachel to Jacob? (29:12)
7. What problems came out of Jacob's preference for Rachel over Leah?
8. What does the name "Israel" mean? (30:28)
9. How old was Isaac when he died? (35:28)
10. How old was Jacob when he died? (47:28)

Lesson Four

"Joshua: the Optimist"**(Exodus 17:8-Joshua)**

We first meet up with Joshua in Scripture in Exodus 17:8 that was shortly after the exodus from Egypt by the Israelites. In Numbers 13:8, he is referred to as "Hoshea, the son of Nun." In other places it is "Joshua." However, there are various spellings for his name, such as: "Jehoshua" or "Jeshua" which means "Jehovah saves or delivers" (Num. 13:16). The New Testament person with the equivalent name is of course, Jesus—which means savior. The wilderness wanderings lasted for forty years and Joshua lived during this time and afterwards also. Joshua begin to be known as a prominent person as he lead the battle against Amalek. He was also one of the two spies that brought back a good report for taking the land of Canaan. As a results, he was allowed (along with Caleb) to go into the promise land, while the rest of that generation died in the wilderness. He succeeded Moses upon his death and became the one to lead Israel in the conquering of the land of Canaan and the settling of the land. He died at the age of 110 years old (Josh. 24:29). His life can be looked at from the various standpoints, as follows:

JOSHUA: THE SLAVE. He was born during the weary years of bondage of his people in Egypt. He probably was familiar with the whip across his back. He had heard and knew of the deep signs for freedom from among his people. He had also seen what idolatry had done to the people as well. These were some of his years of preparation to succeed Moses as the leader of God's chosen nation.

JOSHUA: THE SOLDIER. He was successful in his first leadership of his people against the Amalekites. And his military strategy in conquering the land of Canaan has been highly praised. He had a commission from God to lead the people into Canaan and conquer and settle it—which he did (Deut. 1:38). The people seem to have respected Joshua and followed his leadership (Joshua 1:16).

JOSHUA: THE SPY. The fact that he was chosen as one of the twelve spies is significant (Num. 13:1-16). It was at this time that Moses changed his name from "Hoshea" to "Joshua." He and Caleb brought back a good report—going against the negative report of the other ten spies. His pleas before the people seemed to have fallen on deaf ears at that time. He was blessed to survive the 40 years wandering and lived to go into the promised land.

JOSHUA: THE STATESMAN. Under his leadership, Israel conquered and settled the land of Canaan. After dividing the land up according to their inheritance, he set about to set up the "Tabernacle," appoint the cities of refuge, and arranged the Levitical order and service at the Tabernacle. All was done with thoroughness as he had done as a soldier.

JOSHUA: THE SERVANT. Before he succeeded Moses in the leadership of the people, he was a close companion and helper to Moses. He showed respect for Moses' leadership—backing him all the way (Num. 11:27-29). He seemed to have been willing to serve in anyway to help God's cause and His people.

JOSHUA: THE SAVIOR. His name signified that Jehovah was Savior. He truly believed in and relied upon God. As a result, he did save his people by willingly serving God's plan and purpose. He helped to take away Israel's reproach of the 40 years of wandering. He then led his people into Canaan—the land that God had promised them some 400 years earlier as a people. He was probably about 85 years old when he was given leadership over the nation of Israel. He was God's appointed successor to Moses (Num. 27:18-23).

JOSHUA; THE CHILD OF GOD. We know of no blot on the character of Joshua. His nearest fault was letting the Gibeonites deceive him into a treaty. He is best known for his challenge to God's people in his last address to them (Josh. 24:14-15). From all indications, he was a righteous person. He was one in whom is the Spirit (Num. 27:18). He was filled with the spirit of wisdom (Deut. 34:9). He was one who followed the Lord fully (Num. 32:12). He was one who had the continual presence of God in his life (Josh. 1:5; 6:27). He was deeply mourned at his death and the people continued to serve God all the days of Joshua and the elders that outlived Joshua (Josh. 24:3).

LESSONS TO LEARN FROM JOSHUA

1. He was a good man behind the scenes before he became a good leader of people.
2. His faith in God's promise made him one of the most optimistic persons in the Old Testament.
3. His great courage came from his trust in God.
4. He strove to live up to his name that was given him by Moses.

HOMEWORK

1. What two things is Joshua best known for?
2. How did he become the successor to Moses?
3. What were some factors that made Joshua a good leader?
4. What was the relationship of Joshua with Moses at first? (Exo. 24:13)

Lesson Five

"Caleb: A Dependable Friend"

(Numbers 13:6-34:19; Josh. 14:6-21:12; Judges 1:12-3:9)

Caleb was one of the twelve spies sent out by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. Ten of these spies discouraged the people by saying: ***"We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we."*** Caleb's reply to this statement was: ***"Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."*** (Num. 13:30). But the people of Israel chose rather to listen to the majority rather than the minority. Not only that, but they also murmured against God and Moses and refused to go up and overthrow the people in the land of Canaan. In spite of Joshua, Caleb, and Moses' efforts, the people chose to rebel and were cursed by God to continue wandering in the wilderness for another 38-39 years. And none of the people above 20 years of age were allowed to go into the promise land but Joshua and Caleb.

Caleb was one of those grand heroes of the Bible that we know very little about, but at least enough to learn some important lessons from. At the end of his life he was able to say a very important statement: ***"I have wholly followed my God."*** (Joshua 14:8). He and Joshua seem to have become close friends and supportive of one another. They both exemplified strong faith and obedience to God. The historical narrative that mentions the activities of Caleb go down past the time of Joshua into the book of the Judges. Some important lessons can be gained from this man's life.

HE WAS A MAN OF STRICT OBEDIENCE

Caleb said that he had wholly followed his God! Both Moses and God bore testimony that this was true. Caleb gave his service to God whole-heartedly. He was not a hypocrite, but sincere in his efforts to obey God. He was not like some who obey when it is convenient, but disobey when they please. His was not a divided service—to himself first and then to God if convenient. The Apostle Paul was able to say a similar thing as he looked back over his life that was given in strict obedience to the will of God (2 Timothy 4:6-8). What a blessing to be able to look back over one's life and make such a statement.

HE WAS A MAN OF CONVICTION

When he was convinced of something, he stood by his convictions whether few of many stood with him. He stood side-by-side with Joshua when they were the strict minority in their report about the people in the land of Canaan. He did not try to straddle a fence and try to be in good with both sides, but took a stand for what he believed was the will of God. Neutrality is not what the Lord is calling us unto, but to a conviction that we stay with. (Matthew 12:30). God is calling for His people to be firmly rooted and established in "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Colossians 2:6-7; Jude 3). We, like Caleb, need to be concerned about what God's Word says and take a stand on it—determined not to compromise God's truth. We need to be

challenged today like Elijah challenged the Israelites: **"How long will you go limping between two sides? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."** (1 Kings 18:21). Just how convicted are we of God's truth?

HE WAS AN ENERGETIC & COURAGEOUS MAN

He was a man full of zeal for the Lord! He was not a lazy, lukewarm servant of God like the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:14-22). Rather, he was ever ready to follow his God and to do his will. He was willing to endanger his life to spy out the land, to help conquer the land, and to help conquer a great people that all others feared (Joshua 14:10-15). He did not minimize the hardships or the battles they would have to fight; but, at the same time, he was not afraid to venture forth into great danger if his God said to do it. He was only 85 years old when he led men into battle against the giants (anakims) in the land and against their well-fortified cities. God blessed him because of his courage and zeal. Whatever needed to be done, he was ready and believed that the victory was as certain as God is real! God's people should not be afraid or ashamed to champion the cause of truth, regardless of whether it is acceptable with the masses or not. Caleb was not a man who waited to see which way the majority was going, but he acted out of conviction of what was right and had the courage and zeal to do it. May we be men and women of courage like Caleb.

HE WAS A MAN OF PATIENCE

Patience is needed when things are not going well. The very term infers waiting, long-suffering, bearing up under persecution, hardships, or trials—and keeping our faith strong in God. (James 5:7-8). Caleb's patience was shown by his willingness to follow this disobedient people back into the wilderness and wait out the total 40 years of wandering that had to be finished before they could go into the promise land. The day would come, but he had to patiently wait for it with a people who did not deserve it. He had done and continued to do whatever he could to serve God faithfully—and possibly pitied the poor souls who had thrown away their opportunity to enter the land of Canaan. That day did come when they crossed over the Jordan and occupied the land—and Caleb was there to enjoy (Joshua 14:11). Caleb's patience paid off and he was able to enjoy his reward for many years. And at the end of his days he could truthfully say: **"I have wholly followed Jehovah my God!"**

HE WAS A DEPENDABLE FRIEND

The Bible does not state that Caleb was a friend to Joshua, but it certainly seems to indicate such. They started out being together and standing beside one another when they were spying out the land. And over forty years later, they were still sticking together and encouraging one another (Joshua 14:13). Great men and especially great leaders usually have close friends that not only help them, but give them the encouragement they need to keep on "keeping on!" Caleb seems to have been this kind of man to Joshua. He was always there and could be depended upon. Can we be a friend to others, take a back seat to a greater person, and be an encouragement to him or her? This seems to have been the picture of Caleb!

HOMEWORK

- 1. To what tribe did Caleb belong? (Num. 13:6)**
- 2. What did Joshua and Caleb do when the people refused to believe God and Moses, His messenger? (Num. 13:30, 14:6)**
- 3. What city became the possession of Caleb because of his faithfulness? (Num. 14:14)**
- 4. What was so challenging about overthrowing the cities of the Anikim? (Num. 14:10-15)**
- 5. What was Caleb's daughter's name? (Judg. 1:12)**
- 6. Who was Caleb's younger brother? (Judg. 3:9)**

Lesson Six

"Rahab: Blessed by God"

(Joshua 2:1-24; 6:22-25; Matthew 1:5-6; Hebrews 11:30-31)

One of the more fascinating persons of the Old Testament is a woman by the name of Rahab. She is introduced to the reader at the time of Israel's beginning the overthrow of the land of Canaan. She and her family resided in the city of Jericho, which was west of the Jordan River, and north of the "Dead Sea." Israel had already destroyed the two Amorite kings on the East side of the Jordan River (Sihon and Og) and was ready to cross the Jordan and begin the overthrow of Canaan. Moses had died and Joshua had succeeded him. God promised to strengthen his leadership, to be with him wherever he goes, and He will begin to exalt him in the sight of all Israel so that the people will know that God is with him like he was with Moses.

We are also introduced to Rahab right in the midst of two unusual miracles of the Old Testament: (1) The drying up of the Jordan River to allow Israel to cross over into Canaan; and (2) The walls of Jericho collapsing without fighting, but by faith of the people that was put into action.

Joshua sent two spies to look over the land and to especially evaluate the city of Jericho. So the two men, seeking to find lodging, came to the house of Rahab (who was referred to as a "harlot."). She evidently provided a living by such means, but seems to have had some respect of the people of Jericho. When she learned why the men were there, she immediately let them know how she felt about them.

- 1) I know that the Lord has given you the land.
- 2) The terror of you has fallen on us and has caused the inhabitants to melt away before you.
- 3) We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea when you left Egypt.
- 4) We also know what happened to the two Amorite kings on the East of Jordan.
- 5) Our hearts melted and no courage remained in any one.
- 6) The Lord your God is the true God in heaven.

She requested of the two spies to promise her that she and her family would not perish when they came to destroy the city—since she had been so kind to them to hide them from the officials who were hunting for them. The promise was given, but with some conditions—which she and her family were perfectly willing to meet. When the city fell, she and all her house were saved from the destruction.

But this was not the end of the story of Rahab. She was allowed to live in the midst of Israel as one of them from then on. She also married Salmon and from this union came Boaz. Boaz married Ruth (who had been a Moabite, but she also became a believer in the true God of heaven). From this union came Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, who became king over Israel. All of which means that she was in the lineage of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. She is also listed among those who showed great faith in God recorded in Hebrews 11:30-31.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

1. **Rahab's faith was an obedient faith!** It was demonstrated by what she did. She did what she was told to do (James 2:17-26).
 - a) She gathered her family together.
 - b) She placed the scarlet cord in the window.
 - c) She did not prepare to fight.
 - d) She did not try to flee.
 - e) She did by faith as she was instructed.

Her faith saved her and her family from destruction.

2. **The saving of Rahab shows the universality of God's mercy.** She was a Gentile—not a Jew. Yet God saved her because of her faith (Romans 2:14-15).
3. **Rahab also illustrates that no sinner is beyond the reach of God's saving Grace.** God does not save us against our will, but He is willing to save anyone who will turn to Him in faithful obedience to His Will. If Rahab could be saved and used by God, why cannot anyone who will turn to Him in humble faith (1 Cor. 6:9-11).
4. **Rahab had to choose between her country and friends or God.** Some choices that we must make may not be easy, but they must be made if we are to be acceptable to God. This same choice has to be made by many people even today (Josh. 24:15).
5. **Rahab also had to choose between the religion of those around her or the religion of the Jewish people (John 14:6).** She chose the religion of the true God of heaven over the idolatrous gods of mankind.

HOMEWORK

1. **Did Rahab have to make any changes in her lifestyle in order to live as an Israelite?**

2. **List some changes that you think she may have had to make.**

3. **What kind of a heart did she have to have in order to come to believe in God?**

4. **Why would Salmon want to marry a "harlot?"**

5. **Why was Rahab willing to risk her life in order to save the two spies?**

Lesson Seven

"Saul: A Man With Great Promise"

(1 Samuel 8-31)

"Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly!" What an admission by a man that was king over Israel. These words show a deep sense of shame and sin. These words show that a man realizes what a mess he had made of his life! What made it even worse is that his life at the beginning showed such promise!

- 1) He came from a good family. It was in the line of the mighty men of power (1 Sam. 9:1). He had a father who cared for him (1 Sam. 10:2).
- 2) He was an outstanding young man. The following things were recorded about him:
 - a) He was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward (10:23).
 - b) He was a choice and handsome man (9:2).
 - c) There was none like him from among the people (10:24).
 - d) He was little in his own sight (9:21; 15:17).
- 3) He was chosen by God to be king and accepted by the people gladly. What an honor to be given such a grave responsibility. But God also equipped him for his great task:
 - a) God promised His Spirit to be upon Saul (10:6).
 - b) God gave him assurance that He would be with him (10:7).
 - c) God also touched the hearts of certain men who helped him (10:26).

Saul had every reason to succeed in his responsibility and started out doing well. But it wasn't long before he began making some grave mistakes that led to his downfall and to this pitiful statement: ***"Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly!"*** How could a man so fine and so blessed and so well-prepared go so wrong? God certainly did His part, but Saul failed God. Let's see some of the mistakes that led to this statement.

1. **He took to himself glory that belonged to another (1 Sam. 13:1-4).** Shortly after he became king, he began the arduous duty of dealing with the Philistines. He took 3,000 men and divided them between himself (2,000) and his son, Jonathan (1,000). Jonathan's group overthrew the garrison at Geba. He sent word to all Israel that ***"Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines."***
2. **He made bad decisions spiritually (1 Sam. 13:5-14).** His first bad decision was made just after the above incident. The Philistines had been aroused by the battle at Geba. They came in mass to fight against Israel. The people became fearful and Samuel, the Prophet of God, was late arriving. Saul needed to ask God's favor upon their efforts, so he did not wait any longer, but offered a burnt offering himself (only certain ones were to offer sacrifices to God). Samuel told Saul that his kingdom would not endure because of what he had done. He continued to make many bad decisions that led to his downfall and death.
3. **Saul continually tried to excuse his bad decision-making (1 Sam. 13:12; 14:28-30; 15:10-31).** In a way Saul tried to blame Samuel for his offering a burnt offering to God because of his being late in arrival. Then, he said that he had to "force" himself to do what he did! Later, he made a rash vow that no one was to eat anything until the battle had been won against the Philistines. Jonathan did not know of the vow and ate some honey. When this came to light, he was going to kill Jonathan, but the people would not

let him. He would not face up to his bad decision. Even later, God sent Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Saul and the people spared Agag (the king) and the best of the animals and any thing that was good or useful. When faced with his rebellious decision, he tried to excuse himself by saying the people brought back these things. When he was rebuked by Samuel, he finally admitted his wrong, but it did not stop him for further bad decisions and trying to cover them up. His humble spirit was gone and pride now reigned in his heart.

4. **Saul was filled with envy, jealousy and hatred (1 Sam. 17:1-58; 18:8-9).** When the young man David had killed Goliath and all Israel feared, the people sang: *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."* Saul became very angry and very suspicious of David. As Saul saw that David prospered and that the Lord was with him, but not with Saul, he dreaded him (18:15). Instead of rejoicing with the great successes of David, he came to envy and hate him. He knew that David would succeed him and didn't want it. Saul was not concerned about what God wanted, but what he wanted! The Lord not only withdrew His Spirit from Saul, but also sent an evil spirit to trouble him (16:14)—Saul still was jealous of David and kept on pursuing him to kill him.
5. **Saul returned evil for good (1 Sam. 18:25-29).** David continually tried to do what the king wanted, but Saul's jealousy kept repaying David good acts with efforts to kill him. The king became the continual enemy of David for no good reason. Even when Saul was trying to kill David, David would return good for evil—time and again. Saul's son, Jonathan, recognized the goodness of David and sided with him (23:15-18). Upon one occasion David had an opportunity to slay Saul while he was asleep, but would not do so because he was the Lord's anointed (24:6). At a distance, David awakened Saul and told him what had happened. Saul's reply was: *"You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you."* (24:17). Saul again tries to find and slay David. David again passes up an opportunity to slay Saul and he would not slay him. It is here that Saul finally expresses his shamefulness: *"I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly!"* (26:21).

SOME IMPORTANT LESSONS

1. **It is not enough to begin right...we must also end right (Rev. 2:10).**
2. **Outward beauty and appearance is not enough to commend a person, but there must be an inward beauty of the heart (Matt. 5:3-12; 1 Pet. 3:1-6).**
3. **God was with Saul at first, but they later parted company.** But it was Saul that left God, not God leaving him until there was no hope for him. He did not depend upon God, but upon himself.
4. **Saul allowed jealousy and envy to come into his life and to stay.** He let it make a fool of him as well as make him bitter, destroyed his happiness, ruined his good name, robbed him of his desire to serve others and God, and caused him to think only of himself.
5. **Instead of dealing with sin, he allowed sin to grow in his life.** He would not face up to his sins. He could only look back with remorse of soul.

HOMEWORK

- 1. What would cause a man so blessed and so well-prepared to go so far wrong?**
- 2. What causes a man not to own up to his poor decision-making or wrong actions?**
- 3. How could God choose such a man to be king knowing what he would become?**
- 4. Did Saul accomplish any good?**
- 5. How could such a wretched man like Saul raise such a wonderful son like Jonathan?**

Lesson Eight

"David: The Measuring Stick for Kings"

(1 Samuel 16:1-1Kings 2:12)

The appointing of Saul king over Israel served God's purposes, but he was not to be the pattern for succeeding kings to follow. God wanted another man for that position—being the "measuring stick" for all succeeding kings. Solomon succeeded David and God told him that he needed to walk in the ways of his father, David, who was obedient to God (1 Kings 3:14). The kings that followed in Israel were compared to David (1 Kings 11:6; 2 Kings 14:3), etc. While David was certainly not a perfect man, he was identified by God as ***"a man after God's own heart."*** (1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Kings 15:5). David's life was full and very eventful, but because of his grievous sin with Bathsheba, he had a great deal of problems in his family relationships—the sword did not depart from his house! David served in the following ways:

- 1) As a courageous fighter and soldier (1 Sam. 17:40; 2 Sam. 5:7).
- 2) As a musician (playing to soothe Saul's evil spirit) (1 Sam. 16:16-23).
- 3) As a Poet (he was a writer of most of the Psalms).
- 4) As a Prophet of God (foretelling of the coming of the Messiah).
- 5) As a king over God's people.
- 6) As a type of Christ to sit on "David's throne."

DAVID'S LIFE

1. David's life as a young man. (1 Samuel 16:1-17:58). He was a younger son of Jesse and helped to see after the sheep of his father. God had Samuel the Prophet to anoint David as being the next king to follow King Saul. He was chosen to be a musician in the court of King Saul to help soothe the king's evil spirit. He also became Saul's armor bearer. His early claim came with his slaying of the giant, Goliath.

2. David's life in the Court of King Saul. (1 Sam. 18:1-20:42). Jonathan and David early became very close friends. Because of David's conduct and popularity, he was placed over the men of war and was very successful. His popularity led to Saul's envy and jealousy and his efforts to slay David. Jonathan protected David until Saul made it clear that David had to die. Jonathan sent David away with his blessing.

3. David's life on the Run from King Saul. (1 Sam. 21:1-31:13). Samuel's death occurs shortly after David fled for his life. He had a band of men who stayed with him and helped to protect the borders of Israel from intruders. David had an incident with Nabal and Abigail. David spares Saul's life more than once and finally flees to live among the Philistines. Saul and Jonathan dies in battle with the Philistines.

4. David's life as King over Judah and later over all Israel. (2 Sam. 1:1-5:25). After Saul's death David was made king over only Judah at first, where he reigned about seven years. Then, he became king over all Israel and reign for some thirty-three years.

5. David's Later Years as King. (2 Sam. 6:1-1 Kings 2:12). The Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem. David reveals his plans to build God's Temple, but was not allowed by God. His triumphs in battle are listed and the expansion of his kingdom is described. The affair with Bathsheba is recorded that became a shame in his life, but he was restored again to God's favor. The rebellion of Absalom, his son, is recorded and how his rebellion was dealt with. David was again restored as king over Israel. The story of David ends with the appointing of his successor as king—his son, Solomon.

A GREAT LESSON FROM DAVID

While David has served as a great lesson for youth in his great faith in God that made it possible to slay the giant, Goliath; yet, he has a greater lesson (if possible) for adults in how to deal with sin in one's life. While the army was out in the field of battle, David was at home and was walking on the roof top of his house when he saw a beautiful woman bathing. The following outline will serve as a guide to this great lesson from David.

- 1. David in the clutches of Satan.**
 - a) **The enticement (2 Sam. 11:2)**
 - b) **The yielding to lust (Jas. 1:12)**
 - c) **The sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:3-4; Exo. 10:14, 17).**
 - d) **The reaping (2 Sam. 11:5-10).**
- 2. God faces David with his sins.**
 - a) **His displeasure with David (2 Sam. 11:11-25).**
 - b) **God sends the Prophet Nathan to face David with his sins (2 Sam. 12:1-12).**
- 3. David's reaction to the accusation. (Psalm 32, 51).**
 - a) ***"I have sinned against the Lord."* (Why men do not confess their sins).**
 - b) **David Speaks of the burden of his sin.**
 - **Ps. 51:3; 32:3-4**
 - **What happens when men keep silent about their sins.**
 - c) **David saw the need to acknowledge and confess his sins.**
 - **Prov. 28:13**
 - **Ps. 51:3, 4**
 - d) **David's confession.**
 - **Ps. 51:1-12**
 - **His confession recognized what God wanted (Ps. 51:17; 32:10)**
 - e) **The blessedness of forgiveness (Ps. 32:1-2).**
 - f) **The outcome (Ps. 51:13-14; 32:8-9).**

One of the great values of the Bible's recording of the lives of men and women of the past is that it gives both the good and the bad. However, it shows that even the great men and women of God had some weaknesses that they had to deal with at some time in their lives. No one is perfect—all have sinned and fallen short of being like God! We need to be thankful that God has done this with such a good man as David seems to have been. That way, we can all identify with him and be encouraged by his efforts.

HOMEWORK

- 1. What are some things that David is best known for?**
- 2. How did David use his musical skills?**
- 3. What happened to David after he slew Goliath?**
- 4. Why did David have to flee from Saul?**
- 5. What did Saul finally conclude about his pursuing of David?**
- 6. Where did David finally go to get away from Saul?**
- 7. When did Jerusalem become the capital?**
- 8. What was the terrible incident about the Ark of the Covenant?**
- 9. How did God punish David and Bathsheba?**
- 10. What kind of problems did David have with his children?**

Lesson Nine

"Naaman: the Motivation of Desperation"

(2 Kings 5:1-14)

One of the most important questions in life is: *"How can I find God?"* But the sad thing about this question is that only a few (relatively speaking) seems to be concerned. Instead, people are asking such questions as:

- 1) How's the weather?
- 2) How can I make some fast money?
- 3) What's for dinner?
- 4) Where can I find a parking place around here? (etc.)

The absence of asking the right question does not mean a lack of concern necessarily. Simple questions usually do not reveal the real burning questions lying buried beneath the surface. We believe that the question is there, whether voiced or not, deep in the heart of every man. Man fills his time while on earth with the necessary physical needs and pleasures, but somewhere in his heart can be found the question about man's responsibility to God. For truly without God man is lost, empty, and unhappy. He may not realize what his heart is aching for, but its there. We have been made in the image of God and cannot escape our need of God. Until man finds God, the question will always been there.

A MAN WHO FOUND GOD

Sometimes it takes a tragic event in the life of a person to begin looking for some answers to this question. Naaman was such a man. He lived during the time of the Prophet Elisha but was not an Israelite—he was a Syrian. He was the commander of the Syrian Army (possibly the #2 man in the country). He had been very successful in battle, had received many honors, and was popular with his people. However, one day he saw a discoloration on his leg. It became worse. He discovered that it was "LEPROSY!" This was a terrible disease with no hope for a cure. As the condition grew worse, it was hard to keep it a secret from other people around him. In one of his battles, he may have taken captive and kept an Israelite maid to be a servant in his house. When she learned of her master's condition, she volunteered to suggest: ***"Would to God that my lord were before the prophet that is in Samaria for he would recover him of his leprosy."***

"There is possibility of hope!" He tells the king of Syria about what the Israelite maid had said. The king encouraged him to go to Samaria and wrote a letter for him to take to the king of Israel. Naaman also took valuable gifts with him to give to the man that could heal him. But, when the king of Israel read the letter, his reaction was not good: ***"Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man does send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeks a quarrel against me."*** News travels fast and this incident found its way to the Prophet Elisha. He seek word to the king: ***"Wherefore have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a Prophet in Israel."***

Naaman journeyed to Elisha's house. Elisha did not even come out of the house but told him to go dip in the Jordan river seven times and his flesh would come again as before the leprosy.

Naaman was disappointed! In our terminology: *"He was fit to be tied!"* He had traveled all that distance to see the Prophet and he would not even come out to talk to him. And of all things to tell him to do, he was told to dip seven times in the muddy Jordan. Naaman's remarks were: *"Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean."* He turned away in a rage.

When he finally slowed down his chariot, his leprosy was still there! His servant reasoned with him: *"My father, if the Prophet had bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather then, when he said to you, wash, and be clean?"* His servant got through to him. He went to the Jordan and dipped in it seven times...and then, it happened! He was cleansed of the dreaded disease! Don't you know that he had tears of joy and felt greatly blessed. But something else happened. He found the true God of heaven. He returned to Elisha's house and exclaimed: *"Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of your servant."* Three things had to be overcome before Naaman could find the true God of heaven:

- 1) **His Position.** He was a general, a hero, a man of war that was successful. He tried to hide his leprosy and only as a last resort did he do what he was told to do by the Prophet. He had something stronger than his position—his leprosy!
- 2) **His Performance & Success.** He was a mighty man of valor. He had won major battles and achieved victory. Material success had come his way. Someone has observed: *"Success makes failures of so many people."* It is too bad when God-given talents bring roses to our feet, medals on our chest, and words of praise to our name that these keep us from God. But Naaman's leprosy was stronger than his performance and success.
- 3) **His Pride.** His pride almost kept him from listening to the Prophet. He even offered a substitute—substitutes that cannot save before God. Only the Word of God has the power to save those who will believe it (Rom. 1:16). Naaman would have done something great, if required of him. Then, he could have bragged about what he had done in order to cure his leprosy (save himself). His pride and ego would have been saved. But God leaves no room for pride or ego to be satisfied. God will receive all the glory. And...leprosy was stronger than Naaman's pride.

WHAT HELPS MAN TURN TO GOD

It was quite obvious that Naaman's great need for cleansing from leprosy caused him to ultimately find God. That incurable, spreading, fatal disease overcame all of the hindrances that Naaman had. All else was meaningless unless his leprosy could be cured. It even urged him to go dip in the muddy waters of the Jordan. Our problem is a little more complex than Naaman's, but very similar. Our leprosy is **SIN!** We can try to hide it, explain it away, or even think of it as being put away when it really is not. It even becomes obvious to the view of others. When we finally are willing to admit to ourselves and others that I have an incurable disease of sin, we will do as Naaman. We, too, will overcome our "position," "fame," "pride," or whatever in order to get cleansed of it. For we realize that all of our "greatness," "honor," or "success" means nothing unless we can get rid of our leprosy—**SIN!**

Another factor that was involved with helping Naaman find God was the simplicity of what he was told to do. At first, it seemed that it would be a stumbling block for him. But after careful reconsideration, he submitted to the simple command of God. It may have seemed foolish but it was God's way and God's wisdom. Men attempt the spectacular to save themselves, but God commands the simple. When Naaman went and dipped seven times in the Jordan, he was cured. We, too, must come to the Prophet of God—Jesus Christ! We, too, must obey His simple commands to *"repent and be baptized..... for the remission of sins...."* (Acts 2:38). Until we submit, we cannot be cleansed!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Naaman needed cleansing and so do we! He humbly submitted to the will of God and so must we! Naaman was able to go back home to Syria free of leprosy and we too can be cleansed of our leprosy of sin and be right with God. When men are caused to face up to their sinful condition, there is only one to whom they can go for cleansing—**GOD!**

HOMEWORK

- 1. At what time in Israel's history did these events occur? (2 Kings 1-5)**
- 2. How is Naaman described in these verses? (2 Kings 5:1-14)**
- 3. What caused him to go to the king of Israel?**
- 4. What was king Jehoram's reaction to the letter?**
- 5. What did Elisha do?**
- 6. Why was Naaman so disappointed about Elisha's message to him?**
- 7. What caused Naaman to change his mind?**

Lesson Ten

"Uzzah: Presumptive Action"

(2 Samuel 6:1-11)

Uzzah was a man that evoked God's swift punishment on the spot! But what makes this incident puzzling is that the man's intentions seem to have been honest and good. The Scriptures state: ***"The Lord was angry with Uzzah and struck him down there for his rash act."*** But when we observe the act it seems to have been innocent enough. In fact, his act seems to have been an honest effort to protect the Ark. Why would God take such action so quickly and violently? When we try to fully understand the actions of God at times, it may not be easy. On the surface, there would seem to be no justification for God's actions. Yet, when we seek to dig a little deeper we can begin to see the reason(s) why for God's actions.

BACKGROUND TO THIS ACTION

The "Ark of the Covenant" had been taken by the Philistines in battle against Israel. Due to their irreverence, God had smitten them with plagues. In desperation, they brought it to the edge of Judah's borders and left it at the house of Abinadab. Later, as David became king and had conquered Jerusalem, he wanted to bring the Ark to Jerusalem to serve possibly as a unifying force for the people. But...he made a mistake! He had the Ark placed on an oxcart. The oxen stumbled and the Ark looked as though it would fall. Uzzah put forth his hand to steady it and God struck him dead on the spot! Why? David was bewildered and afraid of the Lord. He did not bring the Ark to Jerusalem for some time, but left it at the house of Obedom for three months. How can we explain God's actions upon a man who seemed to have had good intentions for his actions.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

- 1. Whether we can fully understand the reason or not, there is one thing for sure—God was just in what He did!** (Gen. 18:25). If God is God, He does not do wrong! Whether we can fully understand or not, we should never doubt this fact (Rom. 11:33).
- 2. God's judgments are not based alone on the outward deeds of men, as men do.** God knows the heart and inner being of every man. He knows our thoughts, intents, and dispositions of mind and heart (Ps. 139:23). God's judgments are made correctly and justly. If no outward action seems to justify such a punishment from God; then, we need to search the heart, the attitude, or the persons feeling towards God to find our answer. This seems to be well-illustrated in the actions of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).
- 3. Guilt of actions often depends upon privilege and opportunity.** The Philistines had the Ark for some time. There is no indication that they touched it or not. But God sent plagues among them because of their lack of reverence for it. Even the people of Israel were smitten (50,000) because they looked in it. The Levites had been plainly told not to touch the ark, lest they die! (Num. 4:15). God spelled out the way the Ark was to be transported. Thus, Uzzah was without excuse.

4. **Indifference to divine law is progressive.** Our attitudes develop over a period of time. When put to the test, our attitudes come out in actions. This is especially true where a quick action is called for. Uzzah's quick action showed the attitude he had towards the things of God. He may have appeared to men as an honest person with an honest effort to do good and save the Ark from falling. But God knew the condition of his heart (Matt. 15:19-20; 15:16-22). His actions could have been the results of a culmination of an attitude of disrespect for divine things or divine commands.
5. **Profound reverence for sacred things should be a most important element of our character.** We can show a lack of this character by: (1) A spirit of levity about sacred things; (2) Treating them as common place; or (3) Treated as fit subjects of thoughtless handling. In doing so, we fail in one of the greatest of all of man's needs before God. We need to go back and look at the emphasis that God places upon sacred things and what our attitudes toward them should be. At Mt. Sinai, the Tabernacle Worship was set up and spelled out in detail. Later, Nadab and Abihu (sons of the High Priest) offered strange fire before the Lord and were instantly killed. (Lev. 10). One of God's statements about this incident was: **"I will be sanctified in the eyes of the people."** This is one lesson mankind desperately needs to learn!
6. **We can obviously learn from God's judgments.** We can learn that God wants obedience to His will. God means what He says. He is just in all his acts (1 Cor. 10:16; Rom. 15:4). These examples in the Old Testament can be a great help to us if we will lean and take heed. In the midst of these actions, we can see both the goodness and severity of God at work:
 - a) It is wrong to picture God as only good, with no wrath. As one who threatens, but will not carry out his threat.
 - b) We must realize the awful holiness and majesty of God.
 - c) We need to realize the spiritual meaning and sanctity of His laws.
 - d) We need to cherish a spirit of profound humility and reverence in God's service.
 - e) We need to repent of our wrong attitudes toward God and His will.
 - f) We need to trust what God says and commands, not to question Him—nor take Him for granted.
 - g) We need to be willing and lovingly obey His every wish.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

When we look back at King Saul's actions in regards to the Amalekites—his outward actions seem to have been honest and good intentioned. But God called his actions: Rebellion, Stubbornness, Iniquity, Idolatry, and a rejection of the word of God. Men may seem to have good intentions today, but all the while rejecting God's word—being rebellious and stubborn before God. "Will-worship" is not acceptable to God (Col. 2:20-23). God wants an obedient heart and life. Was Uzzah honest and good-intentioned in his actions? I don't know. But if they were, it did not save him from being slain by God. We need to examine our attitudes closely in regards to God's holiness and our willingness to be obedient to His will.

HOMEWORK

- 1. Why did God strike Uzzah dead?**
- 2. From a human standpoint, how would you evaluate the act?**
- 3. What was so bad about touching the Ark?**
- 4. How would you evaluate God's punishment?**
- 5. On what are God's actions based?**
- 6. Why is it so important to show reverence for sacred things?**
- 7. What can we learn from God's judgment upon Uzzah?**
- 8. Did Uzzah's good-intentions keep him from being slain?**
- 9. What is our attitude towards the holiness of God?**

Lesson Eleven

"Jeremiah: Hope for Tomorrow"**(2 Chronicles 35:1-36:23; Book of Jeremiah)**

Jeremiah is called the "weeping Prophet!" And, we might add—with good reason! His call by God to be a Prophet to the nation of Judah was at a very critical time in their existence. He was only about 20 years old when he began speaking for God to the people (627 BC). Josiah was in his 13th year of reigning over Judah as King and was making valiant efforts to rid the land of idolatry and heathenism and to restore the true worship of God. But the changes were more outward than inward—the hearts of the people were not really turned to God. Jeremiah issued strong warnings to the people that the end of the nation of Judah was drawing near—but no one wanted to hear such a message. Jeremiah lived under five succeeding kings of Judah and all but one was antagonistic to him (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah). Even the priest opposed Jeremiah's messages. As the threat drew closer that Judah would be facing the Babylonian army, Jeremiah advised them to surrender to them and be satisfied with being a vassal state to Babylon. It took three efforts by the Babylonians to stop the rebelliousness of the people that were left in the land (606, 597, 586). In the last efforts by King Nebuchadnezzar, the city and the temple were destroyed and more people were carried into captivity to Babylon. Some people who were left in the land later fled to Egypt—forcing Jeremiah to go with them. Jeremiah possibly spoke for God for close to 50 years in all.

GOD'S PROPHET OF DOOM & HOPE

The political scenes around Judah were changing rapidly. The Assyrians had been conquered by the Babylonians (with other nations helping) and Babylon was rising to power over one nation after another. Judah's time was coming to have to face the Babylonian army. God's Prophets offered no hope to the people of Judah because of their sinfulness and rebelliousness—in spite of the outward reforms brought about by King Josiah. God called and sent Jeremiah to say to the people: ***For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.***" (Jere. 2:13). He called for the people to: ***"Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls."*** (6:16). But they would not listen (Jere. 8:4-7). Instead of believing the Prophet, they persecuted him terribly. Many wanted to kill him, but were stopped. He was imprisoned and put into a muddy pit to die, but was finally rescued. Judgment had to come upon these people. God said: ***"Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go!"*** (15:1) God said that some would die by the sword and others by famine, and the remnant would go into captivity.

But even in the midst of messages of doom and despair, God gave Jeremiah a message of hope to give to His people. Even though they would go into captivity, they would return (16:14-18). But the people would have to remain in captivity for 70 years before returning (25:11-14; 29:10-12). God will bring them back and rebuild them as a people. In the midst of a hope of their

returning to their homeland, God also gave a Messianic hope as well (33:14-18). He also stated that He would give a new covenant to Israel (Jere. 31:31-34).

The Prophet is also known for his lamentations (listed as a separate book in our Bible). These lamentations are over the fall of a great nation that God had chosen, nurtured, prospered, and tried to use to influence the nations around them—but they had failed God and had to be punished. God shows the justness of this punishment, and then gives them hope of returning to their homeland and still to be used by God in the future.

LESSONS FROM JEREMIAH

- 1. Jeremiah shows us clearly what it was like to preach to a people who didn't want to believe the message!**
- 2. He was one of the great Prophets of God who spoke a message of doom and bore the consequences by a people who resented his message.**
- 3. Jeremiah become somewhat of a type of the suffering of Jesus.**
- 4. A message of doom needs to have a message of hope attached to it if at all possible—this Jeremiah was able to do.**
- 5. The willingness to suffer for righteousness sake.**
- 6. The just punishment for sin and rebellion against God.**

HOMEWORK

- 1. At what period of time did Jeremiah live?**
- 2. Did God know Jeremiah before he was born? (Jere. 1:5)**
- 3. Why was Jeremiah reluctant to answer God's call to be a "Prophet to the Nations?" (1:6-7)**
- 4. How did Jeremiah feel about being a Prophet of God after several years of preaching to the people? (Jere. 20:7-18).**
- 5. For how long were the Jews to be in Captivity? (Jere. 25:11-12)**

Lesson Twelve

"Esther: For Such a Time as This!"**(The Book of Esther)**

The 2nd book of Kings ended with the Babylonian captivity of Judah and Jerusalem in about 606 BC. At this time only a few were carried to Babylon. After the next two rebellions that had to be put down, most of the people were carried into Babylon—with only a poor remnant of people left. The city was leveled, walls torn down, and the Temple destroyed in 586 BC. Later, some of the people fled to Egypt. Judah was no more—as a nation! The captivity was to last for 70 years (Jere. 25:11-12), which would mean that around 536 BC the people would be allowed to return to rebuild the city, the temple, and the nation. The book of Ezra records the first efforts at returning to Jerusalem. It was not easy for them to rebuild the Temple, the city, nor their houses; and, to add further discouragement, some of the people around them were constantly trying to stop them or defeat their efforts. Zerubbabel led about 50,000 people back in this first return. Many Jews still remained in Babylon. The second effort at return did not occur until the time of Ezra in 457 BC. It was between the time of these two returns that a very important event occurred that could have affected the Jewish people drastically—but for the effort of two people in particular: Esther and her uncle Mordecai.

ESTHER BECOMES A QUEEN

In 538 BC, the Medes and Persians had joined forces and came against the city of Babylon and overthrew the city. By 536 King Cyrus allowed the return of some of the Jews to rebuild their Temple and city. About 50 years later, a new king came to power over the Medo-Persian Empire—Ahasuerus (485-465). The important event occurred about half-way through this king's reign (about 473 BC).

King Ahasuerus made a great feast in 483 BC and invited people from everywhere to attend. It was at this feast that his queen disobeyed him and he decided to dethrone her and choose another queen. Esther was chosen because she found favor with the king. About ten years later, Haman planned to try to get rid of Mordecai and all the Jews in the Empire of the Medes and Persians. The date was set and the king's signature had been put on the document that on the 13th day of the 12th month (473 BC) all Jews were to be slain.

Mordecai convinces Esther that she has to go into the king and reveal this evil plot and who it would affect (even the queen herself). He reminded her: ***"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"*** She decides to go into the king and states: ***"...and if I perish, I perish."*** Esther plans a banquet and invites the king and Haman to attend. During the meal, she requested that they come again the next day to a banquet and at that time she would reveal her request. The next day she made a request for her life and the life of her people to be spared. She told the king that if she and her people had been made slaves she would not have bothered him; but, the plan was

to annihilate her people. The king wanted to know the person responsible for such an atrocity. She told him...HAMAN! The king had him taken out and hung on the very gallows that Haman had wanted Mordecai hung on. The king could not undo the decree, but he did provide means for the Jews to protect themselves from destruction and with any other persons who wanted to help the Jews. Mordecai was promoted in the kingdom of Ahasuerus and Esther was held in high esteem.

A feast was begun by the Jewish people on the 14th & 15th day of the 12th month (Adar). This is during our February & March months. The feast is called the "feast of Purim."

SOME IMPORTANT LESSONS

1. God's providence becomes very obvious as these events are taking place:

- a) The plot overheard by Mordecai that saved the king's life—but Mordecai was not rewarded at that time.
- b) The plot of Haman to slay the Jewish people.
- c) The king not able to sleep at night and asked for records to be read. He discovered that Mordecai had not been rewarded and desired to do so.
- d) The Gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai were turned to be used on him.
- e) God caused the people to fear the Jews and helped to save the Jewish people.
- f) The exalting of Mordecai.
- g) Esther becoming queen when she did.

2. She was the kind of woman that caused her to be chosen above all the other women.

3. She conducted herself wisely.

4. She was willing to lay down her life for her people.

5. She did not forget her benefactor—Mordecai.

HOMEWORK

1. When did the events in the book of Esther take place?

2. What kind of home life did Esther have?

3. What was Mordecai's relationship to her?

4. Where did she grow up?

5. What is your evaluation of queen Vashti's response to the king's request?

6. Should Esther have married someone that was not a Jew?

