

FIRE IN MY BONES

Great Missionary Themes from
THE BIBLE
Volume I — Genesis to Jeremiah

by
GLOVER SHIPP

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DEDICATION

To the memory of the Prophet Jeremiah and all of his counterparts throughout the pages of the Old Testament, men in whose bones burned an unquenchable fire for truth, I humbly dedicate this book.

“... if I say I’ll never again mention the Lord—never more speak in his name —then his word in my heart is like fire that burns in my bones, and I can’t hold it in any longer!” (Jeremiah 20:9 TLB).



INTRODUCTION

I had been reared on the Great Commission, so it was natural for me to understand that the New Testament had a strong missionary message. I assumed that God's missionary theme largely began with Matthew 28 and ended with Acts 28, even though I recognized that there were hints at missionary outreach in the Old Testament, such as the case of Jonah, who preached repentance to a land other than God's chosen nation, Israel.

But in recent years, as I studied the Old Testament in more depth, a recurring theme began to capture my attention. I came to see that this neglected majority of Scripture is filled with missionary messages. So, out of curiosity and then mounting interest, I reread the Old Testament, noting possible missionary lessons from its pages. By the time I had read to Jeremiah's famous statement about a missionary fire in his bones, more than seventy-five such topics had already been listed!

It was abundantly clear to me by then that the Lord has always reached out to men of all nations. He has always called for repentance, on the part of all peoples. He has always anticipated, through His holy messengers, the redemption of men of every land. But sadly, for forty years I had somehow missed the greater part of His continuing missionary message throughout the Bible!

Again out of curiosity, I checked on the availability of books covering this neglected Old Testament theme, locating only two that even came close. But neither of

these encompassed the whole majestic scope of Old Testament teaching on man's mission to man, as I was beginning to see it.

So I determined, with my Lord's guidance, to strive to make this exciting message come to life for others, as it was coming to life for me. Perhaps it would show all of us more clearly the world-encompassing nature of God's mission, from the beginning of time until the Lord's return. If His concern for lost humanity is really repeated so often through-out the entire Bible, then we should be taking it much more seriously than we are.

One other problem presented itself, however. If I tried to include every topic encountered, the volume would become formidable in size. So, the conclusion I reached was to cover only some of the more prominent lessons encountered, terminating the work at Jeremiah. The remainder of the Old Testament, and all of the New Testament, could then be treated in a future second volume.

Since the fall of man in Eden, one of the keys to God's dealings with man has been through men; through men consumed with His message of redemption. Let us, then, join the host of God's men in all ages who were on fire to proclaim the message of their Lord, regardless of personal cost. I pray, reader, that you, too, may sense this eternal flame, burning in your bones to share redemption's theme with lost humanity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Les Bennett and David Ingram, two of my missionary colleagues here in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, for their careful reading of the text and their valuable suggestions. A bouquet of roses is due to missionary secretaries Jeanne Clark, Janette Ingram and Marilyn Sweeton, for typing (and retyping) the manuscript. I owe a debt of gratitude to J. C. Choate, who encouraged me to prepare and submit this material for publication. I am also indebted to the little book, *The Missionary Message of the Bible*, by Edmund F. Cook (1924), for suggesting themes for several spokesmen in the pre-Christian age, who burned with an unquenchable fire to lead lost men back to their Lord, and to our incendiary Lord, who placed this same missionary fire in my own bones.

BIBLE QUOTES

All Scripture quotations are from the New English Bible, unless otherwise indicated in the text.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born in the year 1927, in Yakima, Washington. He is the son of C. H. Shipp, a longtime evangelist/missionary, and grandson and great grandson of elders in churches of Christ. Reared in Oregon and California, he graduated with honors from Pepperdine University, where he was student body president and member of *Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities*.

After graduation in 1948 he married the former Marjorie Mae Smith, of Los Angeles. They spent the next five years in Dallas, Texas, where Glover served as illustrator and writer for Bible school and other materials being produced by what is now Gospel Teachers' Publications. He was also minister for the Beverly Hills church in that city.

Returning to California in 1954, he served as minister for the Kerman and Pinedale churches, in central California, took graduate studies, taught school and directed an art and advertising service. Following this period he spent three years in the San Francisco area, where he continued graduate studies and served as a staff artist for the *Oakland Tribune* and Dow Chemical Company. At this time he also became assistant editor of *Christian Chronicle*.

From 1962 until 1966 he was director of public relations at Pepperdine University, where he specialized in publications. He also served as a deacon and educational minister for two different congregations, continued his writing and editorial duties, and traveled and lectured on missions. While at Pepperdine he received a Masters Degree in Communication.

In 1965 he became one of the leaders of Operation '68, a group mission exodus to Brazil. Sponsored by the Richland Hills church of Christ, in Fort Worth, Texas, he began specialized preparation for this mission in Brazil. This included graduate study in the Mission Seminar, held then at Harding College. He, his wife and their five children, Gerald, David, Mark, Terry and Cindy, along with his parents and six other families, entered Brazil in 1967. The Shipps have labored for ten years in the major metropolitan center of Belo Horizonte, where nine congregations have been established, with 400 active members.

During his ten years in Brazil he has been instrumental in developing a publications thrust throughout the Portuguese-speaking world, editing *Volta a Biblia*, an evangelistic magazine which has grown to a mailing list of more than 17,000 readers in 26 nations. He has also written and published courses, workbooks, Children's Bible School materials, tracts and other publications. He has assisted in the development of a Bible camp near Belo Horizonte and has led in establishing congregations in other areas of Brazil, including distant Recife and Salvador.

He is staff writer for *Power for Today*, *Contact*, *Mission Strategy Bulletin* and other publications and contributes articles to various other journals. He is author of *God Answers His Mail* and contributing author to various mission books, including *Guidelines for World Evangelism*, *Seeds of the Kingdom* and *The Spreading Kingdom*. During one missionary leave he helped design and develop the Mission Strategy Center at Abilene Christian University, where he also taught in the Bible Department.

He is currently preparing manuscripts on the ten-year history of the work in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and on missions for the sending church. He is also doing research toward a doctorate at Fuller Seminary's School of Missions.

A STATEMENT FROM THE PUBLISHER

Let me tell you how this book came to be. Being on the lookout for new mission materials to print, a few years ago I met Bro. Glover Shipp at the Pan American Lectureship in Guatamala City, Guatamala, and at that time I urged him to do some writing with this purpose in mind. He agreed to do so and his first work was printed under the title, GOD ANSWERS HIS MAIL. This is the second effort on his part and we hope there will be many others to follow.

But getting back to this particular book—in November of 1977 I went down to the Pan American Lectureship in Lima, Peru, which lectureship Bro. Shipp also attended, and while there he turned over to me the manuscript for this book. From there I took it to my home in Winona, Mississippi and then in January of this year while enroute back to my work in India, and on a stop-over in Honolulu, Hawaii with good friends, Bro. and Sis. R. L. Stewart, I found the time to read it for the first time. I then brought it here to Singapore where the type will be set. During the course of type-setting it will be mailed back to Winona for proofreading and finally sent to me or else I will pick it up personally at a later date. It will then be off-set in America and from there it will be sent to brethren all over the world. Therefore, it can be truthfully said that this is an international book.

Bro. Shipp has worked for several years in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, along with his family and a group of other brethren, in an attempt to firmly plant the cause of

Christ in that part of the world. One of his major tasks is in the area of producing good Christian literature in the Portugese language. Through these efforts his materials have gone all over Brazil, other parts of South America, to Europe, and to various countries in Africa. He has also done much writing for gospel papers in the States like the Christian Chronicle, World Radio News, Firm Foundation, and other such periodicals.

This particular work draws mainly on the Old Testament with numerous lessons and applications for our present day. The emphasis is upon missions and world evangelism. As a reader of this book, I think you will find the contents interesting, informative, faith-producing, encouraging, and inspiring. I further believe that you will find in these chapters a sense of direction that will lead you closer to God and in turn make you more conscious of your fellow man, and of the need of taking God's message to the world.

May this unique and unusual volume be a means of helping you to become more involved in preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ—and may you be on fire to take that message to all the world.

J. C. Choate
131 Moulmein Road
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11 January 21, 1978

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IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Genesis 1:26-28

The infinite cosmos explodes into being by the express will of the Creator Himself. Millions upon millions of galaxies are clustered together and set into perpetual motion, according to the timing of God's eternal clock.

In this complex, measureless universe He designates a small sun, with its clutch of planets circling about it, as one of His key enterprises. Then, on one tiny planet which we call Earth, He lavishes special care, creating a bewildering array of life and non-life.

But at first there is no creature of responsible intelligence, at the pinnacle of God's life hierarchy, to care for this world He has commanded into being. For this singular task He forms a man, a man fashioned in the very image of God Not just a higher animal in the evolutionary scale, as many believe, but a special creature, endowed with the power to think, reason, dream, determine a course of action and how best to pursue it. This man (and all of his descendants) is empowered to discern between good and evil, between right and wrong and to suffer pangs of conscience when this fine line of discernment is bent out of shape by his longing to behave like an animal, rather than be like the God from whom he sprang.

Speak Of Infinity

But even more significantly, this human being is given a small spark of infinity, a portion of the Lord Himself, to dwell within his physical body and motivate him to

understand that there is a God in Heaven, to whom he is answerable for all time and eternity. This energy impulse, man's eternal soul, unceasingly moves him to long for his God, to express his dependence upon his Creator and to seek the true, eternal dimension of life in his Father.

Created in the image of God! What a noble position this man occupies. As is stated by the psalmist, "he was made a little less than a god, crowned with glory and honor". (Psalm 8:5).

Rooted In The Creator

Understanding this fact, we can logically conclude that man today is still rooted in his Creator. All men of all races and class levels have in their fleshly framework a bit of eternity that cannot safely be denied or long ignored. All men have eternal souls. The undying spirit loaned briefly to him returns to the Creator upon his death. (Ecclesiastes 12:7). All men belong to God and were created for a divine, and not a selfish, purpose: that of responding personally to their Maker. In Romans 14:7-12, we find that every man must personally acknowledge the sovereignty and divinity of his Father. Whether we live or die, then, we are His property, made by and for His use. Echoes of this same truth are found in 1 Corinthians 11:3, where Paul states that "every man has Christ for his Head," and in Colossians 1:13-18, where we read that Christ has primacy over all created things; the whole universe (including man) exists through and for Him.

Made To Be Godlike

Obviously, then, man's soul is of the greatest value, as emphasized by Jesus in Matthew 16:26. Man has eternal worth and potential. Whatever happens to him, or through him, has implications for all eternity. He was made to be godlike, not animal-like. He was made to be master, not

slave. He was made to be eternal, not temporary. His Creator placed within him the breath of life and he became a living soul . . . forever. Man was placed on this earth, which is his proving ground to “work all of the bugs out,” or in other words, to prepare him for eternity.

If God so loved His noble creature, man, the crowning achievement of His creative acts, how we should love and respect our fellow human beings! This concern we feel must not be exclusive, lavished on some and denied to others. Our Creator did not distinguish between His human creatures, nor can we. (Acts 10:34-35). He is concerned for all. He wants to give life to all. (II Peter 3:9). He wants to welcome all into His eternal dwelling place, receiving from each one that bit of the divine nature entrusted to him.

Worthy Of Salvation

If God so clothed His man-creature with dignity and eternal worth, all we who accept His sovereignty must also consider mankind worthy of eternal salvation. None is beneath our quest; none too remote. In God’s estimation, every human being is just a little lower than the angels. He is not willing that even one should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He stimulates that germ of eternal life, which inhabits every man, to grow and blossom; to respond to Him. He gives, and gives again. He patiently seeks His lost sons. Do we, who claim Sonship in Him, have that same compelling urge to lift man up from his animal existence and help set him on the divine plane for which he was created?



A GOING GOD

Genesis 2:4-24; 3:8-24

Was there an all-powerful Creator who wound up our world and then took a long rest, leaving it to run down by itself? This is a theory advanced by those who must attribute the formation of our complex universe to an intelligent source, but who cannot bring themselves to accept, in a personal way, this creative Mind. They prefer to keep Him remote and uncaring about the tribulations faced by suffering humanity. Thus, they are able to parade calamities, adversity and injustice as proof of the non-personal and non-interfering nature of God. Yes, to them He exists, but He never meddles in the affairs of men, nor does He even care about our petty lives on this sin-riddled earth.

This is a convenient doctrine, because it not only removes God from the human scene, it also removes man from any responsibility to his Creator, and for all practical purposes, to his fellow men, created in the image of God.

There is only one problem with this notion: *It is not true*. From the very beginning of the eternal One's dealings with men, *He has cared*. And to show His constant concern for man, He has journeyed continually from the Heaven of Heavens to this earth, to demonstrate to man that He knows, understands and wishes to free us from our sinful and rebellious ways.

In Genesis, chapters two and three, we find God first creating man in His very image and then, demonstrating His interest in this bit of eternity He had called into being.

For example, He placed man in an earthly paradise, especially prepared for him. He gave man dominion over the earth, to both subdue and care for it. He counterbalanced man's loneliness by creating for him a mate, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. He provided all things for His creature, giving him exhilarating liberty and only prohibiting that which would be harmful to him. It was God's loving will to make man's life abundant, creative and satisfying. He also wanted man to commune directly with Him. For this reason we find this majestic Creator coming personally to man, walking and talking with him in the quiet of the Garden.

Yes, God cared and in caring, went to where He had placed His two humans, matching strides with them as they strolled and conversed together in the Garden.

Man Not Content

But man was not content to be just a little lower than the angels. He wanted to be one of the gods. On a certain ruinous day the temptor slithered into man's paradise, offering him the forbidden fruit of illicit experience and the heady opportunity for eternal knowledge and understanding. Countermanding all of the Lord's instructions, the serpent maneuvered God's people into open rebellion.

We are quite familiar with the entire dreadful scene. Man never had it so good, but he wanted more. And in so wanting, he lost all, sinking to a state of sinful despair, suffering fatigue, aching muscles, advancing age, disease, and finally, death.

A Going God

But our God is a going God; He didn't write man off as a failure in His creative scheme. Praise His name, He

came again on that fateful day to deal with humanity's newly discovered hell! He talked with the man, the woman, and the Evil One, decreeing their just punishment.

But He also promised man another visit, in the form of His own Son. For the first, and only, time in the history of this strife-filled planet, Deity would walk in its dust and mud, its thorns and thistles, its heat and cold, its storms, its suffering ... and finally, would die, in extreme agony, as a loving sacrifice for man's sins.

His Many Personal Visits

During the thousands of years before the coming of the Son, our Father continued to visit us humans and show His preoccupation over our continued rebellion. At times He appeared personally, as on Mt. Sinai; at times, through His ministering angels, as in the case of Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah. And it is entirely possible that He commissioned His Son to appear on special occasions, such as in the visit to Abraham in Genesis 18 and to the three young men in Daniel, Chapter 3. At other times He visited man through His human instruments, the prophets, whose message was always:

“Inquire of the Lord while he is present, call upon him while he is close at hand. Let the wicked abandon their ways and evil men their thoughts: Let them return to the Lord, who will have pity on them, return to our God, for he will freely forgive.” (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Our God has always come to earth, holding out hands of care and forgiveness to His creatures. Instead of locking the gates of Heaven and defying man to find a way in, God has reached out to find man. It is His very nature to go to wherever man has strayed and to lead him back home.

The Same Loving Concern

We, who were twice made in the image of God, once in our physical birth and later, through a spiritual rebirth, will demonstrate this same loving concern for our fellow men, going where they are and continually leading them home to be reunited with their Father. Because He came, we go. Because He gave, we give. Because He relinquished His heavenly home to go to man, we give up our earthly homes for His cause. Because He sacrificed all for man, we too sacrifice all, that other men may know Him. This is the nature of our going God and of all who accept His fatherhood.

“Go with God to those of every land; Go with God o’er hills and desert sand. He said to go; Then why not trust His word, And go with God, for He’s your going Lord.” (From the hymn, *Go With God*, written by the author).



NOAH, GOD'S AGENT OF SALVATION

Genesis 6:5-22; Hebrews 11:7; I Peter 3:20; II Peter 2:5

The corruption, precipitated by man's sudden fall in the Garden, spread cancerously through succeeding generations. By the time of Noah, not many generations later, man had sunk to an all-time low morally, wallowing in a pit of his own evil digging. The Biblical account states his condition in these dismal words:

"Now God saw that the whole world was corrupt and full of violence." (Genesis 6:11).

For this reason the Lord decided, regretfully, to destroy mankind and begin anew the process of subduing and developing the earth through the only possibility left in the world—His servant, Noah.

Always Sought Man

God had always sought man, even from the very beginning. For example, as early as the days of Adam and Cain, He brought His creatures to an encounter with their guilt and their need for repentance. Later, He again called man to repentance through His righteous servant Enoch:

"I saw the Lord come with his myriads of angels, to bring all men to judgement and to convict all the godless of all the godless deeds they had committed..." (Jude 14-15).

And now again, He called out to man in love and warning this time through faithful Noah, a preacher of righteousness. (Genesis 6:9; II Peter 2:5).

Noah's All-Encompassing Faith

Hardly a soul exists in our "Christian" world who hasn't heard of Noah and the ark. But few of us appreciate his all-encompassing faith, as he proceeded to construct a huge box-like structure, perhaps in a place well removed from any major body of water, simply because the Lord had commanded it:

"By faith Noah, divinely warned about the unseen future, took good heed and built an ark to save his household." (Hebrews 11:7).

No small task this. In fact, he was about 120 years constructing it! But this wasn't his only responsibility. Evidently, he was also commissioned to warn others of the fate in store for them, if they did not repent. Phillips words it that he was "the solitary voice" that cried out for righteousness. (II Peter 2:5). Noah's entire project must have seemed folly to his neighbors, just as did his exhorting. Preaching the Word of God has always appeared foolish to the world. (I Corinthians 1:18-23). But this did not deter Noah, nor should it deter us today. We don't know how often or how long Noah attempted to persuade others to repent and join him in the ark, but we do know that in his preaching career he was successful only in the saving of his own family - just eight obedient souls, after decades of effort! I think I might have given up long since.

The Patience Of God

But not Noah, nor the Lord, who waited patiently while His servant built the means of his family's salvation from the impending flood. (I Peter 3:20).

This same passage tells us that all others refused safety in the ark. So, that which they spurned became

their condemnation, while it saved Noah and his family. Hebrews 11:7 suggests that through Noah's faith, he condemned the whole world, and made good his own claim to the righteousness which comes by faith.

Lessons From Noah

Today's servants of God can learn much from Noah. First, God calls us to specific service. Ours is not just a generalized, indistinct kind of following, but through the years, a definite direction to be followed. The over-all aim of our service is the same in every case: we are to save ourselves and all others possible from this wicked generation, as Peter urged the Jews in Acts 2:40. There is no heavenly guarantee that many others will listen and turn to righteousness. Rather, we may find ourselves modern-day Noahs, devoting a lifetime to proclaiming the Word, with few visible results. But preach we must, for there is a fire in our bones, which we cannot extinguish. (Jeremiah 20:9). We *must* share those facts and experiences that which we have seen, heard and learned. (Acts 4:20). But whether serving in a ripe field, planted and nourished by others before us, or in virgin soil, where we must do the initial sowing, after tedious and tiring cultivation of stony ground, we have the same obligation as Noah to fulfill our God-given purpose. It is He, not we, who gives the increase. (I Corinthians 3:6). It is our task to plant, cultivate, water, pray for and expect God to give all increase, according to His will.

Our Great Test

We, too, are being tested, as was Noah. The Lord would see if we really believe, to the extent of building, against all reason, our own individual ark of service and deliverance.

We, too, must learn to lean on Him with all of our strength, patiently waiting for Him to show the way and create the action, in His own time and place. For about a hundred and twenty years Noah waited, seeing the future through eyes of faith; knowing for a certainty that someday a flood would come, because God had said so. It is entirely possible that no rains had ever fallen before, and thus, both storms and flooding would have been unknown to him and his world. But this didn't diminish Noah's faith. On the contrary, he continued to construct the ark, against the day when the impossible would occur.

Impossible Odds

We today also confront impossible odds, in the face of an exploding world population. We do not see how or where either the floods of salvation or of destruction will come. But, we are to proclaim salvation, through baptism, the Lord's present parallel to Noah's salvation, who was saved by means of the same water that destroyed all other families. (I Peter 3:20-21). We, too, are to be proclaimed to all men, our very message being the means of salvation for some and condemnation for others, as indicated in Philippians 1:27-28:

“... you are standing firm, one in spirit, one in mind, contending as one man for the gospel faith, meeting your opponents without so much as a tremor. This is a sure sign to them that their doom is sealed, but a sign of your salvation ...”

Preach, then, boldly and faithfully, as did Noah. Construct Christ's kingdom here on the earth, patiently but surely, against the day when eternal Judgement comes again.



GO TO A LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU

Genesis 12:1-7

Ur was quite the cosmopolitan center. With its lofty ziggurats, libraries, parks and canals, it was a pleasant place with a good future. One of its leading citizens was a prosperous man called Abram.

Can you imagine, then, the initial shock Abram received, when the Lord God suddenly instructed him: "Leave your country, family and friends ... Go to a far land that I will show you." No further instructions: Simply, get up and go! No more soft life here in Ur. No more easy access to ready-made goods. No more reunions with your relatives. No more ancient traditions from the cradle of human existence. No more libraries or formal learning. Just pack up and go, never to return. Leave this place, this language and this culture and adapt to another.

No Objections

Abram could have raised a thousand questions, but he didn't. In a nicely worded comparison between this man of God and his modern counterparts, David Mickey imagines his objecting, as we might today:

"Lord, until I have more information about what you have in mind, I can't make such a decision. I mean, you surely must not expect me to just pick up my family and move without more details. It's only fair for You to answer some of my questions. Just how far are we going? What kind of problems and dangers will we encounter on the trip? Will we follow a well marked trade-route? Are the people where we're going friendly

toward strangers? What about their skin color? Do they speak our language?"

But not so Abram, God's pilgrim: In place of such trivial objections, his real response is indicated in Genesis 12:4 and Hebrews 11:8:

"So Abram went, as the Lord told him."

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive ... and he went out, not knowing where he was to go."

Took Commands Seriously

Here was a man who took the Lord's commands literally and accepted them wholeheartedly. He tore himself from the soft, civilized, idolatrous life on the Chaldean plains, heading upriver along the ancient Fertile Crescent, each day farther from home and the known; each day sensing more and more his new role as a pilgrim. For the rest of his long life he was to live without earthly roots, wandering from place to place in the country that one day would be claimed by his descendants.

Celebrated Faith

The most remarkable characteristic about Abraham was his intense faith. He believed God and because of this was strengthened to face the unknown. Because of his implicit faith, he was blessed eternally, being made the father of God's future nation, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. He was to be the direct ancestor of mankind's Saviour. He was given a great land to pass on to his heirs. And he was enriched a hundred times over, far more than compensating for whatever he had left behind in Ur.

Call Still Valid

Our Lord's call to Abram echoes down through the centuries, vibrating the heartstrings of God's faithful servants in every generation. For He still calls men to leave family, friends, homes and employment. He still insists that we leave our comfortable, taken-for-granted cultural cocoons. He still prods us to depart from our at-ease-in-Ur security and go to lands that He will show us. Had Abram stayed home, his blessings undoubtedly would have dried up and his name certainly would not have been recorded for all time as the hero who left everything behind to follow his Lord.

We, like Abram, are expected to take the Lord's commands literally. When He says to go, we are to go, nothing doubting. If we stay at home in our comfortable Urs, we too can expect to lose our potential hero-of-the-faith status, with all of its accrued blessings.

"But, Father," we still object, "where is this place? Surely you don't expect me to just pick up like that and go! I will have to know a whole lot more about it first. Are the living standards much different from here? What about schools, doctors and hospitals? Will I be able to live in a nice home, or will I have to take my tent? And who is going to finance this move?"

No Questions Asked

Evidently, Abram didn't stop to ask such questions. He was required to go and he went. Does the Lord expect any less of us?

Bless Abram for going to the land Jehovah God showed him. Bless him for his faith and for the example he became for us. Bless all of the other Abrams throughout history who have gone out in trusting faith to far countries

to which the Lord has led them. May their number multiply today, as He continues to call, “Pack up, son, and go to a land that I will show you.”

Churches and individual Christians, He shows us countless lands today and He still tells us to go to them. We don’t need to know all of the details. All we need initially is to believe and obey His instructions. He promised to show us the land, the way to it, and the resources necessary for serving as His pilgrims in it. Why ask for more than this?



A LIVING SACRIFICE

Genesis 22:1-18

Abraham had waited decade after decade for a son, long-promised by the Lord as a necessary link in the fulfillment of the divine plan. Abraham's son by his wife, Sarah, was to be the means of raising up a chosen nation, populating a chosen land and bringing into earthly being the already long-promised Messiah. But Abraham was growing ever older, 80, 90, 95, 98 ... and Sarah was only a few years younger, well past the age of child-bearing.

Another Visitation

Then, suddenly, there came another heavenly visitation, recorded in Genesis, chapter 18. The Lord repeated His promise to Abraham, stating that within a year, Sarah would bear this all-important son. Sarah, incredulous because of her advanced age, chuckled to herself over such an impossible prospect. When accused of laughing, a sign of her doubt, she was frightened and denied having done so. She was answered with a significant question: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:11-15). He who created man could readily reverse the aging process, thus renewing Sarah's earlier phase of glandular-stimulated fertility.

The Child Of Promise

And of course, in due time Sarah gave birth to Isaac, Abraham's heir and the hope and pride of the family. We can picture his being pampered and protected. After all, he was not just any child, he was *the child of promise* born miraculously to serve as a key to overwhelming future blessings.

The whole world's destiny rested on this infant boy: Through him would come the development of the great nation of Israel, God's chosen people, and through him, the world's Savior, Jesus Christ.

But Jehovah has never left His chosen untried. Genesis, Chapter 22, opens with a test of Abraham's faith. Did Abraham believe because of blessings he had received and promises he had seen fulfilled? Did he believe because of his being protected from adversities? Or, was his belief deeper, able to survive adversity and even the most perplexing heavenly command, one that made no sense whatever to Abraham and which struck at the cherished son of his old age, the son of promise? Would Abraham still believe when it cost him dearly and personally?

The Test Of Tests

This was the test of tests. Abraham was to take his only son, whom he loved, offering him as a living sacrifice to the very God who had solemnly promised him for so many years.

We know that Abraham, however much he may have been dismayed by the command, proceeded to obey it. What was his attitude in the face of such an awesome trial? Hebrews 11:19 reveals the answer: "For he reckoned that God had power even to raise from the dead." Abraham, whose son had been given to him initially from the dead, so to speak, could be restored to him from the dead, if that was God's will. What fantastic, yet practical, faith! Abraham was proved and Isaac was spared, through faith. A divinely provided substitute was then offered in Isaac's place. Afterward, the Lord's angel reiterated the heavenly blessing:

“Inasmuch as you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will bless you abundantly and greatly multiply your descendent’s ...” (Genesis 22: 16-17).

Illustrative Of Our Testings

This difficult but triumphant experience in the life of Abraham is illustrative of some of the testings that we too must undergo, perhaps not as traumatic, but no less real. Are we willing, as Abraham, to go to lands unknown to us, to pass our lives as wanderers upon the face of the earth, for His cause and because He tells us to go? Are we willing to sacrifice the dearest things on earth to us, as proof of our devotion to Him? Are we willing to leave father and mother, brothers and sisters, lands and other possessions to follow our Lord? Are we willing to give up everything necessary for His cause? Are we, like Abraham, willing to release our own children to His service in remote regions and for trying tasks?

How Substantial Our Faith?

Just how substantial is our faith? Is it merely a faith propped up by physical blessings (the accusation made by Satan against Job and his faith)? Or is it more solid, a faith which stands firm, regardless of the winds of adversity and the storms of self-sacrifice hurled against it? The palm is a flexible, resistant tree, bending with tempests, and because of this, it is seldom uprooted by the pressures against it. Rather, when the storm is over, it normally snaps back to its original position. So must be our faith - undaunted and courageous, willing to trust everything to God, bending with adversity, but firmly rooted in Him.

What Will There Be For Us?

The disciples once asked Jesus:

“We here have left everything to become your followers, What will there be for us?” (Matthew 19:27). A good question. What will there be for us, if we sacrifice all to follow Jesus? Verses 29 and 30 tell us that we have all to gain — family, lands, houses, abundant blessings now and the riches of all eternity. Trusting faith has little to lose and all to gain. Wherever God’s man goes, he has a worldwide family, brothers and sisters, who will share their homes and possessions with him. Wherever he goes, he has access to God’s resources. Wherever he goes, he is sustained, even in times of testing, by the Lord in whom he trusts.

A Small Price To Pay

And even if he is called upon to sacrifice all upon the altar of God’s service in some difficult field, it is a small price to pay. His Father has already sacrificed much more: His only Son, offered as a substitute for sinful man.

For this reason we gladly give up all for Him. As Paul stated it:

“I count everything sheer loss, because all is far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I did in fact lose everything.” (Philippians 3:8).



YOU AND YOUR SEED

Genesis 12:1-3

“No man is an island...”, once wrote the poet, John Donne. No man lives in a vacuum; all of us have an influence, for better or for worse, in our world. In the case of a very few noble souls throughout history, their influence has changed the course of the world. Think, for example, of the contributions of such men as Socrates, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Martin Luther, the Curies, Pasteur, Edison, Lincoln ...

In the same way, great heroes of the Bible influenced forever the spiritual future of mankind. One of these spiritual giants was God’s man of faith, Abraham. Through this man and his seed a land was dedicated to the Lord, a people was preserved for His purposes, kings and kingdoms were raised and the world’s Saviour was born.

Blessings Through Abraham

No one can measure the true extent of the blessings brought into being through Abraham. Their results are incalculable. Even in our own day, forty or so centuries removed from Abraham’s life, we see the influence wielded by his descendents, the Jews, and their controversies with others of his descendents, the Arabs. Three major religions—Jewish, Moslem and Christian—look to him as a spiritual father. But of course, the most significant blessing he would help bring to the world was in the person of his greatest of all descendents, Jesus. Countless men, of countless nations, have been brought to a new life through the Christ, Abraham’s son in the flesh.

Not only is Abraham a blessing through his seed, but also through his unmatched faith and that of his immediate descendents, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Hear the Bible witness to their trust in God, as they followed the noble example of their father, Abraham:

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau and spoke of things to come. By faith, Jacob as he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshipped God, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, spoke of the departure of Israel from Egypt, and instructed them what to do with his bones.” (Hebrews 11:20-22).

Source Of Their Faith

But what, really, was the source of their faith? It came partially from what they themselves had seen and heard from God, but also from what they had heard from and about Abraham. This great man of faith understood a principle that often escapes fathers today: He knew that it was absolutely essential to transmit a sound example and careful spiritual teaching to his descendents. The Lord Himself says of Abraham:

“I have taken care of him on purpose that he may charge his sons and family after him to conform to the way of the Lord and to do what is right and just; thus I shall fulfill all that I have promised for him”. (Genesis 18:19).

Abraham’s mission began with his own family and reached through them down through the ages. Abraham’s immediate descendants deceived and otherwise showed clearly their human weaknesses. But despite this, throughout their lives Isaac, Jacob and Joseph demonstrated their faith and trust in the Lord.

Where Our Mission Begins

Our mission today must begin in precisely the same place: In our own home—and from there, to our Jerusalems, Samarias, Galilees and far nations. Many a Christian man's chain of faithfulness, perhaps received from his ancestors, is broken in his hands, or in those of his own faithless children! But in Abraham's case, the chain was passed on intact.

What a profound tragedy it is to see a man's spiritual descendency wither away and die, leaving him no name in the family of God. And inversely, what a blessing, to see sons and grandsons demonstrating a profound faith in the God of their fathers. We, like Abraham, are responsible for our own faith and for its sure transmission to our children and grandchildren. Israel's fathers, later on, were to teach their children all that God had done for them. And, in Ephesians 6:4, all Christian fathers are commanded to "give them the instruction, and the correction, which belong to a Christian upbringing"

Passing Along The Torch

It is our holy task, then, to continue the faith, passing it along, like an Olympic torch, to our children and grandchildren. Having done our utmost to both *show* and *tell*—show them the way through our example and tell them what our Father has taught us and done for us—we can safely expect most of them to transmit the faith to their own generation and that of their children.

If such is our constant practice, we can expect to be a great blessing to our own generation and an incalculable blessing to succeeding ones. Abraham's simple, consistent faith in Jehovah brought immeasurable results to humanity. Our simple faith can be no less illuminating, as we live in an age characterized by its deathly darkness

of infidelity to God. Through our lives untold thousands may be reached and in some way changed and brought to their own spiritual encounter with their Creator. No one can measure the potential influence of a single faithful life. The *King James Version* says in Revelation 14:13:

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.”

Yes, a faithful man’s faith and works follow him, influencing others, and especially his own children.

Unmeasurable Influence

If we cannot measure adequately the godly impact of one faithful man on his own generation, how much less can we measure his life and teaching in the lives of his descendents. It is entirely possible that humble parents, such as Jochabed or Hannah, will produce spiritual giants, capable of turning worlds upside down for Christ.

What an awesome thought it is to realize that our descendents are expected to carry God’s message to future generations. At the same time, it is a glorious privilege, to transmit our own sword of faith, tempered in the fires of adversity, to our children, who in turn, will be able to wield it with an even stronger arm than you or I ever did.



I WILL PARDON THE WHOLE PLACE FOR THEIR SAKE **Genesis 18:16-33; 19:1-29**

Abraham, God's pilgrim in Canaan, had become a wealthy nomadic sheik, with vast flocks and considerable influence. One day, resting from the noontime heat, he was seated at the entrance to his sprawling tent. Suddenly, he saw three men approaching and, dictated by eastern cultural norms and by his own innate sense of hospitality, he ran to these three strangers, prostrating himself on the dusty trail before them and offering them rest and nourishment.

They agreed to his kind offer and he then bustled about, ordering everything necessary to ensure their enjoyment. Much to his surprise, these visitors, angelic beings, shifted the conversation to Abraham and his wife, Sarah, reiterating the promise made so many times before of a son, through whom all nations would be blessed.

A Shocking Revelation

Now Abraham's divine guests prepared to leave. But his hospitality didn't end at that point. He even accompanied them down the trail for a distance. One of the three, the Lord Himself, decided to reveal to Abraham what He proposed to do next: Destroy the great sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This revelation came as a shock to Abraham. He not only viewed it as a calamity for all of the inhabitants of the Jordan plains, but also as a personal tragedy, for his nephew, Lot, and his family were residents of Sodom.

For these reasons, Abraham almost recklessly approached the Lord with a series of requests for clemency. He began with an appeal that God, in His divine mercy, spare the doomed cities, if there were, say, fifty righteous souls to be found there. But just to cover all eventualities, he lowered the “safety” margin—to forty, thirty, twenty and even to ten. Each time he received the same answer: “Yes, I will spare these cities if even fifty, forty, thirty or twenty godly persons are found there.” And, wonder of wonders, He affirmed: “Yes, even in the case of ten truly righteous people, I will pardon the whole place for their sake.”

Implications Of God's Patience

Think of the implications of this! Our God is willing to spare entire cities, and surely even nations, for the sake of just a few men and women dedicated to Him. He values human beings above all of His creation, condemning them as a last resort, only after they have abandoned themselves wholly to evil. And even then, He will hold destruction in abeyance, if even a tiny minority is found faithful to Him. Apparently, hope does spring eternal in the breast of our eternal Father. If there are a few righteous men around, this reassures Him that His human creation was not totally in vain. Some, like Enoch and Noah, have retained their godlikeness, even in the midst of total moral decay.

Not only this, however. Godly men will attempt to restore their acquaintances to the path of holiness. They will act as leaven, salt and light, influencing others in the direction of holiness.

Others Sanctified Through Us

And, of course, God loves and cares for His own, even sanctifying others in a sense, because of their connection with His children. This factor is seen at work in marriage and the home, where a Christian mate serves to preserve and sanctify his or her non-Christian partner and children. (I Corinthians 7:14).

How far afield does this principle of divine protection for non-believers function, because of their proximity to believers? In Acts 27:24-37 we find that the Lord spared 276 passengers of a doomed ship, primarily because of Paul's presence aboard. We can conclude, then, that the Lord was even willing to save Noah's world, had it repented through that just man's example and preaching.

The Value Of Righteous Souls

Practically speaking, no one can measure the real value of even ten righteous souls. Perhaps because these few are at their task of salting, illuminating and leavening, or just because they are His men, entire populations today are spared their just punishment. Perhaps a disabled airliner returns to earth safely, because a noble Christian family is among its passengers. Perhaps a fatal car wreck is averted for the same reason, or perhaps permitted, to take its occupants home to be forever with their Lord. No one can determine such things today with precision, but we do know from the Scriptures that loving concern has always existed in the noble heart of God. We are assured that our Father's saints are precious in His sight and that He truly cares for them.

Nobility Of Purpose

Who knows, then, but that you and I can be the means of protecting our entire communities, as well as saving some of our fellow citizens, through our very presence? Perhaps today, too, He is sparing “the whole place” for our sake. This gives our lives an even greater nobility of purpose and an even more marked urgency, doesn’t it? Our role in society, and our mission to it, are of the utmost importance.



REDIGGING OUR FATHER'S WELLS

Genesis 26:12-33

In the semi-arid regions of southern Palestine, dependable sources of water have always been considered one of the greatest of all blessings. With his vast herds, Abraham continually sought water, as a prerequisite for his nomadic camps. In many cases, where conditions appeared favorable, he ordered the digging of wells. And when water was reached, it occasioned a time of rejoicing.

The Wells Stopped Up

Later, Abraham's son Isaac retraced his father's steps through the Negeb region, finding that the wells dug by Abraham had been stopped up, after his death, by Philistines envious of this patriarchal family's abundant wealth. It is amazing that anyone would even contemplate destroying a well, especially in a desert land. But this the Philistines did, a vivid commentary on the extent to which spite-motivated men will go. Abraham's enemies would even destroy their future in the land, in order to get at him and his descendants! Perhaps it isn't any wonder that they acted in this manner, because Abraham and his family had been abundantly blessed by the Lord. They had even grown to sufficient strength to defeat an invading army led by four kings. We can still see this same fear that some have of successful men, wealthy men, different men, foreigners ... as demonstrated by King Abimelech's response to Isaac: "Go away from here, you are too strong for us." (Genesis 26:16).

Redigging The Wells

Whatever the motivation, these precious wells had been stopped up, and Isaac proceeded to clear them out, to return them to their former usefulness. Once again, pure water flowed in the desert, lifted from wells that were again given the meaningful names by which they had been known in Abraham's day, for the name of a place, a city, a well, a spring, or a person always carried with it rich symbolism.

But more than merely restoring the wells his father had dug, Isaac struck out into uncharted territory, digging new wells for his increasing herds. But his efforts were fraught with difficulty, for his adversaries also claimed the territory and its water for themselves and had no intention of sharing it with a newcomer. Finally, he located an area where he could dig a well in peace, sighing with relief: "Now the Lord has given us plenty of room and we shall be fruitful in the land." (Genesis 26:22),

And in this spacious new land he found other wells and pastures for his herds, receiving also a reaffirmation of the holy promise given to Abraham. (Verses 23-25).

Today's Parched Earth

We live today in an arid world, parched for lack of the Water of Life. In many parts of our earth, past generations shared the Living Water of John, chapter 4, with their fellow men. There was a time in the early centuries when the entire Mediterranean world was saturated with the Gospel. But, today, the wells are fouled by materialism, the Islamic faith, Catholicism, nationalism ... where once the Faith flourished, now it is dead. In more immediate times the Gospel was known even in China. Today, it is largely unknown, the wells having been destroyed by communism.

Dwindling Water Supply

The first situation calls for a cleaning out process. As a child, I was reared on a dairy farm in western Oregon. Our household water came from a spring a half-mile away, channeled to the farmhouse through a pipeline. Over a period of months, the water supply would dwindle and become polluted, so someone had to go and clear the spring of accumulated mud and other debris. By the same process, our spiritual wells can easily become choked with our preoccupations, materialism and worldly attitudes, causing the flow of spiritual water channeled through us to dwindle away.

No Land Barren

Secondly, those lands where the Living Water once flowed but are now spiritual deserts, must be newly irrigated, from unstopped wells, so that they may blossom again. No place on earth should remain barren, for it is the Lord's will that all of them bloom spiritually, as prophesied in Isaiah 35:6:

“ ... for water springs up in the wilderness, and torrents flow in dry land.”

Finally, there are vast desert regions, spiritually, where wells of Christian truth have never been dug. These, too, must be made fertile. We, the Lord's modern Isaacs, were called to dig these wells and to bring the water of life to lands that are not yet receiving its blessings.



THIS IS THE HOUSE OF GOD

Genesis 28:10-22

“Like father, like son” is truer than we often are willing to admit. In the case of Abraham’s family, we can see an occasional tendency toward deceit, which reared its ugly head at least twice in this Patriarch’s life, both times involving his wife. Then the identical situation happened in Isaac’s life. When Jacob came on the scene, he showed an even more pronounced aptitude for deceit, bilking his older twin, Easu, of both his firstborn’s birthright and also of his blessing as the elder son.

As a result, Easu vowed to kill his scheming brother, just as soon as their aged father’s funeral was over. As our scene opens, Jacob is fleeing for his life, on the pretext of seeking a wife among his mother’s relatives in far-off Haran.

With perhaps another fearful glance over his shoulder Jacob seeks out a secure place to spend the night, several days’ flight from Beersheba and his vengeful brother. Using a stone for his pillow, his company is the wild animals of the Canaanite highlands and his only protection, Jehovah. Certainly God must have looked with disfavor on Jacob’s sin, but with compassion for him as a sinner who had unmeasurable potential for good.

The Promise Repeated

During the night he experiences the mind-boggling vision of the heavenly ladder, or stairway, filled with angels ascending and descending. Then suddenly the Lord appears and repeats to Jacob the glorious promises made

to his father and grandfather. Sinful, deceitful Jacob will receive, as a perpetual endowment, the land promised to Abraham and Isaac. His descendents are to prosper and multiply exceedingly. And, above all of these grand promises, the Lord reveals the most significant one of all: Jacob is to be a key link in the chain which will eventually bind Satan. He is to be the direct ancestor of the world's Saviour, thus blessing all of mankind forever through his life.

Along with all of these blessings for the more remote future, the Lord promises Jacob more immediate and urgently needed encouragement. Yes, he has done wrong, but he is forgiven, promised guidance, and launched into a newer and more purposeful existence. The God of his fathers pledges to be with him wherever he goes, eventually leading him back "home."

This Is The House Of God

Jacob comes alive, trembling with awe. God had always been the Father of his ancestors, but never before has He reached down and directly touched Jacob's life. Even in the darkness of a strange land, God is here, with Him, and he hasn't even known it. This is truly the House of God. In a flash of understanding, he realizes that he is really near the Lord and Heaven, no matter where he is at the moment or what are his circumstances.

The next morning, Jacob hastens to hallow the memory of this very special place. He erects a pillar out of his former stone pillow, pours oil on it as a symbol of its holiness and renames the place Bethel, which means the House of God.

To complete his dedication service, Jacob makes a solemn vow: “If God will be with me, guard me on this journey, providing me with food and clothing and returning me eventually to my father’s house, then He will be my Lord and Master forever. I will dedicate this holy place to Him a tenth of everything I receive.”

A Changed Man

Obviously, Jacob is changed by his experience of being in the Lord’s presence. What had been academic acknowledgement of God is now personal faith in Him. What had been abstract is now real. What had been scheming for self-aggrandizement is now generosity. His whole approach to life and God is changed. Conversion? Certainly. He is still not perfect, but he is on the road toward godliness. His priorities are straightened out. His changed life will even warrant a new name—no longer Jacob the Supplanter, but Israel, the Prince of God.

Each of us, as Jacob, has a hypocritical, deceitful nature. Our sins eventually pile up to accuse us and threaten our spiritual death. We attempt to flee them, to no avail. Sooner or later we must face certain inescapable facts: Either God is or He is not. If He is, then where we are is His house. He really is with us. He really does care for us. He hallows our pathway and sanctifies our lives. We may be a long time discovering this fact, but whether we knew it or not, God is in this place. The entire earth is His footstool. He is here and we can communicate with Him, because He has given us a doorway of access to Him, through His Son.

No Night Too Dark

Many of us realize, theoretically at least, that God was with our parents and that His influence is still felt occasionally in our own “Christian” country. But we hesitate to admit that He is also in Russia, China and every land, influencing and preparing the way for His cause. No land is too remote and no spiritual night too dark to be removed from His ladder of communication and guidance.

Therefore, we can go anywhere with our Lord, in the secure knowledge that wherever we go, or are sent, He is with us. He will never leave us, nor forsake us. Moreover, He will provide all that is necessary, blessing abundantly our journey until the moment of our return to His eternal house.

Yes, our loving Lord promised to walk with us, sending His angels to minister to our needs. He promised to be with us always, even to the end of the world. Then let us hallow our lives to His service, fearing nothing that may occur during our pilgrimage.



SENT HERE TO SAVE LIVES

Genesis 45:1-15

Many have risen from obscurity to positions of honor, but few as dramatically as Joseph, who suddenly was snatched from slavery and prison, to become second in command to ruler of the world's greatest empire.

Joseph had grown up as the favorite son in a large family. Doted upon by his father (always a dangerous practice), he became the object of his older brothers' envy. To make matters worse, Joseph revealed some prophetic dreams to his family, dreams in which he was even more the center of attention, with even his own parents bowing before him.

Jealousy has a way of seeking its own devious, revengeful ends. When Jacob presented his favorite son a special cloak, signifying his preferred position in the family, it wasn't long until sibling spite took over. Before he knew what was happening to him, brash young Joseph found himself sold as a slave to Egypt.

The Pampered Boy Becomes A Man

Perhaps it took this kind of frightening, humbling experience to turn this immature youth into a real man of God. His underlying positive qualities and faith in God began to manifest themselves, as he rose in his new master's household to a position of considerable responsibility.

But now occurs another disaster for Joseph, as he is desired by Potiphar's wife, who attempts to seduce him. But when he spurns her advances, he is speedily thrown into prison (in those days a place where all hope vanished with the locking of the cell door).

Faith And Optimism Triumph

But in jail, as in slavery, his faith and optimism triumph. He rises eventually to the position of chief trustee, responsible for the other prisoners. His interpretation of two dreams sets the stage for his unexpected appearance before the great Pharaoh and his subsequent dizzying elevation to the position of governor over the whole nation of Egypt.

All of this he takes gracefully in stride, as he proceeds, with his innate administrative skill, to prepare Egypt for the coming seven years of famine which he has predicted.

This dreadful famine now stalks the entire mideast and the real reason for his years of slavery, imprisonment and more recently acquired position of authority becomes clear. For one day his brothers arrive from Canaan to bow before the Pharaoh's chief administrator and beg for grain. They fail to recognize their brother, due to his exalted position, Egyptian language and maturity. He puts them through a strict period of trial, to see if they have changed any in their attitude.

Sent For This Moment

When he is convinced of their integrity, he reveals his identity to them. Chagrined and fearful, they await his justice. He tells them not to fear him, for he now sees that he was sent to Egypt for this moment, to save his family and preserve it for the fulfillment of God's promised destiny. They had meant their abuse of him years earlier

for evil, but God had used it for good. As a result of the Lord's goodness.

Joseph's family is transported in style to Goshen, the best grazing land in the Nile delta. Joseph and his father are tearfully reunited and the family settles down to its new security, acquired from him who had become a slave for their sake. This is a beautiful figure of the Christ, who also would be betrayed and mistreated for our sake, to sustain us spiritually and eternally.

Voluntary Slaves For Christ

As Joseph and Jesus were sent out into the world to save lives, so we too suffer privation, misunderstandings, and the loss of all things, as Paul says it, in order to serve as God wants us to serve, according to His eternal timetable. We may be in an humble or exalted position; it doesn't really matter. What matters is that we realize our role as the voluntary slaves of Christ. Men may abuse us. We may be forsaken by all others. But all of this is to prepare us to understand and to bountifully share our salvation even with those who may have rejected it in the past.

God means all that happens to us for our good and the good of others. He means for us to maintain our true priorities at all times. We were sent here, as His servants on earth, to save others. Many would subvert this purpose, considering only themselves in God's scheme. Others would function in His service only at the level of "governor." Incidentally, all of us can learn a lesson from Joseph in this regard. In spite of his adverse situation and the odds against his success, he was more diligent and loyal than anyone else about him. So he rose in the ranks, always to a position of greater responsibility.

We Are Sent Ahead To Share

Yet others would view the mission of Christians only at the material level, affirming that since Joseph's task was to save lives physically, so our primary task today is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. This is one of our tasks, to be sure, but certainly not our primary responsibility to others. *Joseph saved lives, that spiritual promises might be fulfilled through him.* We today should maintain the same priority in missions. We are sent, at times to the most depressing of spiritual prisons, in order to redeem those incarcerated by sin. In the process, we may provide food, shelter and raiment. But basically, we are sent on ahead into the world to share with spiritually famished fellowmen the life-saving Bread of Life.



I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES

Book of Job

A main thrust of the dramatic book of Job is, “Why Must the Innocent Suffer?” But another, even greater theme is Job’s implicit faith in his Redeemer. No one knows just when Job lived, or who wrote this epic poem, but we can perhaps assume that Job was an Arabian (Ishmaelite or Edomite, thus a direct relative of Abraham). He may well have lived in the times following Abraham and Isaac; the setting is at least patriarchal. He was a sheik of immense wealth, who dwelt in the desert-oasis area south of Canaan.

Job, An Upright Man

Each time I read the book, I am amazed again at Job’s uprightness. Here was a man outside of the mainstream of Jehovah’s redemptive plan, through Abraham. Yet he was of such godly character that no other man of his generation could reach his spiritual stature. He was a man given to genuine benevolence, who nurtured the poor; a man of justice, who protected those abused by society:

“Whoever heard of me spoke in my favor, and those who saw me bore witness to my merit, how I saved the poor man when he called for help and the orphan who had no protector. The man threatened with ruin blessed me, and I made the widow’s heart sing for joy . . . I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; I was a father to the needy and I took up the stranger’s cause. I broke the fangs of the miscreant and rescued the prey from his teeth.” (Job 29:11-16).

This was a real man, then, tough but just, a gentle and righteous soul. He was much too righteous to suit Satan, who saw in him a threat to all he held dear. So one day, Evil incarnate appeared among the angels in God's court, to parade himself before the Eternal God. When asked what he had been up to, he answered: "Oh, I've been running around the earth, from end to end (trying to find souls to devour?)."

Job, The Lord's Showpiece

Then he was presented with the Lord's showpiece, His supreme proof that man can live by God's noble standards, affirming: "You will find no one like him on earth, a man of blameless and upright life, who fears God and sets his face against wrongdoing." (Job 1:8).

Satan's response was a scornful negation:

"Has not Job good reason to be God-fearing? Have you not hedged him round on every side with your protection . . . ? Whatever he does, you have blessed, and his herds have increased beyond measure. But stretch out your hand and touch all he has, and then he will curse you to your face." (1:9-11).

Here was the heavenly challenge ... Was Job's faith based only on material considerations, or did it go far deeper? God trusted in His servant's integrity, so He permitted Satan first to take all of Job's possessions and then, to afflict him physically.

But through all of this, even the loss of his ten beloved children and the demand of his stricken wife to curse God and die, Job remained steadfast in his faith. His answers are classics of acceptance of one's lot in life:

“Naked I came from the womb, naked I shall return whence I came. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (1:21). “If we accept good from God, shall we not accept evil?” (2:10).

False Comfort

To make his situation even worse, three philosophical friends came to comfort him. They sat by his side for seven days, consoling him by their presence. But then they began a series of dialogues, with each speaking in turn and Job responding. Their major theme throughout was that there is one basic cause for a man's suffering: His own personal sin. Job must have committed some secret crime against God, to have brought on himself such a calamity. Smug in their exalted position as his counselors, they insisted that he uncover this sin and confess it: “Is not your wickedness great?” “Know that God exacts of you less than your iniquity deserves.”

Such accusations must have wounded Job even more deeply. He admitted that he had sinned, because all men do, but why this extreme punishment? Why was the Lord suddenly so angry with him?

In his agony, Job even asked Jehovah why He also, along with both enemy and friend, ground His teeth against His servant. And in his loneliness; in his sense of having been separated from God for some unknown reason. Job desperately cried: “If only there were one to arbitrate between man and God, as between a man and his neighbor.” (16:21).

An Eternal Public Defender

Yet, deep within His heart, faithful Job believed in God's promises. The Lord's Advocate would one day deliver men and draw them back to their Creator: "I know that my Redeemer lives and that He will rise last to speak in court." (19:25). Yes, Job would have the blessing of an Eternal Public Defender. He would see his Defense Counsel, his Heavenly Witness, even the Lord Himself, standing at his side.

I know that my Redeemer lives! This is the mighty faith that sustained Job, who saw his Savior from afar. It is our sustaining and protecting shield today also. We know that our Redeemer lives, not by anticipation, as the patriarchs and prophets of old, but by faith in the facts of His life, death and resurrection here on the earth and His ascension, to assume in Heaven His role as our eternal Advocate.

I Know He Lives

I know that my redeemer lives! This is what we are to proclaim to all men. Our conviction of this fact must shine brightly in all that we say and do as His followers, for we function as we do because of our faith in Him. Yet how often, as we preach Him, we reveal by our attitude and comportment that we have doubts about His hearing and acting on our behalf. Not so with Job. His Redeemer was only a promise in Job's day, but he believed with all of his heart that this Holy One would stand by his side throughout all adversities.

The book closes with the most awesome colloquy ever recorded, a court hearing between God and man. Job had pled, "Oh, that one would hear me! Behold, my desire is that the Almighty would answer me!" (31:35).

His Hands Full

Now Job had his hands full, for the Lord did hear and answer him, with a series of questions so profound that until today, scientists and philosophers have still not found the answers to most of them. What was their purpose? Basically, to demonstrate to Job, and to all of us, that the ways of God are so far above our comprehension that we cannot ever hope to understand them to any great degree.

Why Suffering?

Why had Job suffered? Not for any crime that he had committed. There were other factors involved, of which Job was not at all aware. We suffer for our own sins, certainly, but also because of the iniquity of others or, as in Job's case, as a means of testing our faith. Job came through this extremely painful test with perfect marks. Neither his faith nor his integrity were shaken and as a result, he was blessed even more than he had been earlier, living a full life and dying at a very great age.

Can it be said of us, as we suffer our light afflictions for our Lord's cause, that in all of this our faith never wavered? Can it be said of us that our Redeemer really lives in and through us, to bless all men?



THE PLACE WHERE YOU'RE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND

Exodus 3:1-21

Throughout all history, the Lord has raised up men to act as decisive factors in the fulfillment of His eternal purpose here on earth. We can see such key men, especially during periods of great human stress. Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther, and other such giants rose to the challenge faced by them and their people. As a result, their influence on human events became incalculable.

This is also true of the heroes of the Bible—men such as Noah, Abraham, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Paul and the spiritual giant of this chapter, Moses.

Slave To Master

Moses began life as the son of slaves. Hidden in a basket on the Nile, to escape the death sentence against Hebrew male babies, he was at the mercy of man and nature. But the Lord was with him, preparing him for his future role as deliverer, leader and lawgiver. It wasn't by chance alone that he was found by the princess of Egypt and taken into the pharaoh's own household. There he passed the next forty years, receiving the finest instruction available in the world's greatest empire.

It is evident that Moses felt destined to leadership, because at forty, he took a direct, drastic hand in the affairs of his own enslaved people, only to end up fleeing for his life. It wasn't time yet for such action, because

God's preparation for him was far from complete. He had to spend forty more years as a shepherd, maturing and learning the geography and life of the desert, through which, unknowingly at the time, he would guide Israel years later. We can imagine his growing older year by year, wondering all the time if his potential were being dried up in the blistering heat and blowing sands of the Sinai Peninsula. But the most challenging and difficult forty years of his life were yet to come.

A Good Lesson For Us

This is a good lesson for all ambitious, dedicated servants of God today. Moses was not ready at forty for the noble and extremely trying task assigned to him. Only at "retirement" age was he seasoned enough to suit the Lord's taste in spiritual leaders. Saul of Tarsus was ready upon conversion to turn the world upside-down for Christ, but he too found that several years of instruction and seasoning were necessary before he embarked on his mission for the Master. Often we chafe at delay, failing to see clearly what the Lord has in mind for us or when His purposes are to be fulfilled in us. We become frustrated by our years of schooling, both formally and in the college of Hard Experience, realizing only later on that all of this worked together for our good, for our preparation and for the proper development of His schedule.

We, as Moses and Paul, must patiently work into His program, using inevitable delays and disappointments as blocks to building a stronger character, more dependent on Him, more resilient and more capable of withstanding the pressures of the task before us.

All Becomes Clear

One day, then, Moses finds himself, at eighty, leading only a flock of sheep. But God's moment for him has arrived! Moses sees the burning bush and suddenly, all becomes clear, frightfully clear! He is face to face with a manifestation of God Himself, whose awesome voice echoes from the bush. "Take off your shoes, Moses. You are standing on holy ground." The Lord is holy and majestic. His very presence sanctifies the locale, so as Moses discovers, those who approach him must do so with the utmost respect.

This principle has always been true. Our God is holy and whatever He touches is sanctified. We must never be guilty of perverting our worship to Him, or of approaching Him in a casual, mundane way. Nor should we approach His creation indifferently, considering its inhabitants common or unclean. Peter learned in Acts, Chapter 10, that our Lord loves all men and wants them cleansed and sanctified to Him.

Respect And Obedience

But Moses not only must approach God with a holy, respectful attitude. He must obey the divine instructions received at the burning bush. He is told, explicitly, to return to Egypt and lead Jehovah's chosen people out of slavery and to the land promised to their forefathers.

The very implications of this command overwhelms Moses, who has spent half of his eighty years out of circulation. No longer can he speak eloquently. During four long decades his only audiences have been his family and herds. No longer is he up on Egyptian politics, or on the manners of the current pharaoh's court. No longer does he have the ambition, or the energy, that he had at forty. So he demurs, insisting that he is not really the man for God's

job. He cannot see himself convincing the Hebrew patriarchs of his new role as their deliverer, let alone convincing the “god-man”, pharaoh, of the need for releasing his valuable million-plus work force.

But for all of his excuses, God furnishes a solution. Cannot the controller of the universe and the creator of the human tongue see to every ability that Moses will need? Go to Egypt he must, for almighty God sends him, fully equipped for every eventuality.

Every Resource Available

And we, too, must go, to lead God’s people out of their slavery to sin. He speaks to us; He has always spoken to us. He promises, as He has always promised, every resource we need for the task ahead. Let us abandon every excuse—lack of knowledge, resources, support, opportunity, worthiness—and get on with our God-given task, wherever it may be. Let us trust Him to provide everything we need to succeed in our holy calling.



LET MY PEOPLE GO

Exodus 3:7-10; 5:1-2; 6:11

The Lord has always repeated to the world: “Let my people go. Release them from the slavery in which you hold them so tenaciously.”

This was literally true, of course, in the case of His people, in the days of the Exodus from Egypt. The descendents of Jacob, increased from seventy souls to a million plus, outnumbered the native Egyptians, and so were a potential security threat, as well as being the king’s greatest economic resource. No wonder, then, that they had lost their freedom, having become, well before the birth of Moses, the personal chattel of the “god-men” pharaohs, to be exploited as ordinary domestic animals.

Their Cries Heard

But the Lord heard their cries of anguish. Remembering His promise to restore them to the land promised centuries earlier to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He began to bring events together to deliver them from slavery. His servant, Moses, was unknowingly standing by, prepared for this moment.

As this dramatic scene opens, Moses and Aaron are confronting the “all-powerful” Pharaoh, demanding even the temporary release of his hordes of valuable slaves, essential to the realization of his grandiose projects. Can you picture the sudden arrival at his sumptuous court of an outcast shepherd, eighty years of age, with his brother, who was one of the elders of the slaves themselves? Consider their demands: A god whom the Pharaoh has

neither served, nor even known, is requiring the exit of every Hebrew slave—men, women, and children—along with their herds and all of their possessions. But of even more significance is the fact that the Pharaoh considers himself a diety. Why, then, should he yield to some other god, especially that of the Hebrew rabble? Their's must be a weak god, indeed, who would permit his worshippers to sink to the depths of servitude!

The Pharaoh, then, recognizes no authority higher than himself. He holds the power of life and death over his foreign slaves. So it is necessary that he and his people learn that there is but one true God, Jehovah, the supreme I AM.

Egypt's Gods Destroyed

The ruler's lessons become increasingly difficult, as he battles against overwhelming odds to resist learning them. One by one, Egypt's gods are put down, as specific plagues are aimed directly at them and thus, graphically show their importance. But the Pharaoh fights a delaying action, offering compromises to Moses and Aaron. If they will just be content to take the men, leaving their families behind, or if absolutely necessary, take their families, at least leaving their cattle behind, he has them defeated. He knows that if he can retain in Egypt even a part of their lives and possessions, they will be drawn back there, as surely as metal to a magnet.

But, finally, after the most severe punishments inflicted upon Egypt, including the death of the heir-apparent to the throne, along with all other firstborn of men and cattle, he reluctantly allows Israel to depart. But as he reflects on his loss and seethes with indignation over his "defeat", he and his army pursue the fugitives, with the intent of

returning them forcibly to slavery. But God is still in control and the great Egyptian host dies in the Red Sea.

A Type Of Satan

The Pharaoh in this narrative is a type of Satan, who rules as a god over his countless slaves here on earth. He intends to keep every soul who now exists or ever has existed under his control. His goal has always been to rule the earth as its supreme deity, forcing every man to do his will; to be crushed under his powerful hand.

But Jehovah God wills differently. He desires that all men be free. He wants us to leave our slavery to Satan and receive freedom. He wants us to follow His appointed Deliverer to the eternal Promised Land.

Who is this Deliverer? As indicated in Deuteronomy, Chapter 18, he is the Christ, the One whom we must follow for release from the slavery of sin.

Our Lord has always sought the deliverance of mankind. He has always demanded of Satan: "Let my people go, that they may worship me ..." And the devil, as always, fights with every weapon at his disposal to hold men under his power, even to the point of pursuing those who have already turned to their Deliverer.

Our great God-given task in this world is to assist Christ in bringing deliverance to enslaved humanity. We must go, as He and Moses went, to Satan's very headquarters, demanding the release of His slaves and then showing them the way to freedom. It doesn't matter how difficult and even dangerous the confrontation. Jesus promised to be with us throughout the journey, giving us power over Satan's threats. We, as Moses, are to go to enslaved men, proclaiming liberty throughout the land,

even if it involves personal life-endangering encounters with the Prince of this world.

And once released from slavery, God's newly freed men dare not look back at anything they may have left behind. Ahead is freedom; behind are only the hardness and hopelessness of slavery. It is our task not only to free men from Satan, but to lead them to liberty in Christ and eventually, to His Promised Land in Heaven.



OUR PASSOVER LAMB

Exodus 12:1-28

Jehovah's war with Pharaoh, the "all-powerful deity" of Egypt, was rapidly coming to its final battle. One by one, the gods of Egypt had fallen, as their representations (the "holy" River Nile, sacred cattle, the sun, etc.) were systematically afflicted with severe plagues. Now the Pharaoh himself would be struck through his firstborn son, (the next "deity" to assume the throne), as well as the firstborn of all of his subjects and of their domesticated animals.

"Israel is my firstborn," declared the Lord through Moses. "Because you have withheld my firstborn from me, I will take the firstborn of every family of Egypt, as well as of your cattle." But the king, typical of his arrogant manner, still refused to let God's people go.

Deliverance Planned

As the decisive moment drew nearer, Moses instructed Israel about the Lord's plan for its deliverance. Each family was to kill a pure, unspotted lamb, sprinkle its blood on the doorposts of its house and then eat a commemorative midnight feast of the meat of this sacrificial lamb. When God's angel came to the land, he would see the protective blood on the door frames of Israelite homes and would "pass over" them without slaying their firstborn.

Imagine the scene in each Hebrew home as this multitude stands ready to be freed from its long, dreary slavery, eating the passover lamb and meditating on what lay ahead. Each family has its marching orders. Walking

staffs are in hand and sandals on feet. Herds and flocks are milling about, undoubtedly sensing, as animals seem to do, that momentous things are about to happen.

Divine Justice Strikes

Then suddenly, divine justice strikes against the Pharaoh and all of his nation! He is now only too glad to let his disaster-producing mob of slaves leave. In fact, he even orders them out of the country, but too late to save his people an immense dose of grief. Israel receives partial payment for its years of drudgery, in the form of gold, silver, jewels and other valuables. Then it forms a mile-long line of march, as it heads eastward toward the Red Sea and yet another miraculous delivery at the hand of God.

Importance Of Blood

But, returning to the earlier narrative in Exodus 12, we can clearly see the importance of animal sacrifice and blood offering, representing life itself, in God's redemptive plan for Israel. The blood of the passover lamb gave protection to all who believed and obeyed, trusting in its efficacy. This divine protection even encompassed the "mixed multitude" of other nationalities, persons who had accepted the faith of Israel. Thus we see anticipated in the passover lamb the Lord's eventual acceptance of all nations, through the blood of Christ, His one final, perfect sacrifice.

The use of the lamb's blood, as well as the entire passover feast, is rich in symbolism. We know from studying the New Testament (Revelation 5:6-10) that this lamb was a figure of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, slain to protect sinful man from spiritual death. We also know that His blood, and only His, has the power to protect and preserve us in the coming Day of Wrath against those who

spurn it, as if it were merely the blood of some animal, spilled on the ground.

His Life Our Life

His blood, applied to the lives of men, gives them their only means of overcoming spiritual and eternal death. And His body, symbolically partaken of, is our nourishment, as we wander through the desert of this life, enroute to our eternal Promised Land. For this reason He is called, in John 1:29, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world”. And, He, Himself, in John 6:53, declares that man is nourished spiritually only by His flesh and blood.

The Passover feast was to be a solemn annual event, celebrated by Israel in commemoration of its deliverance from death. Some Jews have always kept, and still do observe, the Passover, looking always for the long-awaited Messiah. Little do they realize that He came two thousand years ago and was offered up as the final great Passover sacrifice; indeed, dying for man’s redemption during a Passover feast. No more lambs were to be offered, for Jesus was God’s perfect Lamb (Hebrews 9:12-15), never again to be sacrificed and never to be equalled or substituted by other “redeemers”.

His Requirements For Deliverance

It is our solemn duty as God’s messengers to announce His “passover” sacrifice to all men. They are not aware that eternal death stalks them. They are not conscious of the deadly danger they face, nor of the release from this danger, provided by a living, loving God. They must be told clearly, yes, urgently, to accept His requirements for deliverance and prepare themselves to begin their own pilgrimage to His eternal land.

We, His messengers, know that the Blood of the Lamb has the power to save all men. If others are not aware of its power, the problem is not with the Blood; it is with its intended users. We must be blood sprinklers, placing it liberally on the doorposts of each willing man's heart, that he might be saved from death. We must be Lamb providers, eating of Him ourselves and sharing Him continually. We must show by our own lives that we believe wholeheartedly in our God-ordered journey and its eternal destination. For this reason we strive to be only lightly encumbered with this temporary world's goods and obligations, for this is not our Promised Land; it is only a desert to cross, as we leave Satan's stronghold.

Is this truly our manner and the image we project? Is eternal death a real dire possibility? Is our Passover Lamb real to us, so real that our warning cry is urgent and our mutual feasting on Him the most pressing thing before us?



IS THE LORD IN THIS PLACE?

Exodus 16 and 17

Israel was on the march ... The mighty hand of God had reached down and destroyed the firstborn of all of the Egyptians, because of their refusal to free their Israelite slaves, who were considered by the Lord His “firstborn” and thus, His own children.

Now the great host of Israel was approaching the Red Sea. Looking back, a tendency which they exhibited frequently during their pilgrimage, they saw the dust raised by Pharaoh’s army, in hot pursuit of its lost “property”. This multitude of slaves represented an incalculable fortune and possibly even the real basis of the Egyptian economy.

Between Rock And Hard Place

Trapped between the pursuing cavalry and the sea, Israel was paralyzed with fright and began to lament bitterly its ever having left Egypt, another tendency that was to be repeated over and over again during its forty years’ wandering in the wilderness.

But, again, as always, the Lord was in charge, turning the sea back on itself; piling up, the waters as a protective wall on either side of the long train of human beings, with all of their flocks and herds. And, as the determined Egyptians urged their chariots into this gaping path through the sea, it closed over them. In Exodus 15 we read the triumphant psalm of Moses, as he led Israel in commemorating the Lord’s decisive victory over the forces of Israel’s enemy.

Peace More Difficult To Win

But often the peace is more difficult to win than the war. Israel's motley, undisciplined multitude moved southward through rocky desert land toward Mt. Sinai. It wasn't long until this throng forgot the powerful divine miracles performed in Egypt and at the Red Sea. It began to murmur, wishing to return to Egypt, where the diet had been simple but abundant. The people wanted to trade their future blessings, promised by the giver of all blessings, for a pot of onions and meat stew. Reminiscent of Esau's trade with Jacob, isn't it?

Bread From Heaven

But Jehovah, ever mindful of His people's needs, promised that He would send a rain of bread from heaven, a daily shower (except on the Sabbath) which would require only gathering and cooking. This tasty food was to be given bountifully to Israel, day in and day out, during its entire pilgrimage, until it would eat, forty years later, of the natural fruit encountered in the promised land.

Ever mindful of His people's needs ... Not only providing bread abundantly, with only a minimum of labor on their part, but also meat, in the form of doves, thousands and more thousands of them.

His care did not stop with physical food, however. When the Israelites arrived at Rephidim, one of their rest stops on the journey, they discovered to their dismay that no water existed at the oasis. How were they to survive without water in the middle of a desert? So again they complained loudly, questioning whether the Lord was really with them in that place or not. How soon they forgot His power and presence!

But He was still very much there, of course, and instructed Moses to strike a rocky outcrop. As he did so, pure, crystalline water burst out, enough to sustain the entire multitude.

Contention With The Lord

Because of what had transpired there, Moses called the place Meribah, signifying the contention that Israel had with the Lord. These people never could quite make up their minds about Jehovah. Was He really the supreme Sovereign over all things and all people? And if so, was He really interested in them, enough to be in their midst every moment? They had been reared under the influence of the Egyptians, whose gods were capricious and remote and for these reasons, disinterested in the struggles of mere human beings.

Still Filled With Doubts

But we, of this enlightened age, can look back and see how the Lord has ordered and blessed His creatures, or can we? The truth is that we today, as Israel of old, are still filled with doubts about God. Does He really exist? Is He really in charge of the universe? Does He really care for us, individually, as His children? Will He provide our daily physical needs, as well as guiding us spiritually? So we worry about our daily needs and problems, wondering whether God is really in this place or not.

Even those of us who have pulled up our roots and turned pilgrims in foreign lands are often guilty of this same spiritual lapse. We become preoccupied over purely physical and material needs, forgetting so easily that God still leads His people and provides them with every need, as we are reminded by Jesus in Matthew 6:33. No matter where we are in this world, even the most remote corner of it, God is in that place too, caring for His own.

Do We Believe?

Do we believe this? Yes, but only imperfectly. How often we confront situations in the world in which we doubt that God can really be present. Countries such as Communist China are left to their atheistic fate, because somehow we assume that God is not in such a place. After all, everyone knows that China is closed to missionaries ...

But our all-powerful Lord is there and, according to His own good schedule, the Water of life will gush forth again in that great nation. He is in Lebanon and Zambia, Melanesia, Zaire and French Guiana ... There is no place so remote and no situation so difficult that God is not there and perfectly able to provide bread and water, for both our physical and spiritual nourishment.

Let us then decide this issue, once and for all. Is the Lord in our midst, or not? If so, nothing is too hard for Him and no need too difficult to provide.



PILGRIMS IN A STRANGE LAND

Exodus 2:11-22; 18:1-4

One of the most interesting, but least mentioned men in the entire Bible is Jethro, or Reuel, Moses' father-in-law. We first encounter him in Exodus, chapter two, where he is called the Priest of Midian. Evidently a believer in the one true God, and acting as His appointed servant, Jethro joins the ranks of other such mysterious spiritual giants of Old Testament times—Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, and Job, for example. Their source, their place in God's plan and their overwhelming faith is something about which we may never fully know, but it is clear that they believed profoundly in God in the midst of an evil, pagan society.

Here is this man, Reuel (meaning, God is his friend), a man of faith, a hospitable priest dwelling in an inhospitable desert region, who opened his home to a Hebrew fugitive from Egypt, and even gave this stranger Zipporah, one of his seven daughters, to be his wife.

Those Silent Decades

So forty-year-old Moses, the would-be deliverer of Israel, turned shepherd, cared for his father-in-law's flocks for the next forty years. We do not know what all transpired during those silent decades, except that Zipporah bore him two sons. He had fled Egypt, the land of his birth, youth and early adulthood. He was decidedly unwelcome there and so was forced to remain in exile for forty years as a wandering pilgrim in the land of Midian.

Three Stages Of Development

Of course, what Moses didn't know during all these years of growing older was that his forced exile was a necessary part of his experience, preparing him to cope with leading Israel through this same desert in the third major phase of his life's pilgrimage. It is interesting to note that Moses' life was divided into these three equal stages: Forty years in Egypt, as a prince in Pharaoh's brilliant, worldly court; forty years in exile in Midian; and forty years as Israel's great leader and lawgiver. These might be compared to parallel stages in the life of every servant of God. We must come out of the world, in order to begin our Christian pilgrimage. This fleeing the world is a difficult process, to be sure, but absolutely essential to our salvation. When Moses fled Egypt, he left all behind—position, riches, future—to become an alien; a man without a country. As Hebrews 11:24-27 states it, Moses chose affliction with the people of God over the pleasures of opulent court life in Egypt.

We, too, must become aliens here on earth, pilgrims who are just passing through, as shown us by example in Hebrews 11:9 and 37. For the Christian, this life is a temporary stage, in which he is made ready for eternity. Here, he has no lasting country; he has no roots. This principle is especially difficult to practice, because of the constant pressure on us to put down roots and remain "in Egypt"; to conform to our materialistic age, to the point where we are surrounded by things. We find ourselves pressured into accumulating for ourselves more and more possessions, all of them only temporary at best.

Sense Of Being Excluded

Those of us who have been uprooted and transplanted in another nation come to realize clearly that we are, in fact, pilgrims, whose citizenship no longer attaches, in a

practical sense, to any country. We have become far removed geographically from the blessings and protection of our own native land and are limited in, and even excluded from, participation in our host country. We are subject to all of its laws, but enjoy few of its blessings and little of its protection. We feel excluded from its special holidays. We find it difficult, if not impossible, to ever identify completely with its culture, customs and language. Certainly we can appreciate Moses' feelings, as he named his firstborn Gersom—I was an alien in a strange land—and his second son, Eliezer—God was my help and deliverer.

At the same time, the longer we remain outside of our own nation, the more we become excluded from its attitudes, conversations and practices. Perhaps this was one reason why Moses was so reluctant to return to Egypt after forty years of being out of contact with its life style.

A Real Pilgrimage

So we become men without an earthly country. For this reason, the Biblical concept that this present life is a pilgrimage for God's people becomes very real to us.

The sad aspect to all of this is that many of God's wanderers have settled in here, confusing "way-station Earth" with their final destination, Heaven. I am reminded of the story of the military squad scouting rapidly through enemy territory. As they stopped for the night, erecting their pup tents, one private began to drive his tent stakes out of sight into the ground. The sergeant ran up, asking, "Soldier, what in the world are you doing?" "Why, sarge, I'm just driving my stakes in." "Well," the sergeant answered, "Don't drive them in so far. We'll be moving on in the morning."

We Are All Pilgrims

All of Christ's servants are pilgrims, passing this way but once. We must learn, in the face of every conceivable material attraction here in "Egypt," to flee them, to travel lightly, to be ready to move when and where the Lord chooses. High country back-packers have learned the hard way that even an extra pound of weight beyond the minimum requirements comes to weigh a ton after a while, dragging them down and eventually stopping them dead. A wise marathon runner may not even wear socks, because of their added weight. We are told in Hebrews 12:1-2 to lay aside every weight, every sin and every distraction, in order to run our spiritual race with all possible energy.

It doesn't really matter where we're led by our Lord in this temporary world. It is all a desert to be crossed, enroute home. Nor does it matter too much how many difficulties and privations we face enroute, because it won't last long. Tomorrow, we will be home forever.



ISRAEL AND THE FOREIGNER

Exodus 22; Leviticus 24; Deuteronomy 10 and 31

Israel's vast multitude stands before Sinai, quaking with fear, as Moses climbs the mount to receive a new Law directly from the hand of Jehovah, the awesome I AM. During forty days and nights he remains there, receiving detailed instructions about the fledgling nation's religious, civil and social code. During his prolonged stay in the cloud-shrouded heights, the ever-vascillating people decide to elect a new leader and provide for themselves a god they can see, a golden calf. Imagine the pagan orgy that follows, in plain sight of the Holy Mount. Punished severely for its first deviation into idolatry as God's chosen nation, the Israelites repent and are given another opportunity to mend their ways.

Having broken the tablets of stone in his wrath over this flagrant rebellion against the sovereign God, Moses returns to the mountain top, receiving God's Law a second time. When all of the divine instructions are complete, for every aspect of life, Moses returns to the sprawling camp to announce God's will for His people—its tabernacle, worship, sacrifices, and all of its spiritual, civil and social relations. Such daily details as personal hygiene, injury sustained from the domestic animal of a neighbor, sexual purity, perjury and the like are clearly outlined.

Kingdom Of Priests

Included also in this divine code is a series of injunctions about Israel's attitude toward those of other nations, especially those living with or near Israelite families. By its very nature, Israel is to be a ministering

nation. God's purpose is to prepare His people for a holy mission. "You shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), indicates God's high purpose for His people. As part of their divine purpose, they are to be a ministering people. As the individual Israelite ministers unto the moral and spiritual well-being of his neighbor, so the Lord intends that this holy nation minister to other nations the things of the Spirit. Building a kingdom of ministers (and in this, anticipating His later, even nobler Christian nation of ministers, or workers together with God), is His divine purpose.

Favor Contingent On Obedience

But, as always, His favor to Israel rests upon her willingness to keep His commandments: "If you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession from among all people" (Exodus 19:5). Divine blessing is not an unrestricted favor, with no responsibility on the part of the receivers, but one given as a reward for obedience and as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Israel's great error was that she came to regard herself as a special people in her own right, and not as a channel, through which God would bless all nations.

Hope To The Gentiles

God's purpose, then, in raising up Israel was not just to build a nation or preserve a single race, but rather, He had in view the far greater purpose of bringing hope to the Gentile races: "I will give you for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

Of course, this world view was forever announced through the Great Commission of Christ. (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:19:20; Luke 24:47).

Israel was saved to serve, just as is God's holy nation today. It was saved to save, just as is the church is today. His nation was placed at the crossroads of the ancient world, to be His witness. This noblest of all purposes was shown clearly in the prophets of the Old Testament and in the words of Peter and Paul:

“You are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the earth be blessed.” (Acts 3:25).

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed.” (Galatians 3:7-8).

Consideration To Foreigners

For these reasons we find throughout the Law of Moses that Israel is directed to give special consideration to foreigners, in its social contacts, religious observance and moral behavior. It is required to administer justice fairly to the stranger in its midst and to meet his physical necessities. For example:

“And a foreigner you shall not wrong, neither oppress him, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” (Ex. 22:21).

“Hear the causes between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the foreigner that is with him.” (Deut. 1:16).

“Love therefore the foreigner; for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” (Deut. 10:19).

“Assemble the people, the men and the women, and the little ones, and the foreigner that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn and fear Jehovah your God.” (Deut. 31:12).

“You shall have one manner of law, as well for the foreigner, as for the homeborn ...” (Lev. 24:22).

Even on that very special feast day, the Day of Atonement, the foreigner was to be included in the purification and blessings involved.

As God’s chosen people, Israel’s position of privilege involved a special responsibility, both toward God and toward the rest of God’s nations here on earth. This nation was the heir and trustee of His promise; the transmitter of His blessings to other peoples; His special band of servants.

But Israel took its position to mean intrinsic worth in God’s sight. So it perverted His purpose and soon came to despise all other nations, considering them to be no better than dogs, and withholding from them the divine message. Later on, we can see this attitude in Jonah and in the Pharisees of Jesus’ time, to their own ruin.

World-Encompassing Love

As always, God’s love is world-encompassing; His redemptive purpose all-inclusive. He is still at work to regenerate all nations. He is still persistent in His purpose. As His holy people today, we need a far greater faith, great enough to make us truly obedient to His every call to sacrificial service and spiritual rescue of other lands.

Today we are His nation; His kingdom of priests, with a ministry of peace, brotherly love and salvation to the turbulent, warring peoples of our world. Will His redemptive plan be fulfilled through us? Or will we, through selfish interests and narrowed vision, dash His cherished plan to the ground, as did His earlier holy nation, Israel, in the times before and during the life of Christ?



GRASSHOPPER VISION

Numbers 13 and 14

Israel had heard the awesome voice of God and had seen His brilliant light on the mountaintop. Jehovah Himself had dictated to Moses a code of laws for every exigency. Thus, an unruly, disorganized multitude was to be transformed into a body politic; a theocracy, with the almighty I AM as its only sovereign. His rule was to extend to all levels of Israelite society, moral, social, civil and spiritual. He was to be their God and they were to be His special people, prepared, during the many centuries to come, for the advent of the long-promised Messiah.

After weeks of waiting on the Lord before Sinai, growing each day more nervous and fearful, the people returned to their old idolatrous ways, engaging in orgiastic worship of their newly created golden calf.

Lesson Unlearned

Punished severely for their sinful rebellion, this people still had not learned their lesson. Isn't it amazing that the children of Israel witnessed so many direct evidences of God's existence, power and leadership, and yet denied Him so readily? No, perhaps it isn't so amazing, after all. Do not men of today's world act in the same foolish way?

Nor did Israel improve any with experience. Constantly murmuring, criticizing and complaining, these ungrateful souls demonstrated on countless occasions a total lack of faith.

Upon completion of the Law, Moses appointed highly skilled craftsmen to put in effect the orders he had received directly from the Lord. Bezaliel and other artesans, touched by God's Spirit, prepared all of the materials necessary for the tabernacle, priesthood and other aspects of the divinely ordained worship. Great quantities of gold, silver, bronze, precious stones, fine linens, animal skins and other materials were given voluntarily by those "whose heart moved them to bring an offering for all of the work the Lord had commanded." (Exodus 35:29).

An Encouraging Example

To me, this is one of the most encouraging passages in the Bible. Those who so recently had been faint of heart and rebellious of spirit were now bringing great bundles of prized personal possessions for God's tabernacle. In Exodus 36:5-6 we find an even more extraordinary statement: The people had brought much more than was needed. Moses was actually forced to order them to cease bringing offerings. How many times does this ever occur? Rarely, indeed! In this marvelous show of generosity all of the Lord's program was cared for abundantly, without cutting any corners, and there were still resources left in the treasury, as well as in the homes of the Israelites, whose hearts were still open and whose goods were still available, if needed.

Work Bountifully Sustained

One of the most frustrating aspects of the mission endeavor is the frequent lack of sufficient funds to get the task done. Most overseas workers must skimp and make do, using worn out equipment (if any at all), limiting their missionary journeys, short-changing the education of their children, living with inadequate facilities and even going without proper medical and dental attention. So the work

goes begging and so do the workers. But this is not the situation we find in Exodus 35 and 36, nor in Acts 2 and 4, nor in II Corinthians 8. Just the opposite, in fact! The Lord's work was bountifully sustained, without pressure from the preacher or missionary. Oh, that such a season of financial refreshing might come again for God's artisans!

After the tabernacle and all of its richly fashioned equipment were ready, every piece was blessed, sacrifices were made, the people were sanctified to their glorious but demanding mission ahead and then led on their way to the Promised Land, just a few weeks' journey away.

Meat And To Spare

But again, the people complained ... They had all they could eat of the manna, given freely six days a week. But this gift didn't satisfy them. They wanted meat also, to the point of revolting and returning to Egypt. The Lord gave them meat, free for the taking and heaped up in every tent, until they couldn't stand the sight of it. Even Moses doubted that the eternal Hand could provide such an abundance of meat, but God reminded him that His hand was neither short nor weak. And then He added, for good measure, a promise that we today need to learn: "Now, Moses, you will see whether I fulfill my word or not." (Numbers 11:21:23). And fulfill it He did, with every kind of sustenance and protection needed by His people.

Now as they finally approached Canaan, Moses appointed twelve men, a prince from each tribe, to spy out the land. These secret agents were to observe the people and their cities, the geography and productivity of the country and other aspects of life there.

Forty days later, the twelve spies returned, bearing a huge cluster of grapes, as well as pomegranates and figs. We read their mixed report in Numbers 13: “Yes, sir, it is a good land, yielding milk and honey.” (How else could it have been, since God Himself had chosen it long before?) “But the people! They are powerful, dwelling in fortified cities. Why, we can’t take that land. They are more powerful than we. There are great giants in the land. In comparison, we are like grasshoppers. We don’t stand a chance in a million ...

God Will Lead Us

Oh, the cry that went up from their listeners! The people were so disappointed and angry that they turned again on Moses and Aaron, wanting to go back to the known hell of Egypt, rather than facing the swords of the giants of Canaan. Only Joshua and Caleb, of the twelve, gave positive reports: “If God is pleased with us, He will lead us into the Land and will give it to us ... But, fellow Israelites, don’t be guilty of rebellion. Don’t fear the people of this land, because we can devour them as bread. God is with us. Don’t be afraid. We may really appear to be grasshoppers in their sight, but in God’s eyes, we can become giants.”

Israel, ever consistent, followed its faithless, rebellious pattern, rejecting God, Moses and the report of Joshua and Caleb. Only the intercession of Moses saved the nation from immediate destruction at the Lord’s hand. As it was, every person of that adult generation, except the two faithful spies, died in the desert during another forty years of wandering, with only their children inheriting the Promised Land.

Why So Fainthearted?

This is the dire result of “grasshopper vision”. Ten spies saw giants and walled cities. Only two saw God’s hand cancelling out the enemies’ strength and giving victory to His people. Had we been there that day, where would we have stood—with Joshua and Caleb, or with the ten visionless spies? God has always promised us the victory, and yet how often we look at His noble task with grasshopper vision. Why are we so faint of heart? Let us arise and take the whole earth, for we are well able. If He is with us, we can outgrow the grasshopper stage and become spiritual giants ourselves, winning victories on every front for Him.



THE LORD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU

Deuteronomy 20:1-8

Forty years of wheel-spinning in the wilderness ... Forty years of heat and sand ... Forty years of the same old camping places, of the same barren mountains and rocky trails ... Forty years of pilgrimage, as one by one every soul over twenty, except Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies, dies and is buried in some forgotten plot in the eternal sands ... Forty years for a journey of a few weeks, and all because of faithlessness and rebellion!

But finally, the Generation of the Condemned passes from the scene and a new generation, hopefully of desert-hardened, more spiritually-minded children of these former slaves, is again approaching the Promised Land. Moses, their venerable leader, now 120 years of age and still of clear eye and steady hand, calls the entire company together for a final repetition of God's Law. We can almost see him, a striking, legendary figure, with flowing white hair and beard. The timid, halting voice of forty years ago is gone. In its place rings out the voice of authority.

A Challenge Issued

After repeating the Law to this new generation, He then challenges it with the history of God's dealings with His people, with the blessings that can accrue for trusting in Him and with the curses that will follow for disobedience.

But, in between these two sections of His final discourse, Moses gives Israel special instructions about conquering the land. He says, first that when God's

people confront their enemies, seeing horses, chariots and armies outnumbering them, they are not to fear. Why? Because their same commander-in-chief, Jehovah God, who had led their fathers out of Egypt with a powerful hand, will be fighting at their side.

Regardless, then, of the apparent odds against them, the Children of Israel will be in the majority, if they only follow their eternal Commander-in-Chief. Even one Israelite, battling side by side with God, will be able to rout thousands.

An Urgent Mandate

Because of the urgency and sacredness of their heavenly mandate, they are to be thorough. Every square mile of the land is to be conquered. Every city belonging to the morally rotten peoples listed by God for punishment is to be wiped out, with every living creature in it destroyed. No more will there exist in Canaan the vile idolatry and moral depravity that had made its peoples ripe for destruction.

But it is interesting to note that, despite the urgency of this conquest, Moses concedes certain exemptions from military service. The engaged man and newlywed, who have not yet settled into married life, the man who has built a house and had not yet blessed it, or planted a vineyard, and has not yet received its first fruits, are to be released. And especially, the fearful or timid are to be sent back home. This crusade is too decisive to allow a fearful soldier to discourage his comrades-in-arms.

Arise And Take The World

The picture hasn't really changed at all, after these thousands of years. The Lord still calls His spiritual army to arise and take the world, destroying its idolatry and its

all-pervading immorality, replacing these cancerous growths with His living kingdom. He calls us to go out and conquer, to win nations, peoples and tribes to Him. He admonishes us to be courageous in this task, nothing doubting, for He will be with us during every bloody moment of this battle for men's souls. Do we honestly believe this? Are we really convinced that our Captain will be with us, as He promised in Matthew 28:20? Observe how often He comforted His soldiers, in New Testament times, with the promise of His continuing presence in their own spiritual warfare. For example, in Acts 18:9-10, He strengthened Paul with these words: "Don't be afraid, Paul. Speak out, because I am with you and no one will harm you. I have many potential children in this city."

Front-Line Combatants

The Lord's farflung battlefields are often alluded to in Scripture, with His followers compared to front-line combatants. Paul, especially, likens us to soldiers, in such passages as I Timothy 1:18; II Timothy 2:1-10 and Ephesians 6:10-18. Endure hardness, he says, like a good soldier ... wear the Lord's armor ... fight the good fight of faith ...

But not every Christian can serve on the front lines, for special qualifications and equipment are required. The heat of the battle is no place for the fearful, faithless or untried, but only for those who take His battle seriously and proceed to equip themselves properly for it.

Is The Lord At Our Side?

Do you believe that the Lord is fighting for you? Do you believe He will be at your side on some remote front line, wherever He may call you to do battle for Him? Do you believe that, through Him, we really are "more than conquerors?" (Romans 8:37). Do you accept the nature of

our calling, to go out conquering, under our eternal, victorious Commander? (Revelation 6:2).

Jesus' army is invincible, if we really believe this and do battle faithfully on the world's battle fronts. Let us then lay aside every weight of doubt and fear, for He has promised, "I will fight the battle for you and with you."



BE STRONG AND RESOLUTE

Joshua, Chapter 1

Moses, the servant of the Lord, had led Israel for forty turbulent years, watching all of his generation, except faithful Joshua and Caleb, die in the wilderness. Then, as Israel approached the Promised Land, Moses repeated to the new generation the noble Law of God, as well as reminding them of His mighty power in delivering their fathers from slavery and bringing them to the point of entering into their long-awaited inheritance.

A Necessary Reminder

This reminder was absolutely necessary, for many of these children, now adults, had not seen personally the miracles connected with their deliverance from Egypt. The reason for their faith in God required reiteration, as it does for each generation. How often a faithful father will serve the Lord well, but fail to see to the preparation of his sons and daughters for faithful service. Theoretically, his children should build on his experience in the Faith, to become even more useful than he was ever able to be in the Master's cause. But does this really happen? Faith, as such, is not automatically transferred from parents to children. It must be taught, demonstrated through example and then experienced in the child's life. Surely, for this reason the Lord required the Israelites to repeat His commandments to their children, indoors, outdoors, upon lying down and upon arising. (Deut. 6:8).

At the end of his extensive final charges to Israel, God's great missionary leader and liberator then climbed Mount Nebo to view the blessed land, from north to south

and from the sea to the desert. There he died and was buried by the Lord's hand.

A Successor Appointed

But before he journeyed to that other eternal Promised Land, he publicly consecrated, as his successor, his longtime lieutenant, Joshua, who had received his commission directly from the Lord.

Now Joshua finds himself the commander of God's army, facing the conquest of a strongly fortified hill country. Joshua knows that he has little experience in governing so great a body of people, or even in the art of war, so essential once they cross the River Jordan. Israel has relatively few arms and is in many ways an undisciplined lot, easily discouraged and frequently rebellious.

A Staggering Promise

But at the very outset, the Lord Himself counsels Joshua, promising that wherever he sets his foot, that land will be his, as He had promised Moses. Wherever he sets his foot ... what a staggering promise! He has to but march through the length and breadth of Canaan, implicitly obeying the Lord's instructions enroute, and he can claim every footprint of it as the rightful inheritance of God's people. This territory had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses; the promise will not fail now.

Augmenting this commission, the Lord promises that no one, no matter how strong or how fortified his city, will be able to stand against Joshua and Israel. God had been with Moses; He will also be with Joshua, solemnly promising, "I will not fail you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:5). Joshua can be a great success, prospering

abundantly. With such divine blessings, how can he fail? Certainly he can, because there are conditions attached to the promise. These include: Be strong, be resolute, observe diligently God's Law, neither turning from it to the right (to the legalistic side) nor to the left (to the liberal side). Furthermore, He warns Joshua: "Do not be fearful or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua can be of good cheer, for scrupulous fulfillment of these conditions will guarantee success!

God's People Mobilized

Joshua immediately puts God's plan into effect, mobilizing the people for action. They are at the banks of the Jordan for this one great reason. They must go forward, fearlessly conquering the land in the name of their God. Joshua's warriors show the same implicit faith at this crucial point that Joshua demonstrates. They answer him, "Whatever you tell us, we will do; wherever you send us, we will go." (verse 16).

And so a united, zealous Israel enters the land, and with but one serious setback (caused by one man's violation of God's explicit command), the Israelite army takes Canaan. Joshua neither fears nor fails in his part of the bargain. He dies at a hundred and ten years of age, honored by the Lord and by His children. He leaves a faithful people, firmly established in their new home.

Example Of Courage And Faith

Surely, the courage and faith of Joshua are an example for all of us. But more than this, the lessons God taught Joshua are still applicable today. We, as Joshua and Israel, face a lifelong war, in a do-or-die effort to wrest Satan's territory away from him and to make it a fit habitation for God's people. This battle demands our best, because it is always fought against staggering odds. We

really are relatively few and the enemy is strongly entrenched.

Our Lord expects us to demonstrate courage and faith, nothing fearing. He expects us to march strongly and unhesitantly ahead, regardless of the obstacles—political and social resistance, persecution, cultural differences, evil of every description.

His Unwavering Presence

And, as in the case of Joshua, He promises us His unwavering presence. Wherever we go at His side, we are really in the majority. Wherever we set our feet, at His instigation, He will eventually give that land to us. The outcome is the Lord's. We have no reason to shake in our boots, even if the battlefield is, say, in such a fearsome land as communist China.

As Israel's warriors were ready, so we too must be ready at every moment to say to our great Commander, Jesus. "Whatever you tell us, we will do. Wherever you send us, we will go!" We are truly "more than conquerors, through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:37). Overwhelming victory was Israel's. It can be ours, too, if we are truly strong and resolute in the most demanding of all causes—the conquest of Satan's world for Christ.



CHOOSE HERE AND NOW WHOM YOU WILL SERVE

Joshua 24:14-28

God's man, Joshua, had lived a long and fruitful life in the service of his Lord. He had grown up in slavery, but because of his obvious abilities, dedication and divine blessings, he became Moses' lieutenant throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. He was on the Holy Mount, faithfully awaiting Moses' return from receiving the Law. He was one of the twelve specially chosen representatives to spy out the Promised Land. And only he and Caleb, another Israelite of great faith, brought back a positive report on Israel's capacity to capture the Promised Land.

As a result, these two were the only men of their generation permitted to actually set foot in Canaan. And of the two, Joshua was divinely elevated, just before Moses' death, to the difficult, demanding position of leader of God's people.

Spiritual Strength And Leadership

He showed immediately those traits of spiritual strength and leadership that had brought him to this position, organizing Israel's military and spiritual forces for the task before them.

With faith and astuteness he led Israel's army from victory to victory, always obeying the Lord's instructions. In the book of Joshua only one defeat and one partial defeat are noted during his long military career, a truly remarkable feat, and both of these were caused by others'

sins and deceptions, not by any failure on the part of Joshua's faith.

Every Promise Fulfilled

But now, at the advanced age of one hundred and ten, Joshua comes to the end of his eventful life. He calls together all of the elders, heads of families and officers of Israel for a farewell exhortation. In his moving address, he reminds them of all that God has done for Israel: He has fought for her as He promised, driving out the evil occupants of the land. No one has been able to stand against His people. Every word of God's promises has come true. Israel is in possession of a land for which she has not laboured, a blessed land, flowing with milk and honey.

He then exhorts Israel to avoid being contaminated by the depraved gods and customs of the nations about them, to refrain from marrying into those nations and to obey all of the Lord's commands. The people of God must honor His covenant with them, worshipping and serving Him with singleness of heart. There can be no room in the new land for divided opinions or loyalties. God must have their absolute faithfulness.

Firm Commitment Needed

To climax his speech, Joshua forces the people to make a firm, permanent decision about the Lord. Their ancestors had vacillated at times between the one true God and false gods. Some of them had bowed before the idols and believed in the fetishes and household images and charms of their ancestral home in Mesopotamia and Syria; others had worshipped the gods of Egypt and their "own" golden calf at Sinai. Now they are called upon to decide, once and for all, where their loyalties really lie. They have seen astounding proofs that Jehovah is really

the one true God. But will they accept these proofs in their hearts, prone as they are to idolatry? This is a decisive moment for Israel. How will they respond?

Faith On The Line

Joshua lays his own faith on the line, as he has done so often before. He goes on eternal record for the Lord, saying, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" It doesn't matter, as far as his choice is concerned, whether any other family of Israel remains with the Lord or not: he and his household will. His stand is reminiscent of an earlier position taken by Moses at the degenerate scene of the golden calf: "Who is on the Lord's side?" And of Elijah, centuries afterward: "How long will you sit on the fence? If the Lord is God, then follow Him ..." These all are clearcut challenges, with a choice between two extreme options. There can be no fence straddling in our relationship with God.

The answer of Israel's leaders is immediate and decisive: "We too will worship the Lord; He is our God." Laudable, indeed, but have they thought out the implications of such a decision?

Joshua reminds them that God is holy, jealous and has a long memory regarding broken covenants, idolatry and other sins. They will have to clean house, getting rid of every vestige of idolatry. They will have to live up to their solemn promise of absolute loyalty to God.

Now, to seal the bargain, Joshua makes yet another covenant with the people, erecting a monument, to act as a witness to the pledge taken on this memorable day.

Joshua's great influence over Israel is seen at the end of Chapter 24, where we read that Israel served the Lord during all of his lifetime and that of all of the elders who had participated in this glorious moment of decision.

Same Obstacles Today

As we battle today for the Lord, attempting to extend the borders of His kingdom in a sinful, idolatrous world, we face many of the obstacles faced by Joshua and Israel. Powerful forces are arrayed against us. Satanic influences are constantly undermining the morality of those whom we are attempting to win to Christ and to hold for Him. Entire cultures, even so-called enlightened ones, are saturated with idolatry, in every conceivable form.

Confronted with this kind of pressure-cooker situation, we must take a clear, consistent stand for the Lord, come what may. And above all, we must present a clear, consistent challenge to others, urging them to take their stand with us. As God's messengers, we are placed here in this corrupt world to bring nations to decision. All of the social and material advantages we might offer as inducements are not sufficient to precipitate this kind of lifelong commitment to Christ, especially in the face of the economic and family pressures brought to bear on our contacts, who live in the midst of the pagan societies of today.

Inevitable Choice

"Choose here and now" is the inevitable decision, faced by all men and cultures, cost what this decision may. We were brought into being as God's spokesmen to bring men to this traumatic decision, regardless of the society in which we are proclaiming the Word.

We must present our case clearly and forcefully. The timid, indecisive approach, so loving that it has lost its razor edge, will never cut men's hearts. Sooner or later, they must see the choice—for God or against Him, forever. Such preaching is dangerous for its proclaimer and for its hearers. But sooner or later it has to come to that point. Not necessarily at the first encounter, but at some climactic moment, we are compelled by our Lord to issue the eternal challenge to every man, "Choose here and now whom you will serve!"



NOT BY FORCE OF ARMS

Judges 3:7; Judges 6-8

Israel had entered the land of Canaan like an avenging angel, destroying city after city. Nothing could stop her; no alliance of kings or nations could hold her back. Under the guidance of the Lord, Israel's awesome conquest of the land must have been a dreadful experience for the peoples under judgement. Their trauma is well indicated in a famous archeological find from Canaan, the Amarna Letter, addressed to an Egyptian ruler:

"The Habiri (Hebrews?) are capturing our fortresses; they are taking our cities; they are destroying our rulers. They are plundering all of the country of the king. May the king send soldiers quickly. If no troops come this year, the whole land is lost..."

By the death of Joshua, the bulk of the Promised Land had been captured. However, God left in the area certain nations, such as the Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians and Hivites, to act as irritants, to see if Israel would faithfully continue its war of liberation and obey the commandments of God, in the face of the idolatrous temptations placed before her by these pagan peoples.

The Lord Forsaken

But, sadly, we find Israel soon forsaking her Lord and Deliverer, to intermarry with the children of these perverted nations, and as a result, to worship their gods. As stated in Judges 3:7 and in frequent other passages, Israel forgot her one true Lord, turning to the most vile of heathen gods.

Time and again in Judges the story is repeated. Israel becomes perverted and idolatrous. Losing for this reason her divine protection, she is conquered by these morally corrosive neighboring nations. Finally, in her utter distress, she cries to the Lord, who redeems His people, under the leadership of divinely appointed judges. Despite rebellion and evil on their part, even despite their having forgotten Him, God does not forget his people, a lesson of hope for all of us today, as we struggle with our own sin and spiritual rebellion.

Same Act Again

In Chapter 6, we find the same act being played out again. The Children of Israel again forget their Lord and because of this are delivered into the hands of the Midianites, Amalekites and Arabians. What an irony! Their own distant cousins, also descendents of Abraham, have wrought such havoc among them that they are forced to seek refuge in caves and pits, hiding even their crops from the marauders.

Finally, the Israelites cry for help and God sends His prophet to remind them:

“I brought you out of slavery. I delivered you from the Egyptians and from all your oppressors. I drove them out before you and gave you their lands. I told you not to stand in awe of the gods of the Ammonites, but you did not listen to me.”

God Still Willing To Forgive

In spite of all of their contrary behavior, God is still willing to receive them back, if they will but repent. So He chooses yet another man to lead them against their enemies —Gideon, a farmer’s son, who considers himself the most insignificant member of the weakest clan of the

tribe of Manasseh, a far cry in attitude from many would-be saviors in today's ego-trip world.

Gideon's response to the holy call is much the same as that of Moses before the burning bush. Alone, he knows he is nothing; unfit for the demanding task set before Him. But the Lord reassures him, saying: "I will be with you ..."

But Gideon, who could well have lived in our times, demands proof of God's guidance against the bloodthirsty enemy hordes. The divine Word is not quite sufficient for him. He requires not only proof, but proof doubled, in the form of a fleece of wool, first wet with dew, when the ground around it is dry, and then dry, on ground soaked with dew. And even these miracles do not totally suffice, because on the very eve of battle his faith has to be propped up again by a furtive visit to the enemy camp, to hear the fears expressed by its soldiers.

Yes, Gideon is quite modern. He insists on walking by sight, and not by faith in the simple, direct Word of the Lord.

But, finally, he becomes convinced that God really will lead him and his men to victory. But it is to be Jehovah's victory, not Gideon's. To make this fact abundantly clear for all time, the Lord tells Gideon that there are entirely too many soldiers in his army. Israel might claim the victory for herself, through her own might, rather than through divine intervention. So Gideon's 32,000 recruits are reduced, first to 10,000, with all of the fearful and faithless sent packing. But for the Lord's purpose, ten thousand are still far too many. He will need only a few to set to flight the millions. So the number is diminished to a pitiable handful of three hundred!

In this period, night battles are almost unheard of. But utilizing the darkness, three hundred torches and a like number of horn trumpets, Gideon and his “army” encircle the enemy camp and cause it to panic, because in its confusion, it believes that each torch and trumpet represent a large contingent of enemy soldiers. So Midian flees and is cut down by pursuing Israelites. God has said that one of His men would be able to destroy a thousand of Israel’s enemies and during this amazing night His promise is again fulfilled.

Victory With Weak Tools

Our eternal Father never fails to keep His promises. If failures come, and they do, they are always men’s. We forget Him, times without number. We turn from Him to other interests. And yet, He calls us back to His work; to His battles. We assume that large numbers and ample resources are necessary to the success of “our” spiritual projects. But this is not necessarily so! If the program to be accomplished really is of God, He can see it through with few resources and in fact, with tools that appear weak and inadequate. In 1 Corinthians 1:27, we see that God really does choose foolish and weak things, according to the world’s judgment, to confound the wise and powerful. Or, as we are reminded in Zechariah 4:6, it is neither by force of arms nor by brute strength, but by the Lord’s spirit, that His victories are won.

God And The Minority

How else could His task ever be accomplished and He receive the glory for it? He has never had the majority on His side. In the fulfillment of His mission here on earth, twelve simple, largely unlearned men were sent out to conquer the world. These same mathematics have held true ever since. “Who will go for us?”. He asks. And a relative handful answers, “Here am I; send me.”

But with a handful, He routed Midian. And with a handful of faithful men today, He can and does put to flight the hordes of spiritual wickedness today. We can never take credit for the victory, for in and of ourselves, we are nothing. But He takes this nothing and makes it Something for the accomplishment of His holy purposes. Echoing Hebrews 11, He brings spiritual strength out of weakness, if we are really willing to trust in Him for the victory.



NO KING IN ISRAEL

Judges 21:25

God's people had conquered the bulk of the land of Canaan and had settled in cities which they had not built and eaten the fruit from trees and vines that they had not planted. Of all peoples on the face of the earth, these were the most blessed. They were led and protected by the all-powerful hand of Jehovah. They were given a sure inheritance at the crossroads of the ancient world. Nothing could keep them from success and happiness. Or could it? ...

The generation that entered the Promised Land, and the one following it, remained true to their Eternal God, partially due to the noble influence of Moses, Joshua and Caleb. But then, a generation later, they had digressed dismally, returning to the idolatry practiced by their ancestors and even adding a few "refinements" to it. Somehow, one generation lapsed, failing to instill in the next one the same ardent faith to which it held. All it takes, after all, is just one generation to lose all we have gained spiritually through many generations.

In Egypt their forebears had lived for centuries under skies that seldom, if ever, brought climatic surprises. Except for occasional droughts, year after year the Nile would rise on schedule, overflow its banks and bring new, rich alluvial soil to the land. Irrigation, controlled by human ingenuity, maintained their abundant crops. There had been a god for every aspect of nature—the river, the sun, the earth, the crops, life and death. All was in order, most

of the time, and the gods were normally sublime and predictable.

A New, Unpredictable Land

But now they found themselves in a new physical and cultural environment, where man could not control the elements, the wild beasts, the unpredictable nature of life in that region. Whether rains came at appropriate times during the year, to nourish their hillside crops, no longer depended on man, but on God, or, as their Canaanite neighbors assumed, on the gods. After all, these other nations had been around for a long time and knew the country. Their gods were the gods of the land; the ones supposedly to be placated. So Israel came to accept the abominable idols of their neighbors, a tendency sternly warned against by God. They began to offer their firstborn to the consuming fires of Moloch, their chastity to Baal, Ashtoreth, Dagon and other Canaanite deities.

Descent To An Animal Level

So God's chosen became little more than animals, having forgotten His great miracles, that had made possible their departure from Egypt, their sustenance in the wilderness and their conquering of this new land. They polluted their new home, erecting images, shrines and "sacred" groves or posts on every hilltop.

Time and again during this dismal period, Israel went astray and was brought back to its senses only by the most distressing calamities. Time and again, it was reduced to abject slavery. Time and again God's chosen did what was wrong in His eyes, and on each such occasion, He delivered them to outside oppression. Eventually, they would cry to Him for salvation, and in His abundant mercy, He would raise up from among them a deliverer.

Self-Worship

Finally, the situation became so abjectly evil that the entire nation was actually reduced to worshipping self. In chapter 21, verse 25, we read that “every man did what was right in his own eyes”. Every man the determiner of right and wrong. Every man the final authority! Every man his own god and judge!

How did such a situation ever come about in the first place? The answer is in that same passage, if we are able to see it: “There was no king in Israel.” Neither God nor man was accepted as the ruling force. Not even the Lord of Heaven was respected as the supreme authority over man’s spiritual and moral affairs. Thus the only “god” left to worship was man, with all of his evil tendencies and self-importance.

Our Fatal Illness

No king in Israel! This is the world’s fatal illness today, just as it was thousands of years ago, in the days of the Judges. Nation after nation and people after people worship self-made gods, leaving in the dust of “superstition” the one true God. For them there is no final authority. For them, there is no absolute concept of right and wrong—everything is relative, or at least is arbitrated from man’s viewpoint, not God’s. Every nation, and its citizens, do that which appears right in their own eyes, or in contemporary terminology, they do “their own thing”, ignoring the long-term consequences for themselves and for others.

When Israel finally rejected God's man, Samuel, she chose herself a king, to be like the other nations. And the result was calamity! The Lord told Samuel, in 1 Samuel 8:7-8:

"They have not rejected you, it is I whom they have rejected, I whom they will not have to be their king."

The One True King

God would have every nation and every man be subject to Him as their one holy King. He would be their Strength and their Redeemer. He would be the final Arbiter in all of their decisions. This is the message of the Prophets, of Christ Himself and of His Apostles. Paul rings out this same message in Acts 17, as he proclaims the sovereignty of God to the pagan philosophers of Athens:

"The God who created the world and everything in it, and who is Lord of heaven and earth ... created every race ... He fixed the epochs of their history and the limits of their territory."

It is this eternal king who raises and puts down nations, who crowns and uncrowns kings, who chooses presidents and other human authorities. To Pilate, the Roman governor, Jesus answered, "You would have no authority at all over me, if it had not been granted you from above ..."

Absolute Sovereignty Of God

We, like Christ and Paul, are to preach to all men, including governors, presidents, kings and dictators, the sovereignty of God over their affairs. All men must bow to authority—the authority of God the creator and of His Son, Jesus. We cannot sit idly by, accepting the status quo of “no king in Israel,” with every man (and land) doing that which appears right in his own eyes. Speak we must, by every means at our disposal, to tear down these shrines of selfish interest and perverted worship, building in the heart of every man a shrine dedicated to the Lord of lords and King of kings.



YOUR GOD MY GOD

Ruth 1:15-18

Oh, how God's people suffered in the days of the Judges! They never seemed to learn the essential lesson of strict obedience to God, and so ignored entirely His frequent warnings about what would happen if they abandoned Him for other gods. Time and again He was forced to bring them to their senses by subjugating them to foreign powers, by withholding rains at critical times and bringing other calamities upon them. And on each such occasion, the Israelites would fearfully come to their senses and the Lord would provide deliverance for them.

During one of these periods of divine chastisement, when famine stalked the Land of Canaan, a hungry family of the village of Bethlehem panicked and fled to the neighboring and very pagan land of Moab. There Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons hoped to find relief from their suffering.

Even More Suffering

But instead of relief, they suffered even more cruelly. First, Elimelech died, leaving his widow and orphaned sons stranded in a foreign land. Despite the Mosaic injunction against mixed marriages, the sons married Moabite girls, of idolatrous background and a different cultural heritage.

After ten years there, both sons, Mahlon and Chilion, also perished, leaving their Moabite wives, Orpah and Ruth, also widowed. This was all that Naomi could take. Everything had gone wrong. Now, nothing remained for

her in this strange land. Since Israel was once again being blessed, she would return to her home clan and to her own God, where she belonged.

But soon after starting the long journey, she turned to her beloved daughters-in-law and urged them to return home. Nothing was to be gained for them by continuing with her. She could provide them with no more sons; only continued misery.

Ruth's Sacred Vow

Orpah wept and turned back to her own world, passing forever from the history of God's people. But Ruth persisted in remaining at Naomi's side, with an emphatic promise that will remain to her credit through all time and eternity:

“Do not urge me to go back and desert you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. I swear a solemn oath before the Lord your God: nothing but death shall divide us.”

What a magnificent vow! Surely having been influenced by her in-laws' faith in God and demonstrating the highest kind of filial love and loyalty, regardless of personal cost, Ruth was determined to face a very uncertain future in a foreign and perhaps hostile country. She would accept the land, the people, the strange customs, the care of her aged mother-in-law and even the Lord of Israel. Furthermore, her commitment was longterm; until death parted the two of them.

Sacrifice Rewarded

And, after various trials in her adopted country, as well as hard physical labor in the grain fields of Bethlehem to support her and her mother-in-law, Ruth's sacrifice was rewarded a thousand times over. She married the wealthy Prince Boaz and gave birth to Obed, the grandfather of David. Through this act, Ruth became a direct ancestress of the world's greatest blessing, Jesus the Messiah.

There are many lessons to be learned from this short but moving interlude of Old Testament history. Among these are the following, taken from verses 16 and 17.

Go Where Led

First, *where you go I will go*. Every Christian should be willing to go where His Lord leads him, regardless of the personal cost or the strangeness and difficulty of the place. Wives and families should be ready to go where their family head goes, to serve his Lord. How often the wife and children short-circuit the father's desire to follow the Lord's leading to another land and people. Or, if they reluctantly agree to the program, they soon begin to regret their decision and apply subtle and not-so-subtle pressure on him to return home. This kind of family disloyalty is more than most men on the mission field can withstand for long, so they begin to seek a graceful way out of their commitment to God. We cannot imagine Ruth having regretted her decision, as hard as life was at first in Bethlehem, nor can we picture her plotting to break her vow, made in the Lord's presence.

Commitment To Unity

Second, *your people, my people, and your God my God*. I see this as a commitment to religious unity in the family, to the eternal God and to cultural adaptation. Ruth

would adapt, no matter how difficult the task. She would believe in the true God and accept His people, Israel, leaving behind forever her own deity and people. When we leave our homeland to serve Him who left Home to serve His Father in this world of strangers, we pledge ourselves to adapt to a new culture and language, which certainly is no easy task. The people of that land must become, in a real sense, our people and their ways must become, as much as possible, our ways. They, too, must learn to accept us and our strange ways and to accept the God we preach, who at first may seem foreign to them.

Long Term Commitment

Finally, *where you die, I will die*. This significant little phrase indicates long term commitment, in Ruth's case to everything that was new and foreign to her. I used to think that five years was a long period to devote to missionary service. Now, after more than a decade on the field, I realize that the urgency and magnitude of the task actually calls for a Ruth-type commitment, in all possibility until death. It doesn't really matter, after all, where we are buried. Heaven is just as near from our adopted land as from our homeland, and perhaps even nearer. After all, absolute loyalty to God is much more important than considerations of language, culture and other man-created barriers.



ASKED OF GOD

I Samuel, Chapters 1 and 2

The epoch of the Judges was coming to an end. It was a time of unrest, when there was as yet no king in Israel and every man did according to what was right in his own eyes.

It was during this critical period in Israel's development that a young wife named Hannah made an unusual promise to God. Frustrated by years of sterility and the constant taunts of Peninnah, her husband Elkanah's other wife, she journeyed to the holy Tabernacle, where she prayed in anguish of heart for a son, promising:

“O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt deign to take notice of my trouble and remember me, if thou wilt not forget me but grant me an offspring, then I will give the child to the Lord for his whole life ... ” (I Samuel 1:11).

A Brave Vow

What a brave vow, for a mother to give her child away forever. But this young matron was so overwrought that any sacrifice was worth the cost just to have a child, especially in a period of history when womanliness meant fertility. But, as later events showed, she made no idle promises. A vow was a vow, to be strictly fulfilled.

While pouring out her soul to the Lord, she was accused by Eli, the High Priest, of drunkenness, and that in the very place of worship. Evidently, life had become so degraded in Israel that any kind of immorality could be expected, not only among the populace in general, but

also from Eli's sons, heirs to the royal priesthood. However, this was carrying things too far, for a woman to stand in a mumbling stupor before the very presence of Jehovah. So Eli chastised her, only to find that deep grief was the motivation for her distraught behavior. So he blessed her and she returned with her family to their home in the hill country.

The Lord's Answer

The Lord saw her tears and heard her anguished vow. So she was given a bright, healthy son, whom she named Samuel, because, she said, "I asked the Lord for him".

The next year, when it came time for the family's annual visit to the tabernacle, Hannah stayed behind, to care for her infant son. Each year thereafter she remained at home, until the child was weaned and able to care for some of his own needs.

Lent To The Lord

Then, finally came the time, when Samuel was perhaps five years of age, to fulfill her vow. So she presented the child back to the Lord, dedicating his life to spiritual things. And this was her explanation to Eli:

"I am the woman who stood near you here praying to the Lord. It was this boy I prayed for and the Lord has given me what I asked. What I asked I have received; and now I lend him to the Lord; for his whole life he is lent to the Lord." (I Samuel 1:26-28).

Samuel passed a long, useful life as God's last judge and one of His greatest prophets. What he had learned from his saintly mother in his earliest years stayed with him until death. His spiritual qualities were manifested even in childhood, as the Lord revealed only to him

messages of vast import to the whole nation. He never turned from his pathway of spiritual service established from before his birth by his mother. He was holy and dedicated to the Lord forever, and he never forgot this fact.

An Important Lesson For Us

How important is the lesson of Samuel's birth and life to God's people today! Somehow, we have forgotten, in our quest for material success for us and our children, that they are gifts of God, on loan to us just temporarily. They were never to be ours to manipulate and hold onto for our own gratification, neither ours to waste on worldly living.

Our children are a precious heritage, to be reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They are ours to mold in the image of God; ours to set on the pathway to holiness. During their early years they learn attitudes that never leave them. How do mother and father react to possessions, spiritual service, worship, prayer, Bible study and self-sacrifice for the Lord? Their big-eyed, open-hearted children soak all of this up and spill it out later in their own lives. Examples: Jacob's earlier deceits, repayed in the deceits of his sons. Or, David's immorality, multiplied publicly by his son, Absalom.

No Strings Attached

But there is another aspect of Hannah's attitude and Samuel's birth that also needs attention: Hannah was prepared to give her only child (at that time) to God, with no strings attached.

We, God's children, are the recipients of the gift of His only Son to us. Can we do less than give our sons and daughters to Him? All of our children are rich blessings, to be laid on His altar, along with their parents. There is no

way in which we can keep our children. We will either lose them to God or Satan. How much better, for us, for them, and for the Kingdom, to gracefully return them to their Maker, for His noble purposes.

Selfish Denial

Many parents, however, selfishly deny His right to their children's lives. Many especially balk at the idea of their children's leaving to serve their King abroad. Mother and Father feel threatened, so they actively discourage their children's plans, instead of giving them desperately needed moral support.

When it was time to decide to come to Brazil, our own children were ready for this spiritual adventure even before their parents. But we showed that we too were willing to sacrifice ourselves, so they willingly followed us as we journeyed, united in purpose. We parents should long for all of our children to be God's property, to be used how and where He chooses, regardless of the cost to us.

He Promises To Hear

Fellow Christians, ask of God, because He promises to hear in Heaven and heed us. Ask Him to lead you in the paths of His choosing. Ask Him to guide you in your selection of a mate, in your bringing children into the world, and in your rearing and preparing them to be turned over, forever, to their Lord. This is His view of your place as a parent. Use your brief time well with your "borrowed" children, gracefully giving them to Him when the time comes.



SPEAK, LORD: YOUR SERVANT HEARS

I Samuel 3:1-21

The child Samuel was left alone at the House of God with the aged high priest, Eli, his family having returned to its home in the hill country. Can't you imagine that he was bewildered and thoroughly homesick? Even the best of emotional preparation for this moment must have been inadequate, as this boy of very tender years faced a new life in the formal, impersonal atmosphere of the Tabernacle.

But his parents were gone back up the trail to their home. He had been promised to God and so he must stay behind. We often mention the dedicated sacrifice of Hannah, but seldom consider Samuel's role in this drama. He too sacrificed—his childhood and youth, the love and comfort of home. His associations now were principally with aged Eli and his two renegade sons. Surely all of this was difficult for the child Samuel.

A New Moral Low

The moral level of Israel, including that of its spiritual leaders, had reached a new low. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were rank opportunists, using their sacred office to fatten their own bodies and pocketbooks. Blasphemers against all that was holy, they set a corrosive example from above which soon would destroy the spiritual fiber of the whole nation. Both Eli and his sons had been plainly warned about this by a prophet of God, but the warning went unheeded.

Chapter three opens with the dismaying statement that in those evil days, “the word of the Lord was seldom heard, and no vision was granted”. This is always the result of spiritual neglect. The darker we allow the pathway to become for others, the darker it becomes for us also. If we extinguish the light, we too remain in darkness. The priests had dimmed God’s eternal light, in His very Tabernacle, and so the entire nation groped in darkness. A self-defeating cycle had been put into motion and only strong, new, visionary leadership could reverse it.

No Visions Received

Think of the implications of this: No vision was granted to the people. By their choice, and that of their spiritual guides, they had cursed the light and welcomed the darkness. No one in Israel received a vision. No one saw, or even remembered, what a blessing Light could be.

But, one night, when Samuel was still quite young, the Lord broke through the dense cloud of spiritual darkness. Samuel was asleep in the priests’ quarters, near the sacred Ark. The light of God still flickered, barely ... Perhaps there was still hope for a spiritual rebirth.

Personal Contact

Suddenly, Jehovah spoke directly to His young servant. Thinking it was the aged and blind Eli calling him, Samuel jumped up and ran to him. Three times this happened, for Samuel still could not recognize the source of this voice. The Scriptures say that he did not yet know the Lord. His understanding was still academic, not personal. And it is obvious that he would have to have waited a long time before seeing God clearly in the lives of Eli’s two perverse sons. Faith, to be valid, must have a personal as well as a literary dimension. Certainly, faith comes by hearing the Word of God. But many an atheist

has heard the Word without believing it. Samuel required personal contact with God, along with academic assent, to become His divine instrument. Neither of these facets of faith — academic and personal — is valid by itself. One is cold and unfeeling; the other, unpredictable, depending on the emotions of the moment.

Eli finally realized that Jehovah God was reaching out personally to Samuel, so he instructed the lad to respond: “Speak, Lord; thy servant hears thee.” Samuel then answered the Lord’s call, thus becoming a channel of communication, first between the Lord and the House of Eli and subsequently, between God and the entire nation.

The text tells us that as Samuel grew up, “the Lord was with him, and none of his words went unfulfilled”. All Israel recognized in Samuel a true prophet of God, because of the Divine Presence in him.

Why Selected

Why was Samuel selected for the noble honor of being God’s spokesman? First, he was divinely conceded to Hannah to become the Lord’s instrument. Second, he was spiritually prepared for this task. And third, he was willing to listen to the Lord’s voice and follow it. Had he been unattentive to the voice that night in the Tabernacle, surely he would not have continued to receive God’s revelations throughout his lifetime.

Affirmation Of Receptivity

“Speak, Lord, your servant hears” is more than a statement; it is an affirmation of receptivity to God’s will. “Speak, Lord, your servant hears” indicates a willingness to accept the eternal mandate, regardless of personal cost. “Hear” means far more than just understand the words spoken. It also signifies unconditional obedience.

When Samuel launched his own life of total obedience to God, he faced formidable barriers, not the least of which was rejection and rebellion on the part of his fellow Israelites.

Unconditional Obedience

When we, as Samuel, enter our own life of unconditional obedience, as we must, we have no way of knowing the personal price tag attached to this decision. It will be expensive, of that we can be assured. For example, the personal cost to Christ of His self-emptying is graphically presented in Philippians, Chapter 2. We have no reason to expect, as Dietrick Bonhoeffer put it so well, cheap grace, a means of serving the Lord, or of hearing His voice, without paying the cost in personal sacrifice.¹

Called To Sacrifice

He may call us to any task, in any remote spot upon this earth. He may call us to suffer and die there. He may call us to leave behind everything that is dear to us. But call us He does, and we must follow. When He speaks to us, are we in tune with Him? Do we recognize His voice? Are we honestly willing to respond with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, your servant is ready to hear and to follow Your voice."

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrick, *The Cost of Discipleship*, pages 45-49.



THE LORD JUDGES BY THE HEART

I Samuel 16:1-13

The great judge and prophet, Samuel, had suffered through years of rebellion on the part of the people of Israel. One of his heaviest burdens was seeing pressure building for a king, because the people wanted to be like all of the other nations around them.

When their noisy demand for a ruler came, Samuel was distraught. After a lifetime of faithful service as God's prophet, he was being summarily rejected. But the Lord instructed him:

"Listen to the people and all that they are saying; they have not rejected you, it is I whom they have rejected, I whom they will not have to be their king." (I Samuel 8:7).

Samuel was then commanded to warn the people about kings and their oppressive, dictatorial ways. But even after this strong warning, the people answered, "No, we will have a king over us."

A King Anointed

This king, selected by the Lord and anointed by Samuel, was the tall, handsome young man, Saul. In the beginning he was scrupulous about following the Lord's will. At first God's Spirit dwelt in his heart, to guide him in the Holy Way. But later, headstrong and rebellious, Saul disobeyed God's orders and for this reason was rejected by the Lord. Immediately a spirit of evil replaced God's Spirit in his heart and he became more and more agitated,

more and more a victim of depression. His unpredictable temper fits even led him to attempt the murder of his young court musician and imagined adversary, David.

Despite all of his appearance of leadership and kingliness, Saul found himself totally alone. Meanwhile, the Lord was busy searching out his successor. Shortly, God sent Samuel on another anointing mission. He was to travel to the village of Bethlehem, where lived certain descendents of Ruth and Boaz, a man named Jesse and his family. There, Samuel would be shown which of Jesse's abundant brood of sons had been divinely ordained to replace the now spiritually derelict Saul.

But courageous old Samuel, Saul's anointer and "conscience", momentarily became fearful, questioning: "But how can I do this? Saul will find me and kill me." The Lord answered him: "Take a heifer with you, for a sacrifice to the Lord, and invite Jesse to the sacrifice. Then I will instruct you further."

A Different View Of Man

So Samuel proceeded to Bethlehem with his offering. Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice and were duly presented to the prophet. We can almost see Samuel sizing up each of Jesse's sons. Tall, handsome Eliab, Jesse's firstborn, fit Samuel's concept of what a king should be, but God vetoed the choice, saying, "Take no account of it if he is handsome and tall; I reject him. The Lord does not see as man sees; men judge by appearances, but the Lord judges by the heart."

Each of seven sons was presented in turn to Samuel, only to be rejected by the Lord. Samuel, undoubtedly perplexed by now, asked if these were all of Jesse's sons. He was told that there was also the baby of the family, but he was out shepherding the family's flocks. Samuel ordered him brought immediately. When this youth, David, entered the house, he proved to be handsome and ruddy. The Lord then instructed Samuel, "Rise and anoint him: this is the man".

Israel's Most Notable Ruler

The prophet then anointed David, who received the Lord's Spirit from that time onward. We know the results—David became perhaps Israel's most notable ruler, especially in the spiritual realm, and was one of Jesus' noblest human ancestors, even considered in the Bible a type of the Christ.

Samuel erred, just as all of us, judging as we do by outward appearances only. "Beauty is only skin deep," it is said, but how often we base our judgements on that thin shell that covers man's real nature. We catalog others in our society by the shade of their skin, the shape of their eyes, their height, weight, hair color, way of walking, pitch of voice, kind of dress, financial resources, number of degrees they hold, whom they know and other such remarkably superficial standards. And how often we regret later such precipitous categorizing.

Precipitous Judgement Of Others

Then, when we come into contact with those of other nations, languages and cultures, we are even more prone to dichotomize, dividing whole societies into either the “goods” or the “bads”. By these mentally convenient standards, every Frenchman immoral, every Jew financially shrewd and untrustworthy, every Russian a “Commie” ... We assume that our American way is always best and every other way inferior. Our language is expressive and poetic; other tongues are so much gibberish. And on and on it goes, comparing unfavorably other peoples, their products, their politics, their habits, their money ...

But, remember, always, that the Lord does not judge by such standards as these. He goes deeply, to the very heart of nations and individuals, expecting us to attempt, in our limited human way, to judge in the same manner, or if we cannot, to withhold judgement entirely.

Beautiful Human Souls

There is great beauty and great ugliness among all peoples. All languages are expressive and beautiful in their own way. All cultures have their noble elements and their ignoble ones. All nations count honest men and thieves. But above all, every nation is made up of potentially beautiful human souls, souls that are eternal, souls that are changeable into God's image.

If we can come to even partially judge as the Lord judges, we will give the greatest eternal value to lost souls of every nation, respecting the good that is in them and patiently teaching them, loving them and drawing them to Christ, where their true worth can be realized. We will treat respectfully all cultures, adapting to that which is good

and attempting to change only that which must be changed in the light of Scripture.

Thus, we “ugly Americans,” who are attempting to share God’s Kingdom with other lands, will also eventually be seen as more than skin deep—as beautiful people dedicated to serving others and judging them with the utmost reluctance and caution.



THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S

I Samuel 17

David, the youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem, had been divinely appointed as the next king of Israel, to replace rebellious Saul. But then, nothing more happened for a period of time to confirm him on the throne. This delay shows us, again, that God's calendar is different from man's. David returned to his sheep, with only the memory of his anointing still lingering in his dreams.

Meanwhile, Saul took his army out against the perennially dangerous Philistines, Israel's aggressive neighbors along the western coastal lowlands. In those days, it was normal for soldiers to be sustained, at least partially, by their families. The aged Jesse, preoccupied over the safety of his three oldest sons in the war, sent David to resupply them and check on their situation.

David arrived at the battle-line early in the morning and was conversing with his brothers, when the Philistine champion, Goliath, came out, for the fortieth day in a row, to goad Israel into putting up her own champion to fight him in single combat, the winner claiming victory for his army, with the losing forces becoming the victors' slaves. Of course, no one accepted his challenge, because he was a giant of a man, more than nine feet tall.

Challenge Accepted

Upon hearing this arrogant challenge, David made inquiry and accepted Goliath's terms, despite a hefty difference in age, stature and battle experience. King Saul, hearing that the giant's challenge had been taken up, sent

for David, who informed him, "Do not lose heart, sir. I will go and fight with the Philistine." When Saul raised objections, David answered that he had killed lions and bears who had attacked his flocks, adding, "This uncircumcised Philistine will fare no better than they; he has defied the army of the living God."

Saul then gave David his own armaments, but David refused them, preferring his shepherd's weapons, a sling and a handful of round stones from the brook. And we all know what happened next. The giant ridiculed him, swearing in the name of Dagon, his god, that he would feed the flesh of this child to the scavenger birds and beasts.

A Classic Of Faith

David's answer is a classic of faith in God. He simply announced to Goliath:

"You have come against me with sword and spear and dagger, but I have come against you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the army of Israel which you have defied ... all the world shall know that there is a God in Israel. All those who are gathered here shall see that the Lord saves neither by sword nor spear; the battle is the Lord's, and he will put you all into our power."

Goliath was soon dead, felled by one small stone and swiftly beheaded, thus proving for all time the eternal truths that David had announced to the giant and to all those assembled about the Vale of Elah.

Profound Lessons For Today

I see in this favorite children's story various profound lessons for us adults who are dedicated to God's battle against Satan and his hosts. First, our Enemy and his hosts constantly defy the army of the living God. They boast that God is dead and His followers are nothing more than sheep. They rely on their human strength and resources to carry the day. Their challenge must be taken up by every generation of Christians, for who are they to defy the Lord and His church? We must be ready and willing to meet them and do battle with them in the name of the Lord.

Second, the Lord, who saves His followers from all kinds of dangers and difficulties, will save us from Satan's darts. If we really believe this, we are unconquerable. What a tremendous advantage it is to know beforehand that our God will care for us, even in the heat of the most perilous spiritual battles!

Every Kind Of Weapon

Next, our enemies come against us with every kind of weapon—physical, material, emotional and even spiritual. We come against them, not with physical or material weapons, but with spiritual armament, as Paul reminds us in II Corinthians 10:4 and Ephesians 6:10-18. These weapons are no less powerful, just because they are spiritual. In fact, they are more than sufficient to break down the enemy's most fortified strongholds. Believing this, we can wield them confidently against whatever spiritual enemy we may encounter.

The Lord really does not rely on human weapons, but wins His battles with spiritual thoughts and words; with His message, empowered by His Spirit. To men, such weapons appear weak and useless, but He has chosen

these very hopeless arms to put to flight the wise and powerful of this world. (I Corinthians 1:27).

The Battle Is The Lord's

Next, we must always remember that the battle is the Lord's, not ours. The scriptures are not ours, they are His. The church was not purchased by its members: it is and always has been the exclusive property of its Saviour. Its program is not man's, but Christ's. And its battles are not those of His followers', but are His battles. This is where the action is—on the battlefronts of His choosing. And on these battlefields, how we do battle must be according to His design. David defeated Goliath with one of history's simplest weapons. Gideon won an impressive victory with three hundred men, armed with pitchers and torches. In both cases, it was God's doing, to prove that His victories are won according to His plan and not necessarily according to our programs, no matter how well thought out. Why not, then, return to a dedicated use of His weapons, wielded in His way?

Victory For His Cause

The inevitable result of this kind of warfare is victory for His cause. We on mission battlefields often feel that we are so few and the enemy is too formidable for us. All Israel thought this way as it listened to the taunts of Goliath. But one young man thought differently and brought victory to his people. Just one faithful worker, fighting where and how his Lord directs, is always assured of final victory.

Finally, such success against hopeless odds will prove to all men that the victory was not our doing, but His. David shouted back to Goliath, "All the world shall know that there is a God in Israel." Victories won by the few, with His weapons and in His way, will still prove the same

eternal truth. Whether it accepts Him or not, all the world will be forced to admit that there is a God, ruling over His people and leading them in spiritual battle.



THE LORD WAS WITH HIM

I Samuel 18

In an act of unsurpassed bravery, created by a profound faith in God, David had killed Goliath, the Philistine giant, and paved the way for a great victory against Israel's oppressors.

Now this bold, faithful young warrior-poet was set on his pathway to the throne. He became, first, court musician for the king and then, his official armor bearer. Another advance for David was the fact of his being befriended by Jonathan, Saul's oldest son and heir-apparent to the throne, who made a mutual compact of enduring love and friendship with the young Bethlehemite.

A Successful Leader

As in the case of Joseph's phenomenal rise in the household of Potiphar, in prison and in Egypt's royal palace, so David continued to rise in Saul's kingdom. He was successful as a leader of men and military strategist, and so well liked by the common soldiers and even some of the officers, that he was soon given command of a troop of one thousand men.

Now it came time for Saul's victorious army to return to Gibeah, the capitol. As is always the case with victorious armies, women came out to praise their menfolk. These particular women had an eye on David and his mighty exploits, shouting:

"Saul made havoc among thousands, but David among tens of thousands."

This eulogy was perhaps a bit exaggerated, but David had captured the public's imagination with his epochal slaying of Goliath. So they attributed to him the major glory, letting only a little of it reflect onto the king.

Saul was a moody, violent, evil-spirited man, and these words rankled him. He, the great king, given second place, behind one of his captains! So he asked, "What more can they do but make him king?" And from that day on, Saul jealously watched David and plotted his death.

The plot thickened rapidly, for only the next day, as David played his harp to soothe the frenzied king, Saul tried to pin him to the wall with a spear.

The Lord With David

After this, Saul realized clearly that the Lord had forsaken him and was with David. Small wonder! Headstrong Saul had taken on the position of high priest and prophet, offering sacrifices to the Lord. Later, he had disobeyed the Lord's explicit command to completely obliterate the Amalekites, for its earlier treachery against Israel. Saul had brought back the best of the Amalekites' herds and their king, to celebrate yet another victory procession and enrich his and his people's wealth. But on his triumphant return, Saul was met by Samuel, who sternly condemned him for his disobedience and announced to him that, henceforth, he would be forever abandoned by both the prophet and by his God. So the king spent his days in brooding despair, punctuated by the violent outbursts typical of a mad mind.

Meanwhile, David continued to succeed in his efforts, leading his band in victory after victory against Philistia. Each success on David's part brought a blacker mood to Saul and more public praise to David.

Saul even went so far as to plot David's downfall through an ingenious marriage plan. He would give David his daughter, if the latter would kill one hundred Philistines as his "bride-price". He was thus counting on David's death at the hands of the Philistines. But again, David succeeded, killing two hundred Philistines, and won Saul's daughter, Michal. So now this young upstart was a member of the royal household and the reigning hero of the populace.

All of Saul's later, continuous attempts to be permanently rid of David ended in failure. David and his band of six hundred faithful fugitives escaped every attempt made against them.

Awaiting The Throne

Finally, in God's time, Saul died in combat and David was crowned king of Judah, reigning in Hebron for seven years. At the end of these years of further preparation he was made king over the entire nation, where he ruled magnificently for another thirty-three years. If he was anointed by Samuel at fifteen or so, he would have spent another fifteen years in a cat-and-mouse game with Saul, waiting for the day when this anointing would be fully consummated. Surely he must have wondered when God's plan for him was to be realized in fact, but at no time did he doubt that God was with him and bringing events slowly to a climax.

David Adapted To The Lord's Purposes

What was the key to David's success story? He succeeded in everything he undertook, the Word tells us, "because the Lord was with him." The Lord was with David because David, except for a couple of brief lapses later on, was with the Lord, adapting himself to the Lord's purpose for his life.

This is the formula for any of us who wishes to be spiritually successful. We cannot hope to accomplish any lasting good unless the Lord is with us in our efforts, which means that we must be walking in the Lord's pathway, not ours.

David had ample opportunities to run before the Lord, as Saul had done. He could have killed the king on at least two separate occasions, excusing his act on the grounds that he was the rightful heir to the throne, by God's decree. But he refused to touch the Lord's anointed, waiting instead for divine guidance in the matter of ascending to the throne.

An Impatient Generation

We today are an impatient lot, making grandiose plans, developing expensive projects and expecting instant results. We live in an age of "short-termers"—those who commit themselves only to immediate programs and "miraculous" results. Patience is a lost virtue—the patience that led Noah to await God's wrath for 120 years, as he laboriously built the ark, the patience that led Moses to await God's leading for forty years, his only audience a flock of sheep, and the patience that led David to spend fifteen years anticipating the promised throne. This is the kind of patience that led Michelangelo to devote six exhausting years to recreating the story of the Bible on the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel in Rome; the kind of patience that has led great composers to devote decades of their lives to one majestic work.

We must stop and re-analyze our entire program of Christian service and even our basic attitudes. Are we, as God's workers, building according to His plan, or according to our own? Are we serving Him with our whole heart, yet at the same time maintaining an ear cocked to

His guidance? Are we sowing and watering, leaving with Him the real increase? Are we trying to run the church and its mission, or have we given these matters, and our very lives, back to Him, to run as He wills?

Remember the lesson of David, fellow laborer. He was successful in all that he undertook, *because the Lord was with him* and because he waited for the Lord's will to be done in his life, not because of any great natural resources within him. His is another story of "strength out of weakness," as indicated in Hebrews, chapter 11.



WHAT AM I, THAT THOU HAST BROUGHT ME THUS FAR?

II Samuel, Chapter 7

God's great servant, David, had been anointed king of Israel. But it is interesting to note that, instead of being crowned, he was persecuted. Driven from forest to cavern and from mountain heights to desert vastness, he and his men were in constant danger for their lives at the hands of vengeful King Saul.

God's Calendar

Twice during his years of enforced exile, David had the opportunity to kill King Saul and surely take over the throne, to which he had been divinely called. But no, he refused the opportunist's role, choosing to patiently bide his time. The grace of waiting on the Lord is a rare virtue, especially in our day of instant action. But in David's case, as in that of Abraham, Moses, Job and so many others of God's saints, patience proved to be a winning factor. God's plans follow His calendar, not ours. In His good time and on His terms His battles will be fought and His victories won. David, the future king, could pen these words, based on his experience with patient waiting: "Wait for the Lord; be strong, take courage, and wait for the Lord." (Psalm 27:14). If we can just learn to wait on Him, we shall be renewed day by day, in grace and spiritual strength.

But being human, we often continue to try to force His hand or manipulate His will ... On one occasion during his days as a desert raider even David lost all patience and

would have killed an entire household, had it not been for the diplomacy of a woman named Abigail.

He and his band had protected the lives and property of countless Judeans during these years, as he raided neighboring nations, bringing a percentage of the spoils to his own tribe. But it was no small matter to maintain his hungry horde of followers, six hundred in all. So he was compelled to ask for help from those whom he had helped. One such man was Nabal, a wealthy but churlish type, who flatly refused him. As David and his band were enroute to Nabal's holdings to destroy every soul, he was met by Abigail, Nabal's wife, who placated him with a generous offer of food and with these words:

“No calamity shall overtake you as long as you live. If a man sets out to pursue you and take your life, the Lord your God will wrap your life up and put it with his own treasure, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away like stones from a sling.” (I Samuel 25:28-30).

Nabal was soon dead, but by the Lord's hand, not David's. And it wasn't long until David claimed this intelligent woman for his wife.

Nor was it long until Saul and several of his sons were killed in battle against the Philistines, as had been predicted by the returned spirit of Samuel. Although David knew that this defeat paved the way for him to ascend the throne, he showed his magnanimous spirit by lamenting the death of his enemy, Saul, and his close friend, Jonathan.

Patience Still Necessary

But patience must still be called upon. He was granted only the tribe of Judah as his kingdom, ruling in Hebron for

seven years, while Ishbosheth, Saul's last son, ruled over the remainder of Israel.

Then the day finally came when David was given rulership over the entire twelve tribes. The elders of Israel came to him, after the precipitous assassination of Ishbosheth, and asked him to be shepherd of God's people, belatedly remembering his divine anointing twenty years earlier.

After having firmly established his rule over Israel, David looked to new worlds to conquer. He turned statesman, developing international trade, and builder, erecting public structures and a luxurious palace for his greatly expanding family.

A Noble Plan

But still he wasn't satisfied. He longed to build a monumental, permanent home for Jehovah and His ark, observing to Nathan the prophet, "Here I live in a house of cedar, while the Ark of God is housed in curtains."

Nathan agreed with David's lofty plan. But that night he discovered that the Lord disagreed, and that lone vote took the election! Nathan was instructed to tell David:

"Are you the man to build me a house to dwell in? Down to this day I have never dwelt in a house ... wherever I journeyed with Israel did I ever ask any ... whom I appointed shepherds of my people Israel why they had not built me a house of cedar? ... I took you from the pastures ... to be a prince over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone ... I will make you a great name among the great ones of the earth." (II Samuel 7:5-9).

Yes, what was David? A shepherd, with inclinations toward poetry, a brave man and one whose heart could be touched by the Lord; a man dependent on God's guiding. And he was also at times impetuous and lustful. Nevertheless, this simple shepherd was used mightily by the Lord.

Hope For Spiritual Greatness

So there is hope for true spiritual greatness in all of us. Who are we, or our families, that the Lord has brought us thus far? We cannot merit, in ourselves, the grace and nobility bestowed upon us. Who are we, to be God's messengers to His great nations on this earth? Who are we, to be blessed so abundantly? I, for one, am a poor farm boy, lifted up by the lord, through no ability or right of my own, to a place of immense responsibility and even of honor. To be used by the Lord to fulfill His purposes is the noblest of all callings.

We may not be permitted to erect in cedar, brick, or stone some enduring monument to His glory. We may pass our lives being spent in His service on some remote spiritual battlefield. We may end our days a failure, as men view life, but in the Lord's sight we can become giants of the Faith. To be crowned by Him and to possess the kingdom prepared for us since the world was made—this will be real eternal nobility, a glorious climax to a humble life devoted to Him.



IN ALL THAT HE DOES HE PROSPERS

Psalm 1

David began his ministry to God as a youthful shepherd. Tending his flocks and meditating on the grandeur of God's world, this gifted poet began to express his praise in the form of psalms. The results are still with us today and even yet, in our hurry-scurry world, have the power to both stir and soothe the soul. And, of course, Psalm 23, is the best known of all of the 150 songs of praise in the book of Psalms, plus various others encountered in the Old Testament (examples: Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32; II Samuel 1).

As David matured, led from the wrath of King Saul and finally experienced the joys and sorrows of kingship, he expressed his changing moods in song. Some of his songs, or psalms, reach the heights of human capacity to express praise to God. Others reach the depths of despair. But in all of the approximately seventy-five psalms attributed directly to him, David shows clearly his unquenchable faith in God.

David's Real Character

As pointed out in *Halley's Bible Handbook*,

"In the Psalms the real character of David is portrayed; and in them God's people generally see a pretty fair picture of themselves, their struggles, their sins, their sorrows, their aspirations, their joys, their failures and their victories."²

² Halley's Bible Handbook, Twenty-Fourth Edition, p. 248

Halley even suggests that the Psalms were a far grander accomplishment on the part of David than his development of the Israelite kingdom. Certainly this book, so thoroughly influenced by the mind and heart of David, must stand as one of the noblest expressions of man's reaching out for the hand of God.

When he was exalted in spirit, his Psalms 8 and 19 soared to the heavens. When confronted with his own sordid sin, his Psalm 51 portrays the genuineness of his repentance.

Valuable Lessons For God's Workmen

But the Psalms are more than the personal statement of one believer. They contain messages valuable to God's workmen of all ages. One example is Psalm 1, which encourages all of us to continue faithfully in our service to Him, knowing that eventual victory is certain.

Happy The Lord's Man

This Psalm opens with a conditional blessing: Happy is the man who does certain things and avoids doing certain others. If he fails to observe these principles and fails to walk in the Lord's pathway, he can expect to lose his divine blessings.

Happy, therefore, is the Lord's man, who does not follow the leadership of the wicked, nor walk the road of the sinner, nor take his place among the scornful. What a difficult task it is to remain uninfluenced by the materialistic and permissive attitudes which daily bombard us. Even God's own servants can find themselves thinking as the world, walking according to the world's patterns and becoming indifferent, as the world is indifferent, to things holy. One of the Christian worker's pitfalls is eventually to become suspicious and scornful—of worldly

men, hypocrites, those who ask for material aid, even those who submit to baptism. We are disappointed in others. We suspect their motives. We eventually become like those we scorn—spiteful and negative in attitude. And thus, we miss the glorious blessing of walking with our Lord.

Secret Delight

The truly godly man has pleasures of which the world cannot know. For instance, the law of the Lord is his delight. He never tires of reading it and meditating on it. It is strange but tragically true that often the spiritual leader becomes so occupied with good works that he has no time left for individual nourishment on the Word and meditation on his own life in relationship to his Lord. This certainly includes the overseas worker, who faces all of his American colleagues' pressures, plus countless others (language, culture, endless red tape. . .).

In this regard it is edifying to note that Martin Luther, in his apogee of spiritual leadership, devoted half of each day to study, prayer and meditation. When asked how he could afford this luxury, with so many other things to do, he is reported to have answered, "I can only accomplish those other tasks because I have spent four hours a day with the Lord."

Deep Spiritual Roots

The godly servant is like a stalwart, shapely tree, always robust. This is true because his roots drink deeply of the Water of life. With such nourishment of soul, it is no wonder that he never withers away, but just keeps on growing in the faith and in capacity to produce spiritual fruit.

And fruit he produces, in God's season. All that this kind of man does prospers, not necessarily by men's standards, but by the Lord's. To other men we servants appear foolish and even slightly mad. We fail to conform. We walk by a different drumbeat and sing a different melody: the Song of Moses and the Lamb. By the highest spiritual standards, we are rich beyond measure, even though our material holdings may be rather meager. We are more than conquerors, through Christ our Commander. We do not need material proofs of our wealth and position, as others do. We have no reason to place our trust in merely material things. Our affections are set on the highest goal and the true riches of love in Christ Jesus. We know beyond question where we are headed and who awaits us there.

A Protected Journey

This kind of spiritual journey is watched over by the Lord. Whatever may happen to us, even in some remote spiritual outpost, He is there observing and leading us. He is involved with us, every step of this pathway. Often things do not seem to work out according to our plans and logic. But if we are on the path of true righteousness, we know that *all things* will eventually work out for our good and for the best interests of our Lord's Kingdom. (Romans 8:28).

There is but one sure way—the way of sparkling brooks and lush trees, laden with fruit. Why, then, choose the desert of self-interest, of stunted growth and parched leaves, when the way of eternal prosperity could have been followed?



MY FEET IN A LARGE ROOM

Psalm 31

As we read the Scriptures and meditate on them, our spiritual horizons are always expanded. This was definitely true in David's case, as he wrote down for all time the ever increasing vision he had of God's greatness and goodness. For example in the King James Version, Psalm 31:8 reads, "Thou hast set my feet in a large room."

Limiting God

Our universal problem in relationship to God is not to make Him greater in our minds than He really is, but rather, to limit His nature and power; to place Him in a box of our own making. Our "God-in-a-box" tendency is a theme developed by J.B. Phillips, in his little but spirit-expanding book, *Your God Is Too Small*.

Sometimes we do the same with the scope of His mission here on the earth. By limiting our view of His mission to one congregation, one city or one field only, we become guilty of a "missions-in-a-box" syndrome.

When I was a child in Oregon, I used to climb the tall Douglas Firs on a hilltop at our farm, in order to see up and down our valley for several miles in each direction. I would sit in a little tree house we children had scrapped together, dreaming of distant horizons, of lands beyond my valley, but never imagining that one day I would be living and serving in one of these great lands...

Expanded Horizons

Throughout the Bible we are ever challenged to look to distant horizons. For instance: "Abraham, I want to show you a new country, which will be an inheritance for your children." "Moses, take my people to their Promised Land." "Joshua, the land is before you. Rise up and take it." "Elijah, go to Syria." "Isaiah, who will go for us?" "Jonah, go to Nineveh, that great city." "My Son Jesus, it is time to go on that long journey to earth." "Apostles, go into all the world..." "Philip, go down to the desert region." "Peter, go teach a Roman Centurion." "Barnabas and Saul, go to the Gentile world."

Every such heaven-ordained mission was complacency cracking, status-quo shattering and horizon expanding for its hearer. Why is this? Why does the Lord insist on expanding our horizons; of placing our feet in a large room?

God Not Limited

First, because of the nature of God Himself. He cannot be limited by finite bounds, nor can His purposes for man be limited to our merely human reasoning and planning as indicated in Isaiah, chapter 55.

Second, because of the nature of our calling, which is universal in scope. Even if men eventually inhabit the moon and outer space, our calling must be stretched to include these pioneers also.

Third, because of the nature of man's need. Romans, chapter 3 reminds us, graphically, that all men are sinners, fallen from the holy standard set by God. All men are in urgent need of being called back to God. Our calling, then, is every man, which is a vast field, indeed.

A Universal Response

But this isn't all, by any means. The Lord insists on our expanding our private spiritual horizons through that which He has done for us. His blessings are universal and our response to them should be in proportion. In verse 7 David tells us:

"I will rejoice and be glad in thy unfailing love; for thou hast seen my affliction and hast cared for me in my distress."

God knows our souls and our trouble. He is always merciful to us. His love is unfailing and all-encompassing. How can our love, then, be limited to only a few of God's creatures? And how can our mercy for others be boxed in by geographical, cultural, language, economic or other restrictions?

Unlimited Movement

Our Lord has not limited our movement to one small area of His world. A certain Indian chief could not decide which of his three sons should succeed him as tribal leader, so he told each one to climb a tall mountain and bring back what he had found there. Based on their findings he would choose his successor. The oldest son climbed toward the top and brought back an exquisite timber-line flower. The second climbed even higher and returned with a crystal which sparkled in the sun. The third, however, labored on to the very top of the peak. When asked what he brought back, he answered:

"Father, I brought you a new world. I saw rich valleys, teaming with game. I saw lush forests and sparkling streams. I saw distant mountains and great new lands for our people."

Which of the three sons was made chief? The third, of course, for he expanded his horizons, to give his tribe greater blessings than ever before.

Range At Will

Our Father would have us “range at will” (NEB) among the peoples of this great earth. We are not enclosed or limited, but have been placed in a large room indeed, a room big enough to more than meet our most soaring dreams for His eternal Kingdom.

We today have been placed in a Twentieth Century world filled with the most complex, explosive metropolitan centers. We live in a time of staggering material and demographic growth. But we also live in a time when our earth is shuddering under a constant threat of hunger, atomic warfare and human restlessness. The world seeks to fill its spiritual vacuum in the most perplexing ways. And the Lord has placed us in the midst of this agitated humanity to show it the one Way that leads to peace and life.

Our Feet In A Large Place

Fellow messengers, He has truly set our feet in a large place. Never yield, then. Never throw in the towel; never cease going through the open doors He has placed before us, never stop “climbing trees”; never cease climbing mountains, in order to see more and more of His world and its need. Never rest until all men have had an opportunity to hear the Good News of salvation in Christ.

Remember always, our Father has not put us in a box, walled in on every side, but rather, in a large place, where we can range at will in His service. Following His lead, we have every opportunity to grow, expand and pioneer new territory for Him: “Look,” He says to us, “I have laid the land open before you; Go in and occupy it...”



ACCLAIM OUR GOD, ALL MEN ON EARTH

Psalms 100

David, the visionary, often dreamed of God's eventual spiritual empire, which would be far more extensive than the physical boundaries of the nation of Israel. His mind, divinely guided, reached into the Christian era, as he dramatically created praises to the future Messiah and His eternal kingdom, into the day when all nations would acknowledge the sovereign of God.

God's Master Missionary

Although not missionary in basic thrust, the psalms are rich in missionary meaning. This is particularly true of those psalms which helped to prepare mankind for the coming of Christ, God's Master Missionary. It is in the contribution of the psalms to the Messianic hope of Israel and in their unique message to all men of all ages that we discover their profound missionary message.

These hymns of Israel clearly bear witness to the unity of God's plan for the eventually redemption of mankind. In a survey of the psalms we find a repeated anticipation of the future eternal King, who would reign in righteousness, and of a kingdom that would reach to the ends of the earth.

Sons Of The King

In Psalm 45 the writer affirms:

"You shall have sons, O king, in place of your forefathers and will make them rulers over all the land.

I will declare your fame to all generations; therefore, the nations will praise you for ever and ever.”

This divine truth portrays the creation of countless sons for the Lord; countless members of His family, who would reign as a kingdom of priests. (I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). Certainly, Christ’s fame has been and is being proclaimed to men of all nations, causing them to praise the Lord forever. Men, whose ancestral worship was of animals, spirits, or a multitude of “saints” and other beings, now lift up their voices in unison, despite language and cultural barriers, as they praise the one true God and His Son.

Continuing this theme, we read in Psalm 47:

“Clap your hands, all you nations; acclaim our God with shouts of joy. How fearful is the Lord Most High, Great Sovereign over all the earth! ... God is king of all the earth ... God reigns over the nations ... the princes of the nations assemble with the families of the God of Abraham; for the mighty ones of earth belong to God, and He is raised above them all.”

Our Lord Reigns

Yes, our Lord reigns over the entire earth. Sooner or later all men must bow before him, acknowledging Him as supreme Authority. (Romans 14:11-12; Revelation 1:7). Even the earth’s mighty will do obeisance to Him, for they belong to Him. We must not fear any man, no matter how lofty his earthly position, for we are kings and priests of God, and our message must reach to the heart of every man, regardless of his position here on the earth.

In Psalm 67 we read an exhortation to the nations to Praise God, for His judgement and government would be

universal. His just government, accepted with praise and thanksgiving by all people, would be the signal for universal peace, the guarantee of spiritual blessing and the extension of His fear and praise to the ends of the earth.

This same theme, dealing with the outreach of His kingdom to the ends of the earth, is echoed frequently in the Psalms. For example:

“May he hold sway from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth ... all kings shall pay him homage, all nations shall serve him.” (Psalm 72).

“Then shall the nations revere thy name, O Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.” (Psalm 102).

“Let all the kings of the earth praise thee, O Lord, when they hear the words thou hast spoken; and let them sing of the Lord’s ways, for great is the glory of the Lord.” (Psalm 138).

“The Lord has made his victory known; He has displayed His righteousness to all the nations ... Acclaim the Lord, all men on earth, break into songs of joy, sing psalms.” (Psalm 98).

We, then, His children, are to be instruments through whom psalms are created and lifted up to Him in all lands.

His Call Universal

Because His kingdom is universal, His call is also universal, encompassing all peoples, of all nations and generations. This is the true mission of His Kingdom—the channel through which every individual on earth can gain access to God and praise His salvation. (Revelation

5:9-10). For this purpose His people exist. Through them all men may join in psalms of praise to their Creator and Redeemer.

“Acclaim the Lord, all men on earth, worship the Lord in gladness.” (Psalm 100).

“Acclaim our God, all men on earth ... make glorious His praise.” (Psalm 66).

“All nations thou hast made. O Lord, will come, will bow down before thee and honor thy name.” (Psalm 76).

The turning of the nations to God, then, is clearly foreseen in the Psalms. It was God’s intent from the beginning to create on the earth a holy nation, composed of Abraham’s spiritual seed. Those of all lands who open their hearts to Him would be His inheritance, as indicated in these passages:

“Let all the ends of the earth remember (He who created them) and turn again to the Lord; Let all the families of the nations bow down before him.” (Psalm 22).

“You are my son, he said; this day I became your father. Ask of me what you will: I will give you nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession.” (Psalm 2).

Dean R.W. Church has observed:

“No feature is more striking in the Psalms than the unquestioning natural directness with which they

embrace the heathen, the nations ... and the kingdom of God.”³

No Exclusive Club

Yet, in spite of these all-encompassing missionary psalms, Israel did not include other nations in its thinking. To the contrary, it became an exclusive club, considering other peoples as little better than animals. The Lord had to force even Jewish Christians to enlarge their horizons, in order to include men of other nations (Acts 10 and 11, for example).

Universal In Outreach

But, before we condemn the Jews too severely, do we in His modern spiritual Israel behave much better? Are we truly universal in our outreach? Are we creating, of all nations, a people joined with us in psalms of praise to their Lord? Only in a limited way! Oh yes, we proclaim the Great Commission, but our practice of it is often restricted to certain peoples and classes, and not to all men.

To be worthy of His universal Kingdom, we must be “men for all nations”. His eternal message in the Psalms includes every people, tribe and isle. Our message today must be just as universal, because it is His message:

“The Lord is king, let the earth be glad, let coasts and islands all rejoice.” (Psalm 97).

³ Cook, Edmund F., *Missionary Message of the Bible*, p. 47.



THAT ALL PEOPLES MAY KNOW THY FAME

I Kings 8:22-43

The spirit of David—Shepherd, Poet, Psalmist, Warrior and King—had returned to its Maker. David's noblest dream had been to build a permanent home in Jerusalem for God's ark. But because he was a man of war, he was denied the fulfillment of this goal. Instead, the Lord promised that his son, a man of peace, would build a temple in His honor.

So David, ever receptive to the Divine Will, contented himself with stock-piling materials of the highest quality for this future holy place, thus giving his heir a head-start on it and, at least indirectly, participating in this manner in its construction.

A Special Blessing

Now Solomon was on the throne. As he assumed the burden of kingship, this son of a devout father was offered a special divine blessing, whatever he felt was most essential to his success as a ruler over God's people. In an inspired moment of perception, Solomon requested wisdom, or understanding, that he might walk correctly before the Lord and judge wisely His people.

Solomon, you chose well. Because you selected spiritual wisdom, and not riches or fame, which at best bring little permanent satisfaction, the Lord promised you more wisdom than all others before you, and as a bonus, more riches and fame than any other king. It is abundantly clear to us on the mission field that we, as Solomon, desperately need wisdom from above. We face countless

difficulties and choices that can only be resolved with help from on high.

Solomon, then, was off to a positive start, with success guaranteed, if he would but continue with the attitude he demonstrated in requesting wisdom. Not long after initiating his reign, this wise king turned to the promise made to his father. He took inventory of the materials on hand for the projected temple and wrote up a contract with Hiram, King of neighboring Tyre, to furnish more materials and skilled builders.

Structure Takes Shape

Years passed and this magnificent structure took shape, so well planned and executed, that neither the sound of hammer or saw was heard at the construction site. Every piece was prefabricated and fit perfectly! Covered with gold and richly furnished, it was one of the wonders of the ancient world and a great spiritually unifying force for God's people.

Now came the long-awaited day for its official consecration. Solomon summoned all of the elders of Israel, all of the heads of tribes and families and all of the priests. When they had assembled in Jerusalem, the sacred furnishings of the very hallowed tabernacle were brought to their breathtaking new home. The new altar was dedicated with the sacrifice of sheep and oxen beyond counting, a lavishly generous gift for a lavishly endowed temple.

Then the sacred Ark of the Covenant was reverently deposited in the Most Holy Place. Not even God's chosen priests could remain near it, for the glory of the Lord filled the room and spilled over into the entire temple, His house.

All Promises Fulfilled

Solomon blessed the assembled company, relating the history of the tabernacle and the new temple and reminding those present that Jehovah God had fulfilled at that moment all of His promises made to David.

Then the king lifted his hands to heaven, a most appropriate gesture of supplication largely ignored in our religious expression today, and said:

“O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant with thy servants and showing them constant love...”

“But can God indeed dwell on earth? Heaven itself, the highest heaven, cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built!”

Solomon realized clearly that the all-powerful God cannot possibly be contained in any man-made temple. The Lord, high and lifted up, spills out of human walls and reaches into His entire universe.

Prayer For Foreigners

Following this, he presented a series of petitions dealing with future rebellion and repentance on the part of God’s people. And in this list of petitions, he included even a plea for the foreigner:

“The man who does not belong to thy people Israel, but has come from a distant land because of thy fame (for men shall hear of thy great fame and thy strong hand and arm outstretched), when he comes and prays towards this house, hear in heaven thy dwelling and respond to the call which the foreigner makes to thee, so that like thy people Israel, all peoples of the

earth may know thy fame and fear thee, and learn that this house ... bears thy name.” (verses 41-43).

As suggested by Solomon, when any man, of any race, tribe, or nation, comes unto the Lord because he has heard of His fame and majesty, this man should be received as a brother whom God joyfully accepts. And how shall he have heard of the Lord’s fame? Through His people, who are continually spreading His renown to every corner of the earth.

Ruler Of All Peoples

Our Lord is ruler over all peoples. He is concerned for all. He longs for all men to know His fame and fear Him. He expects the nations of the earth to learn that there is a house that bears His name and to come unto it. Today the house of God is not a physical temple, because He is universal and no material house can contain him. His temple is the church, which is composed of individual members, serving Him in unity of purpose. (I Corinthians 3:16-17; I Timothy 3:15). But the question of this chapter is, are we really making His name known and attractive to every man who lives on the face of this earth, so that all might know His fame and turn to Him?



IF THE LORD BE GOD, THEN WORSHIP HIM

I Kings 18

The Kingdom of Israel had reached its apogee during the reign of Solomon, when it became a great commercial empire.

But soon after the grandeur of Solomon's days, the kingdom was torn apart by just one foolish decision on the part of his son, Rehoboam. Now only two minor states survived, the newly created Israel and Judah, all that was left of the earlier kingdom.

Following the decadent, idolatrous example of Solomon in his older years, Israel formed a new religious sect, represented by two golden calves, one at far-north Dan and the other at Bethel, near the border of Judah. King Jeroboam's reasoning was that if Israel continued to make frequent pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem, she would soon return to Judah's political control, as well as her religious influence.

Those who followed him on the throne of Israel continued in his steps. The situation became so degenerate that in I Kings 16:29-33, we read that King Ahab reached a new spiritual low, doing more that was wrong in the Lord's sight than all of his predecessors together. He even contracted marriage with the Sidonian she-devil, Jezebel, and bowed his knee to her base god, Baal.

A New Voice For The Lord

At this very tragic time in Israel's history, Elijah the Tishbite came suddenly on the prophetic scene, announcing to Ahab that, due to his rebellion against God, there would be neither dew nor rain for an extended period of time. Think of the implications! A man of faith, authorized by the Lord, could control the very elements!

But he couldn't control Ahab and Jezebel. To protect him from their wrath, the Lord sent him into hiding east of the Jordan. There, he was abundantly cared for by ministering ravens, while drought raged in Israel. When the stream that brought him water dried up, Elijah was sent to the Sidonian village of Zarephath, in Jezebel's home territory, where Divine Providence continued to meet his needs and those of his poor widowed hostess.

God Cares For His Own

God cares for His own, reader, and never doubt it! During three years of famine, Elijah did not want for food and shelter. The Lord's care over His children continues even to our present day. Because of this constant heavenly care for our needs, Jesus commands us to put away all anxiety over food, drink, clothing and shelter. (Matthew 6:25-34). Our Father knows our needs, and if we really trust in Him and serve Him faithfully, He will provide us with every essential. Luxuries are never promised to us, but the basics of life are. So, when we lose financial support for our spiritual service, or are laid off from our employment, there is absolutely no reason to push the panic button. Our Father knows and cares.

Troubler Of Israel

Returning to the narrative from I Kings 18, at the appointed end of the drought, Elijah was sent back to confront Ahab. The king, who had searched in every land

for the missing Elijah, his arch-enemy, exploded: "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" Elijah answered, "It is not I who have troubled Israel, but you and your father's family, by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and following Baal."

Many people prefer to receive only spiritual pabulum (Isaiah 30:10) and, if served strong adult fare, become critical and even dangerous. But one function of God's messenger is to speak plainly and clearly, regardless of its consequences. Elijah was such a messenger boldly condemning Ahab for his sins and calling Jezebel's false priests to a contest, the stakes of which would be extremely high.

Hopelessly Outnumbered

On the peak called Carmel, overlooking the sea, Elijah stood alone with God. On the opposing team were four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, backed up by reserves of four hundred prophets of the goddess Asherah. By today's standards, the majority was right and poor Elijah was hopelessly out of the action; he had lost the game before the opening whistle.

Often we on the Lord's team look at the odds against us and are ready to concede the game. We are but grasshoppers facing the giants of false religion, superstition, materialism, indifference ... We face hordes of unbelievers, the greater part of them ignorant of God's Word, lost in their modern idolatry. The odds reach, not 400 to one, but more like millions to one, and we despair. Not Elijah! He boldly stepped forward and asked: "How long will you sit on the fence? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

Not a word did the people answer. No one wished to commit himself. Certainly, there is nothing new under the sun. People are still the same, vacillating, weak in conviction, wanting God's blessings, but also seeking the excitement and self-satisfaction of their own religious and philosophic pathways. They want to stay with the crowd.

Men Filled With Fire From Heaven

If it was excitement the crowd on Carmel craved, it got it that day. Fire came down from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice prepared by Elijah, the drenched altar and even the trench full of water around it. And then the wrath of God consumed all of the false prophets, by the hand of His servant, Elijah. It was a glorious triumph for our Lord and His faithful minority.

We today must stand for truth, as did Elijah, regardless of the personal cost (and there was considerable cost for him, as we shall see later). There is a time to speak words of encouragement and a time act as fiery prophets, firmly denouncing wrong. We must bring all men and nations to a real confrontation between their idolatrous ways and the living God.

Love and goodwill are absolutely essential to our relationship with other men. But there are times when love and goodwill alone will not get the job done. There are times when mankind is so perverted that only a bold pronouncement must be made in the clearest possible manner, in words that every man can understand.



I, ONLY I, AM LEFT

I Kings 19

Elijah had experienced, firsthand, the loving protection and care of Jehovah. Trusting implicitly in Him, the prophet had stopped the formation of rain clouds, defended the Faith and defeated, permanently, a host of false prophets in the land.

King Ahab, aghast at having witnessed the downfall and death of the official state prophets, and indeed, the collapse of Baalism as the state religion, went running home to cry on his wife's shoulder. Consumed with anger, she vowed to take Elijah's life, immediately, as he had taken those of her prophets.

Let Down After Victory

So Elijah, frightened human being as well as bold prophet, turned tail and ran. Imagine such comportment from the same man who had called down fire from heaven! On second thought, it isn't so strange after all. One of our most dangerous moments, as far as faith is concerned, is that period of letdown after a notable spiritual victory. I know this to be true in my own experience, I come out of a great campaign, Bible encampment or other high point in our work here in Brazil, exultant but tired. Suddenly, that noble purpose had been achieved, or reasonably so, and I find myself temporarily without a new goal. So I'm a ripe subject for Satan, grumpy and critical. Or, I'm fearful of new goals, having so soon forgotten how my Lord had given me victory over the last one.

Surely this is the way it was with Elijah. So he ran away, fearful for his life; not just away, but far away, into the wilderness of Judah.

Poor, dejected ex-hero! He sat down under a bush and prayed for death! When it was slow coming, he grew even more weary and fell asleep; surely a drugged sleep of emotional exhaustion.

Not Abandoned By The Lord

But the Lord had not abandoned him. As he slept, an angel prepared him a meal. Having eaten it, he succumbed again to sleep. Awakened a second time, he was provided a second time with heavenly food, God's messenger explaining that the journey was too much for him.

Sustained now by nourishment from God, he went on, forty days longer, into the heart of Sinai. Finally arriving at the Holy Mount itself, he entered a cave, to pass the night.

Things were indeed hopeless ... a price on his head, he was a fugitive from the mad queen's wrath. There were no more battles to fight. There was no more faith to defend. He was disappointed in himself and even in God, indignant at his unjust lot, totally alone...

But suddenly, the word of the Lord came to him: "Why are you here, Elijah?"

"Why am I here, Lord? I'm here a martyr for Your cause. I was so zealous for You, and look where it brought me. Everyone has forsaken You, killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars. I, only I, am left and now they're trying to take my life."

Elijah may have been through, but the Lord wasn't through with Elijah. So He ordered, "Go and stand on the mount. Face the facts, Elijah!"

Then, on Sinai, the Lord passed before him, not in a strong wind or earthquake, which shook the mountain and shattered the rocks. Neither was He in a consuming fire, which passed by. Instead, He appeared to Elijah with a still, small voice. Asked again what he was doing there, hidden out, he answered with the same worn out excuse that he had used earlier.

Much Noble Work To Do

But there was still much noble work for him to do. He was ordered to anoint a king, incidentally, over an enemy country, which demonstrates again that God rules in the nations of men. He was also to anoint a successor for Himself, Elisha, the son of Shafat. And he was reminded that he was not alone, after all, even in idolatrous Israel, for there were seven thousand others who had not bowed their knees to Baal. There was still a strong nucleus of faithful men in the country, but Elijah, in his despondency, hadn't noticed them. He should have, for he knew that Obadiah, Ahab's controller, was still faithful, and so were the one hundred prophets of God he had protected and sustained. But dejection is deadly; it blinds us even to our successes for the Cause and the souls who have already become faithful to the Lord.

To Elijah's credit, however, he pulled himself out of his desperate spiritual condition and got to walking. Now he had reasons again to live and serve. He had direction, positive direction. And he soon had a companion in his dangerous task, a disciple to prepare for leadership in God's task on earth.

Desire To Be Spiritual Heroes

What vital lessons we can learn from Elijah's life. We, too, are men of God, but our feet are still of clay. We really want to be heroes for Him and, in the heat of spiritual battle, very few of us willingly retreat but when the battle turns against us, as it will at times, and discouragement cuts us down, we run for our lives.

We feel that the Lord, or at least someone, has been most unjust to us. Here we were, dedicated to Him, at great personal cost, and the whole situation has turned against us. Our work is set back and many converts prove to be unfaithful. We are criticized, pressured and threatened, perhaps even run out of our area of labor. We look at the hosts of Satan about us, the idolatry and resistance against the Word, and we feel that we are the only faithful ones in our entire part of the world. Discouraged, we return home, where the "mount of God" can hide us.

But, brothers in the one Cause, He has never forsaken us. We need so urgently to seek Him in prayer and listen to His guiding voice. We need to spend time with Him, away from the constant pressures, in order to have our priorities and purposes straightened out. Who told us that our task was finished or that we could leave the field of battle? Rather, we should be fighting still, winning new battles and preparing co-workers to carry on, for our own spiritual strength and for the sure continuation of the work.

Back into the battle, then, “prophets” of God. The enemy is still there and still dangerous, but our Lord will provide us with reinforcements and all of the spiritual nourishment necessary for the fight.



THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL

II Kings 7

Elijah, God's mighty prophet, had returned to his Maker, riding a fiery chariot and lifted up by a whirlwind into the heavens. His assistant, Elisha, received his cloak and, according to the final request he had made of his master, received a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

So now Israel was without Elijah's powerful presence. But the Lord had provided a successor: Elisha, himself a noble, dedicated man of God, who immediately began to show his divinely ordained power. He parted the Jordan River, raised a boy to life and sweetened a poisoned broth.

Death In The Pot

"There is death in the pot!" was the dismayed cry of the company of prophets under Elisha's leadership. We, the Lord's messengers, as was Elisha, should be equally alarmed at the death that stalks so many pots today—drug and alcohol addiction, immorality in its most perverted forms, idolatry, spirit and devil worship, doctrinal errors of the most subtle and diverse kinds... There is death in every pot about us and we must cry out, to warn men of their danger. Only the meals of God's Word can successfully neutralize these evil influences. As men of God it is our solemn task to apply the Word, diligently and consistently, so that harm may be neutralized and only spiritual nourishment remain.

A Man Without Hope

Elisha's reputation soon spread, even to other lands. The Aramaeans, or Syrians, had captured a little Israelite girl, who became a servant to the wife of Aram's leading military commander, Naaman. This general was capable, dedicated and highly esteemed by his master, but there was one severe handicap in his life—he was a leper. Even to our present enlightened day, leprosy is dreaded and lepers are isolated from society. So talented, loyal Naaman was a marked man, a man with little or no hope for his life.

Filled with pity for him, the little Israelite slave observed one day to her mistress, "If only my master could meet the prophet who lives in Samaria, he would get rid of the disease for him."

So Naaman, clutching at any hope, reported this to the king, who wrote a letter to the king of Israel, asking him to cure Naaman. King Jehoram was thunderstruck! "Am I a God", he asked, "to kill and make alive, that this fellow sends to me to cure a man of his disease?" The king immediately saw in this request a plot to seek a quarrel against Israel.

"A Prophet In Israel."

But Elisha knew what was transpiring, so he reprimanded the king, saying, "Let the man come to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Soon General Naaman showed up at Elisha's humble home, retinue and all. Here was a golden opportunity for God's man to make hay politically. Such an event was worth a great deal of space in the local papers and could bring considerable prestige for him. But instead of putting on a show, Elisha simply sent out his servant, Gehazi, to instruct the great man to go down to the Jordan and dip

seven times in it. That was all, just obey a simple command!

No Instant Miracle

Naaman was furious. Nothing had gone as he imagined it. The prophet hadn't even shown the "decency" to come out and meet him. He hadn't worked any magic. There were no incantations, instantaneous cures, laying on of hands, ... And not only that, the Jordan wasn't even in the same class with the sparkling Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus. What possible good could come from dipping once, or even a hundred times, in the Jordan, let alone the senseless command to wash seven times in it?

And this is precisely the line of reasoning of countless modern men. They seek something magical in religion. They seek pageantry and excitement, instant cures, something magical and mystical. They seek religion on their own terms, not God's. They attempt to bypass the plain commandments of the Bible, on the basis that these are simple or meaningless, by their human standards.

Absolute Obedience Required

So Naaman reacted and it was only after much persuasion on the part of his servants, who were far wiser on this occasion than he, that he relented and went back down the mountains to the muddy Jordan, where he obeyed what the man of God had told him. Once, twice, three times he dipped and then four, five and six times, with possibly no visible results. Only after literally fulfilling the instructions given to him was he restored to health, in fact, better than health, for his flesh became as firm and rosy as that of a little child.

Obedience was the key. He had to show faith in what he was commanded and comply with it, totally, before he was cured. How often we desire blessings from the Lord, but without absolute submission to His will.

No Merchandising

Naaman learned his lesson well. He returned to Elisha and announced, "Now I know that there is no god anywhere on earth except in Israel." It took the most telling proof to convince him of this fact. But now he was so convinced that he requested two mules' loads of Israelite soil, apparently to build an altar of it or spread it out on the ground in his home country, in order to make sacrifices to God on that "holy" spot. He did vacillate a little, in reference to his accompanying the Syrian king to the temple of the god Rimmon, but otherwise, his new commitment seems to have been genuine. He even offered generous gifts to Elisha, as a token of his gratitude, but this holy man, unlike many healers of today, refused to reduce God's sacred works to the level of the market place. How could he put a price tag on this service, which had been accomplished by God's power and not his?

His servant Gehazi, however, was of a far different nature. Greedy for gain, he was dismayed at Elisha's magnanimity. So he went in pursuit of Naaman, fabricating a tale as he ran. Naaman, whose heart still overflowed with gratitude, generously pressed on Gehazi two bulging bags of silver and two changes of clothing. But this wasn't the end of the story. Elisha, seeing in his spirit what Gehazi had done, left him with these riches, gotten by falsehood, but also left him with an unwanted reward. The dreaded leprosy of Naaman was transferred to Gehazi and his descendants.

Several Human Types

So we see in this story several human types in operation.

For instance, there was the slave girl, whose trust in God and His servant, Elisha, set up the process by which her master was cured. Might we all have such simple, open faith, ready to be shared for spiritual healing. Then there was the foreigner, Naaman, idolatrous, skeptical and rebellious at first, but when converted, truly dedicated to God. His servants were common-sense men, who saved the day for him by sound reasoning. Oh, how the Lord's Kingdom needs men such as these, whose powers of persuasion bring men to obedience. Elisha is the noble picture of God's man, unassuming, concise, a totally firm and honest transmitter of God's will for man, and one who sought neither glory nor riches for himself. Finally, there was Gehazi, sadly the picture of some of God's present servants, who only function if they can see personal gain in it.

Which of these are we, fellow servants? What are our motivations? How great is our faith? How willing are we to share it, plainly and without strings attached, to others?



OPEN HIS EYES AND LET HIM SEE

II Kings 6:8-23

During the lifetime of Elisha, Israel's principle enemies were its own rebellion against God and its constant idolatry, along with the neighboring country of Syria. At monotonously regular intervals, Damascus would send out small units of its army to harass the Israelite border, or even launched against Israel full-scale armies, augmented by hired mercenaries.

Once, when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he announced his attack plans to his staff. But Elisha, made divinely aware of even the enemy leader's thoughts, warned the Israelite king. It wasn't long before the Damascan king realized that someone was informing the enemy of his military secrets. Summoning his staff, he was determined to find the traitor. But one of his ministers answered, "Lord king, none of us is guilty. The culprit is Elisha, the prophet, who tells the king of Israel everything you say, even in your own bedroom."

Plot Against Elisha

The king was in no mood to permit some "religious fanatic" to impede his invasion plans. So he sent a strong force of chariot troops to surround the city of Dothan, where Elisha was staying at the moment, intending to capture this troublesome prophet.

The next morning, Elisha's disciple went out into the town and saw the enemy forces in the distance. Dismayed, he hurried back to his master, asking him, "Which way are we to turn?" Elisha's answer is a classic of

faith in his eternal God's resources: "Do not be afraid, for those who are on our side are more than those on theirs."

A Victorious Fact

Those who are on our side ... what an uplifting, victorious thought! Even though we may appear to stand alone, surrounded by spiritual enemies, pressuring us and seeking to destroy us, we can be certain of the final outcome. Often, we are mechanically dependent on numbers, but they mean little to the Lord. He can win with a multitude, with three hundred men, with a dozen followers, or even with one faithful servant. His forces are often invisible, even to the eyes of faith, but they are nonetheless present. The odds may appear to be hopeless and the battle may seem to be going against us, but we have no reason to fear, for those who are on our side are always more than those who are on the side of evil.

Think for a moment of World War II. The Third Reich's juggernaut seemed invincible, as it rolled over Europe. It dominated the land, the air and the sea. But final triumph went to the forces that appeared so pitifully weak in the beginning of the conflict. How a war begins doesn't necessarily give any indication of its final outcome.

Let us never forecast the final outcome of our life-and-death struggle against the forces of evil. The battle is far from over and the Lord has not yet deployed all of His troops for final victory. They are beyond numbering, just as Elisha's enemies found out.

Open His Eyes

Returning to the alarming scene in Dothan, Elisha then lifted his voice in prayer to the Lord, asking, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see." When the young man's eyes

were opened to a new spiritual dimension, he saw the hills covered with horses and chariots of fire. A mighty host indeed had responded to the call of God's prophet. Oh, how blind we are! How seldom do we ever glimpse just how much power is available to us, as God's servants. The hills about us are covered with His divine forces and we cannot even see them. In fact, we may never even guess that they are there to protect us and guide our steps to final victory.

All we see is the size of the enemy's forces. We move about on a mission field and take a count of the hordes of unsaved; countless souls enslaved to superstition, false religion, materialism and ungodly ideologies of every kind. "Woe is me," we cry, "the task is impossible. We're one against millions. What can we possibly do to turn this mass of humanity from its present downward path to the Lord's highway?"

Not Alone

Alone, we cannot. But we are not alone. We have our Commander's heavenly legions arrayed at our side. This is what Elisha's disciple saw when the Lord opened his eyes. Oh, that He might open ours, to see as this servant saw and to take courage! Oh, that we might have our vision expanded, to see, in truly spiritual dimensions, the things our Lord would have us see!

But there is yet more to this stirring event in II Kings, Chapter 6. Just as Elisha had prayed for vision for his disciple, he now prayed for blindness, Elisha led it on a wild goose chase to Samaria, the Israelite capital, delivering alive every man into the king's hand.

The king, elated, wanted to kill the entire enemy force, but Elisha instructed him, instead, to wine and dine his military

prisoners, afterward sending them in peace to their own country. As a result, all raids on Israel ceased for a long period of time.

Enemies Forgiven

Notice how the Lord handled this delicate situation. Not a life was lost and no revenge was taken. Enemies were forgiven, fed and freed. How like the words of Christ, when He instructed us to give physical and spiritual sustenance to our enemies. (Matthew 5:39-42).

Humanity is lost and blind, lashing out even against its only possible source of salvation. We need spiritual vision, in order to see mankind's real needs and respond to them. And, oh how the world needs vision, to discern who God's prophets, and what God's way, really are. "Lord, open their eyes" should be our daily appeal to Him who can give (and remove) vision at will.



THIS IS A DAY OF GOOD NEWS

II Kings 6:24-7:20

Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, was a stubborn man. Time and again, he attempted to subdue neighboring Israel, only to have his efforts end in frustration. At the root of his failure were the Lord and His servant, Elisha, whose life was threatened by the enemy king.

So, after countless earlier attempts, Ben-Hadad called up his entire army and marched on Samaria. This was it: an all-out effort to destroy Israel's capital. The city was besieged, very successfully, because soon its inhabitants were starving, to the point where even the head of a dead donkey fetched a scalper's price. Things finally became so desperate that the inhabitants turned to cannibalism. Upon hearing this, the king tore his clothes but, instead of turning to God in repentance, cursed Elisha, the Lord's messenger, vowing to have his head. Oh, how we like to blame others for our problems and failures! How we tend to lash out at God, instead of tearing our spiritual garments in abject confession of our sins.

Open Spiritual Rebellion

The angry, distraught king believed in living up to his vows. He sought out Elisha at once and cried, "This is the Lord's doing. Why should I wait any longer for him to help us?" He had never trusted in the Lord before. It isn't surprising at all that he denounced Him now. The Lord's hand was not too short to reach Israel, nor His eyes and ears closed to the nation's plights. It was simply a case of open spiritual rebellion, faithfully reflected in the king's hard attitude. If God really existed, He hadn't turned a

hand to help. No need to wait any longer ... Take things into your own hands.

A Remarkable Prophecy

But suddenly, Elisha announced the most remarkable prophecy. Today, the people were giving all they had for a handful of beans. But tomorrow a simple shekel would buy a household's needs of both flour and barley!

The king's minister, a shriveled soul without an ounce of faith in him, exclaimed, "Even if the Lord were to open windows in the sky, such a thing could not happen!"

Elisha had the final word for this poor little man: "You will see it with your own eyes, but none of it will you eat." God's care and blessings surround us, heaped up and running over, but how often we fail to even see them, let alone feed upon them. At least, this man was allowed to see Providence at work.

Beggars always congregate at key points of movement in a city, and Samaria was no exception. Four lepers—castoffs of society—were staked out at the city gates. With conditions as they were in Samaria, these unfortunates could expect no help from that quarter. Desperate, they saw death stalking them from hunger, as well as from disease. In the middle of such an urgent crisis, they resolved to go over to the enemy, knowing they would probably be rejected there too, or even executed. But any kind of action was better than awaiting a horribly inevitable end in the city.

So as night fell, they quietly slipped off to the enemy encampment. But much to their surprise, they found it entirely abandoned. Not a soul remained to watch over the wealth of goods and equipment piled here and there.

Victory Without Human Resources

The Lord, who doesn't necessarily depend on human resources to win His victories, had arranged in the dead of night the noise of a great host of chariots and horses. The Syrian army, immediately recognizing the ominous sound, abandoned even their horses and fled into the darkness, each man seeking to save himself.

Here then, were four starving lepers, in the midst of an encampment rich with food and spoils. Amazed and greedy for sudden and wholly unexpected gain, they began to loot tents, hiding all of the valuables on which they could lay their hands.

A Day Of Good News

But these four, although the very dregs of Samaria's society, still had a conscience. They began to question what they were doing, even though looting a vanquished foe was perfectly normal. Their fellow citizens were in a helpless state. While in the enemy camp, the four lepers, having gorged themselves, were busy seeing to their own interests. But then, conscience began to eat at them. Looking at each other, they decided:

“What we are doing is not right This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait till morning, we shall be held to blame. We must go now and give the news to the king's household.”

The king and his staff were understandably skeptical of the lepers' report. But one wise counselor suggested that a party be sent out, to see if this was a trick, to lure them out of the city. So two men were ordered to investigate the matter. Returning, they reported that the Syrian army had indeed fled, in its haste casting off equipment as far away as the Jordan.

The Prophecy Fulfilled

The next day, just as Elisha had predicted, a shekel purchased both flour and barley, to assuage the people's hunger. And, again, as Elisha had predicted, the king's lieutenant saw it happen, but never lived to enjoy it, for he was trampled underfoot by the starved populace.

What was the comment of the four lepers, standing in the midst of blessings and knowing that their countrymen were starving? "This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves!" Oh, my brothers in Christ, this, more than ever, is a day of Good News, of the Lord's *eternal Good News*. This is a day of salvation, a day of heaven's windows opening and pouring out immeasurable spiritual blessings. How can we possibly keep this to ourselves? It is too good to hoard. It must be shared with starving humanity. Human beings are dying of spiritual hunger, never knowing that nearby there is food and to spare. Whose fault is it that they know nothing of the Bread of Life? It is primarily ours, for we have eaten of this Bread and know where it is to be found!

Too Urgent To Wait

The need is too urgent for us to delay. We dare not even wait until "tomorrow". If we do, only we are to blame for the resulting calamity.

This is a day of Good News. We cannot afford to guard the Bread of Life within the four walls of a church building, private home or individual heart. We cannot keep it to ourselves. Let us hurry to every Satan-besieged city in the world, crying out, "There is no more reason to go hungry spiritually. We have found Bread and want you to eat of it and live!"



LET JUSTICE ROLL ON LIKE A RIVER

Amos 5:4-6, 24;7:14-17

Happily for those of us of humble origins, the Lord uses the small and “unimportant” people of this world to fulfill His purposes. We applaud noble Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul, but we need to recognize also the contribution of humble fishermen like Andrew, Peter, James and John. And also, the contribution of such men as Amos, the herdsman and tree-dresser from the village of Tekoa.

Accused Of Presumption

Amos was accused of presumption by Amaziah, king Jeroboam II's chief priest of Bethel, a center of idol worship. This prophet, Amos, was even given the “There isn't room enough in this town for both of us” routine, being ordered to get lost in neighboring Judah, where he might find things more to his liking and where, perhaps, his dire prophecies could no longer be heard by the evil leaders of Israel. “Go away,” Amaziah cried, as if Amos's departure would neutralize the truth of his message.

But simple, courageous Amos answered:

“I am no prophet, nor am I a prophet's son; I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me as I followed the flock and said to me, ‘Go and prophesy to my people Israel’. So now listen to the word of the Lord...”

The Unqualified Prophet

And Amos, not qualified by any human standards to be God's messenger, proceeded to spell out the doom of Israel. The nation would be plundered and destroyed, with all of its more capable residents shipped off to die in a foreign land. Why? Because of its incessant rebellion against God. Because of the very spirit that motivated Amaziah to stop up his ears against the divine message and attempt to deport the messenger.

No, Amos was not a Doctor of Theology. He was not even educated or smooth in his delivery. He was a man from the countryside, perhaps with the odor of his sheep and of his soil still about him. But he had been given an assignment by the Lord Himself, and although his task was unrewarding and even quite dangerous, he felt compelled to fulfill it "Listen to the Word of the Lord" was his call. He must preach what God had put into his heart to preach, even though the message was certainly not designed to win friends. Rather, it was intended to shock Israel and to influence it to turn back to Jehovah.

Preaching For All Messengers

How often we assume today that preaching is for polished pulpit man, prepared for years in acceptable schools.

Nothing of the kind! Preaching is for all of God's messengers; for every man who feels responsible for sharing his Lord's message, regardless of the messenger's ability or prior achievement. Of ourselves, we are nothing. We shall never rise above the level of unprofitable servants. But He who created and called us can use those latent abilities existing within us for His glory. Who was Amos? A menial shepherd. But look what God did with and through him. So there is hope that great things may

be done through us also, not for our own glory, but to honor Him and advance His kingdom.

Message Against Softness

Amos had many urgent messages to share from Jehovah. Some were negative, such as his condemnation of the soft society of Samaria, in chapters four to six:

“Listen to this, you cows of Bashan who live on the hill of Samaria, you who oppress the poor and crush the destitute, who say to your Lords, ‘Bring us drink’ ... Shame on you who live at ease in Zion, and you, untroubled on the hill of Samaria ... you who loll on beds inlaid with ivory and sprawl over your couches, feasting on lambs from the flock and fatted calves...”

What an urgent message for our day of conditioned luxury! Woe to us, who have so much, expect so much more and share so little with a starving, dying world.

Important Positive Message

But Amos also had an important positive message, for Israel’s day and for ours. In chapter five he appeals to the people of Israel:

“Resort to me, if you would live, not to Bethel ... if you would live, resort to the Lord, or He will break out against Joseph like fire...”

Israel’s trust was in its idolatrous worship and not in its divine Deliverer. Yet the nation felt that it had really found the essence of joy. “Man, this is living” must surely have coursed through its collective mind, as it prostrated itself before its images and was swept on into self-indulgence and the most despicable orgies, in the name of religion. But the Lord says through Amos, “If you really want to live,

come back to me. What you are doing is not living, it is a form of suicide.”

Life In The Lord

Countless humans today resort to their drugs, exotic philosophies and sensual pleasures of every possible description, assuming that this is living. But it isn't; it is really suicide. Life is in the Lord, and in Him only. Jesus tells us that He is life, real, lasting, eternal life. (John 14:6). Let us cry out, then, as Amos, “Resort to the Lord, nations of earth, if you want an abundant, purposeful life.”

Also, in chapter five, Amos trumpets, “Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” In this age of polluted politics, when lies appear to serve better than the truth, when justice is perverted and even great institutions fall to the moral blindness of bribery, how our world needs a strong prophetic dose of justice! How it needs a message of righteousness, to cure the spiritual and moral sickness that eats at it as a cancer!

Source Of True Righteousness

True righteousness may be found only in Christ. Let His right and His truth; let His moral standards and His salvation flow like a crystalline, unpolluted stream (a rarity these days, in both the physical and spiritual realms), to slake the thirst of countless souls parched for morality and godliness.

Why is our world so sick? Why have sexual perversion and other hideous signs of moral decay taken a hold on all peoples? Because we have failed to keep the stream of Eternal Righteousness flowing. Countless lands are receiving little or none of its benefits. When shall we return to the fountain, clear the springs, and open the waterways, so that righteousness may really flow to all men?



GO TO NINEVEH, THAT GREAT CITY

Book of Jonah

The short book of Jonah is remarkable in many more respects than the fact of Jonah's having been swallowed by a great fish. For example, in this brief narrative, we find the most direct case in the Old Testament of divine intervention in the spiritual affairs of nations other than Israel and Judah. Nowhere else in the Old Testament narrative does God show as clearly as in Jonah His sovereignty over all nations. Nowhere else does He demonstrate as graphically His forgiveness of penitent Gentiles. For this reason alone, the book plays an especially important role, anticipating as it does the Lord's eventual mandate to go and call all men of all nations to repentance.

A Case Of Ethnocentrism

Jonah was an Israelite through and through. He had been reared to believe that all other peoples were to be scrupulously avoided, for fear of spiritual contamination. And besides, everyone knew that God's love extended only to His chosen people, Israel. What was intended originally to protect Israel from idolatry and moral corruption had been perverted into a severe case of ethnocentrism.

Imagine, then, Jonah's utter consternation, when the word of the Lord came to him, commanding that he go to Nineveh, capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire, which dominated the world of that day. Few armies have ever demonstrated any greater ruthlessness than the Assyrian and few nations have been more violent. (Jonah 3:8).

Based on Jonah's fears and prejudices, Assyria was the very last city on his list of receptive areas.

So here was the prophet, ordered to go into the Assyrian lion's den itself and cry against it, for God had declared, "its wickedness stares me in the face".

Obedience In Reverse

This was too much! As Jonah indicated later, he was afraid, especially that the Assyrians just might repent and be spared their so richly deserved destruction. So he went in the opposite direction, hurriedly taking a ship to Tarshish.

However, no man has ever succeeded in fleeing from God's presence or in ignoring His commands. He who controls all of the awesome forces of the universe let loose a hurricane that threatened to swallow up the tiny sailing vessel. It is difficult to imagine this, but Jonah was asleep in the midst of mortal danger—evidently with no conscience problem about his disobedience and flight, let alone concern for the multitude of condemned souls in Nineveh.

The captain gruffly awakened him, asking that he pray to his god, in the hope that perhaps some deity might give them a thought and save them. Ancient times were far different from ours. Just imagine! It was assumed then that all men had a religious faith, of one kind or another, to protect them in times of crisis.

The superstitious crew decided finally to cast lots, sensing that this howling storm had been precipitated by the crime of someone on board. This time their strange notion had a basis in fact, for the lot fell on Jonah, who readily admitted that he was attempting to flee from God.

He proposed that they throw him overboard, but the others, surprisingly just in the face of danger, at first refused. Only reluctantly did they finally agree to the suggestion of casting him into the sea, praying to their gods to be forgiven for their act.

Not Through With Jonah

Jonah was through with God, but God was far from through with Jonah. A great fish had been prepared to swallow him whole. Three days of churning in the fish's belly dramatically changed Jonah's outlook, as he fervently called on his abandoned Lord for deliverance.

Commission Still Before Him

When he was finally delivered miraculously from the fish, the chastised prophet still had to face his earlier commission to go *now, urgently*, to Nineveh and denounce it in God's own words. This time Jonah obeyed at once. The medicine he had been forced to take for his earlier rebellion was too bitter to risk taking again.

Arriving at Nineveh, he entered the formidable capital, a vast city that had spread out along the Tigris River for the amazing distance of three days' journey by foot. Its population is even indicated—at least 120,000 inhabitants, or perhaps even 120,000 children, plus young people and adults.

A Shaken City

Jonah tramped on into its heart, shaking the city to its foundations with his fiery preaching, so much so that every man in it repented. *What preaching that must have been!* Even the emperor-god himself stripped off his robes of state and put on sackcloth, decreeing an absolute fast for man and beast, as all of its citizens prayed to God with

all of their might. Not only this, they were commanded to cease and desist immediately from their habitual violence. Talk about repentance—this was the genuine article! And provincial Jonah, who really wanted to see Nineveh ruined, was highly disgruntled at this turn of events, muttering: “Exactly as I feared. That is why I ran away. Lord, I knew you were gracious and compassionate ... take my life: I should be better dead than alive.”

God's Continued Care

Still hoping to see divine wrath descend on Nineveh, Jonah stalked out of the city and sat down where he had a good ringside seat, except for the heat of the merciless sun. Even the flimsy hut he erected didn't help much. So this same compassionate God, who loved both Jonah and the Ninevites, created a quick-growing plant to shelter him.

But the providential plant withered away as quickly as it had appeared. Faint from the heat of the sun, Jonah regressed to his earlier tune: “I want to die; I'd be better off dead than alive.”

When interrogated about his attitude, he testily answered that he was mortally angry over the loss of his favorite gourd plant. Then the Lord retorted, with an answer that still haunts us today:

“You are sorry for the gourd ... a plant which came up in a night and withered in a night. And should I not be sorry for the great city of Nineveh, with its hundred and twenty thousand who cannot tell their right hand from their left ...?”

Modern-Day Jonahs

These four chapters abound with lessons for us today, don't they? Are we not much like Jonah, in our own ethnocentrism; our own snobbishness? Do we not studiously ignore many other less attractive nations of our world? Are we not prone to escape our Christ-given mandate to preach Him to all of the earth's great and small cities? And are we not stubborn, rebellious, vindictive and small-souled, just as Jonah? When God doesn't act as we think He should, do we not blame him and wish we could just curl up and die? Yes, we are still the same unforgiving creatures, with little room in our hearts for the world's hopelessly and violently lost.

Catalog Of Modern Cities

But there is yet more in this book to ponder here. If the Lord considered Nineveh a great city, which fact He repeated three times for Jonah's benefit, how must He catalog cities of today, which are ten, twenty, or thirty times larger? If He went to such lengths to insist that Jonah preach in Nineveh, to what lengths might He go to persuade men to preach in our present-day Megalopoli, with their populations of multiplied millions?

In our field of Brazil alone, the ten principle cities run from a million to more than ten million inhabitants each, with the vast majority of their citizens still bowing before pagan images. These are cities with populations tens of times larger than that of Nineveh, cities growing at explosive rates, cities hopeful for the future and yet, without hope. And these statistics could be repeated for most of the major nations of the world.

Nineveh was in Jonah's hands, to save or to destroy through his preaching. The present world's great cities are in our hands, to save or destroy. If we try to flee them, as

did Jonah, both they and we will be brought to ruin. How long will we run from them? How long before we enter them and preach repentance with all of our heart and resources?



A NEW SOWING IN THE LAND

Book of Hosea

“Go take a wanton for your wife” was the beginning of the Lord’s message to Hosea. What a message! Hosea, the newly called man of God, was commanded to go and pick out as his wife a common prostitute, one who had led a filthy, promiscuous life. A strange order for a prophet, wasn’t it?

Why This Command?

Why this command? God wished to show graphically to Israel how it had prostituted its relationship to its eternal Husband. And the lesson would not end just with marriage to this wanton woman, Gomer. More was to be taught yet in this unusual and, for Hosea, most trying relationship.

Before long, Gomer presented a son to Hosea. This child was to be called Jezreel, as sign that the Lord would destroy the kingly line of Jehu, because of the ruthlessness he had shown in exterminating, at Jezreel, the household of his predecessor, Ahab. And also, in the Valley of Jezreel, the Lord would bring to an end the entire nation, for its wanton disloyalty to Him.

Shortly Gomer, momentarily loyal to Hosea, gave birth to a daughter, calling her name Lo-ruhamah, which meant “not loved”. By this strange name the Lord intended to announce to Israel that its constant infidelity had killed His Love for the nation.

God's Love Killed

This daughter was followed by a baby son, who was named Lo-ammi, which meant "not my people". Israel had not only killed the Lord's long-suffering love, an extremely difficult thing to do, but had even caused Him to reject His people. If these people were truly God's children, they would not engage in the evils which they constantly practiced. So obviously, they must no longer be His possession.

But, praise the Lord, this isn't the dismal end of the story. Apparently, Gomer followed the downward path of the whole nation, leaving Hosea and returning to her former wanton life. But this time, she was so involved that, by herself, she could not be freed from her sinful slavery to some other man. Hosea was required by God to go out and publicly buy his own wife back. He must accept again the adulteress, forbidding her to have sexual relationships with any man, including her own husband, so that over a long period of time, she might become purified of her evil tendencies. All of this, too, had its parallel in the case of Israel.

A Wanton People Redeemed

God's wanton people, playing the adulteress, would eventually be redeemed by its divine Husband, purified in the fires of captivity and brought back into a right relationship to God.

A new covenant would be drawn up between the Lord and His people. Its terms would include the end of warfare against His will, so that all living creatures might lie down together without fear. He would betroth His people to His own heart, in lawful and eternal wedlock, in a state of unflinching devotion and love. In this spiritual relationship there would be a new sowing in the land; it would bring

forth abundant fruit from this spiritual marital relationship. And, instead of his people being unloved, it would be loved. Instead of being rejected, it would be restored to favor as His people.

Peace Out Of Suffering

Out of the miserable experiences suffered by Hosea and Gomer, would come eventual peace and prosperity for them. And out of the rebellion and severe punishment through which God's people must pass, would come eventual triumph for those who were faithful to the Lord.

These prophecies dealt in part with the restoration of a remnant of Israel, composed largely of exiles from Judah, to the land of Canaan. After seventy years in Babylonia, the chastised remnant would return to its home country, where there would be a new planting and new crops harvested. The very Vale of Trouble (destruction for its rebellion and captivity in a foreign land) would become a Gate of Hope, for through that gate the restored children of these lost generations would pass in their return to God's favor.

A New Seed In The Land

But Hosea's prophecies also dealt with a far higher hope, that of the restoration of a spiritual Israel; the establishment of a new Kingdom of Peace and the sowing of a new seed in the Land. This refers, of course, to the Kingdom of Christ, which would one day be established.

When the Lord's eternal Kingdom came, it brought an era of spiritual peace, or at least the potential of such peace. It was a Gate of Hope, eternal hope, for the world's countless souls passing through their innumerable vales of human trouble.

An Agricultural Kingdom

The Kingdom of Christ is partially agricultural in nature. God's spiritual Israel is to be a new sowing; it is to sow a new seed throughout the earth. Never before had such seed been planted. But now we, His seed, are to answer for the earth, as He answers for the Heavens. We are to reproduce abundantly, bringing forth unnumbered new souls for His harvest. He has no place for sterile seed or unproductive soil. He expects sowing and reaping. He awaits a bountiful harvest from this sowing in the land.

To Love The Unloved

Our eternal father wants to love the unloved. He wants to say to the millions who are not now His children, "You are my people," and He waits to hear them respond, "Yes, Lord, You are our God."

But how shall this ever happen, if God's "prophets" today are unwilling to buy back the earth's wanton souls or to graphically show them the message burning in His all-forgiving and all-encompassing Heart, regardless of the personal cost involved?

The book of Hosea concludes:

"Let the wise consider these things and let him who considers take note; for the Lord's ways are straight and the righteous walk in them..."



HIS GREATNESS TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Book of Micah

The world of God's prophets included Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Phoenicia, Edom, Israel and Judah. As pointed out in *The Missionary Message of the Bible*,⁴ this was:

“a divided, warring world of separate petty states, with diverse aims and conflicting interests. Each had its own national deity, which it employed rather than worshipped, and each of these tribal deities was considered to be merely one among many gods, with power limited to its own territory. These nations ... continually contending for national supremacy and for the superiority of their religion, produced crises in the affairs of the world and consequently in the life of Israel. It was usually in the midst of these crises that the prophets spoke.”

Actors In The Drama

Suddenly, the narrowly nationalistic Hebrew people were thrown irresistibly into the great world drama going on around them. In this tense situation, the prophets spoke out against Israel's idolatry and vices, calling on God's people to maintain a holy standard of righteousness, because of her obligation to all nations.

⁴ Cook, Edmund F., *The Missionary Message of the Bible*, p. 32.

These seers consistently warned that God's people would be dispersed and destroyed for their rebellion, but even in the face of the gloomy situation before them, they looked forward to a Golden Age of peace and spiritual prosperity. Through all of their messages runs a bright thread—the Messianic hope—a strong thread binding the faithful to their always true and forgiving Father.

A case in point is the prophecy of Micah, who came onto the scene of world turmoil during the reigns of Judah's kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and thus, was a contemporary of Isaiah.

Many Nations Attracted

After strongly denouncing the leaders of Israel and Judah for their crimes against their God and their own citizens, he turns to a more positive theme in Chapter 4, one also cited in Isaiah, Chapter 2:

“In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be set over all other mountains, lifted high above the hills. Peoples shall come streaming into it, and many nations shall come and say, ‘Come and let us climb up on to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.’ For instruction issues from Zion and out of Jerusalem comes the word of the Lord.”

Here is the Messianic Theme, the Hope of Israel, the call to all nations to turn to Jehovah God. Eventually, the Lord's Holy House would be erected high above all others, as a cathedral set on the loftiest mountain. It would be a world landmark; a beacon to which men of all nations would be guided. Many nations would come streaming to it, indicating its universality. By no means would it be a

tiny sect, hidden among the throngs of humankind, but a great spiritual magnet, drawing all peoples to it.

An Uncontainable Kingdom

The Lord's kingdom is for all nations; multitudes of all nations. It cannot be contained in any narrow, nationalistic mold. It is neither Jewish, Hellenistic nor Anglo-Saxon. Its very nature is missionary and only those of its followers who have an intense missionary zeal truly understand and support its purposes.

This mass advent to the house of the God of Jacob is for a definite purpose: "That he may teach us his ways and we may walk in His paths." The new Jerusalem, the church, is to be a fountain of instruction for lost men, not a private club for its exclusive membership.

Then in chapter 6, Micah echoes the Lord's case for Israel and all nations: "Up, state your case to the mountains; let the hills hear your plea ..."

State His Case

Applying these words to our missionary theme, we too, as God's modern day messengers, are under divine orders to state His case to all of the earth's mountains and hills, valleys and plains, continents and islands; the very pillars that bear up the earth. There are vast regions of the earth, however, where not even an echo of His case for salvation is heard. As Leviticus 25:10 commands, we are to "proclaim liberty throughout the land, to *all* the inhabitants thereof." (KJV). Are we really tolling liberty throughout the world, or merely ringing a feeble note here and there?

In chapter 7 the hope of the prophet, and that of all men, is only the Lord: "I will look for the Lord, I will wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me ... Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is my light."

God Will Hear

Yes, God will hear the penitent sinner, regardless of race or socio-economic status in the world. He who looks for the Lord will find Him. He who dwells even in spiritual darkness will find light in Him. But how much easier is his search, if a light-bearer comes his way.

"Once more," the prophet declares, "Thou wilt show us tender affection and wash out our guilt." For these nearly two thousand years since the death of His holy Son on the cross, our God has taken away the penitent's guilt. Where is there a God like Jehovah, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance?

Now let us turn back to chapter 5, where we find a specific prophecy about the birth and nature of the Redeemer, so long promised to fallen man:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, small as you are to be among Judah's clans, out of you shall come forth a governor for Israel, one whose roots are far back in the past ... He shall appear and be their shepherd in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall continue, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth ..."

What glorious news! In Him all men shall find pasture and peace. And in Him all men can continue safely, for now His greatness is to reach to the very ends of the earth. No lost sheep is too remote for His protective hand. Nor should any sheep be too remote for our concern and our sharing of Christ's salvation and security with him.



HERE AM I; SEND ME

Isaiah 6

Israel and Judah, brothers in crime, were on a whirlwind course toward destruction. Prophet after prophet had been raised up by the Lord to warn these two rebellion-hardened peoples that the end was near. The awesome Assyrian war machine was rolling in every direction, lubricating its track with the blood of hundreds of thousands of victims. The fearsome shadow of Assyria could be seen in the land, but it made no difference at all to idolatrous Israel and almost no difference to Judah. On with the dancing! On with the pagan feasts and orgies!

But the Lord still hadn't totally given up on Judah. There suddenly appeared on the prophetic scene another of His giants, Isaiah, son of Amoz and in all probability a man of royal lineage; a man of knowledge and culture. Isaiah witnessed Israel's downfall and continued to call Judah to genuine repentance, even long after Israel had been destroyed for its sins. He began to prophesy during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah, but it wasn't until the year of Uzziah's death that Isaiah received what might be defined as his formal call from the Lord.

Remarkable Lessons

This divine call, found in chapter 6, contains several remarkable lessons for all of us who would be called out and used of God for His noble purposes.

First, Isaiah had already been serving the Lord, but suddenly he received a much loftier vision of Jehovah's nature and his own relationship to it. A man may strive to

serve his Lord—somewhat ineffectively for years—but it is not until he is called in God’s time and way, through providential events in his life and spiritual development, that he comes alive for the Lord. This is certainly true in the case of Isaiah. He had believed in God all of his life, but now he knew Jehovah in a more personal way. He saw in a vision the Ancient of Days, high and lifted up, in all of His eternal majesty. Until we too “see” the Lord, high and exalted, we remain largely stunted in our spiritual development

A Man Of Unclean Lips

Our eternal God is holy. He should be approached with the utmost respect, rather than the casual, almost flippant way in which He is treated in our present world. Our response to the Lord God should be on the order of Isaiah’s response:

“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; yet with these eyes I have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.”

Face to face with our eternal Creator! When we sense His holy presence in our lives, we will prostrate ourselves before Him, realizing how very unworthy we really are, how filthy, how contaminated with the world. Moses removes his sandals on God’s holy ground. Isaiah cries, “I am lost”. The poor publican in the temple sobs, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Alone before our Maker, we cannot help but feel our unworthiness.

A Useful Instrument

But thanks to His forgiving nature, Isaiah was cleansed. A seraphim touched his mouth with a glowing coal from the altar, wiping away, at one stroke, his iniquities. Now he was sanctified, fit to stand before the

Lord. This cleansing never comes of ourselves, but rather, is a gift from the Almighty God. Paul cries out in Romans 3, "There is no just man, not one." Unclean, we are unfit for His service. But He has promised to wipe away our sin and to touch our venomous tongues, in order that we too might be useful instruments for the fulfillment of His purposes.

Send Me

Isaiah was now prepared to hear and obey God's mandate for him: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?" And from Isaiah's chastened, cleansed, receptive heart came the answer: "Here am I; send me." All that the "new" Isaiah needed was direction, for he was ready to follow the Lord's will, whatever the personal cost. And it would be costly. According to Jewish secular history and an indirect reference in Hebrews 11, it would eventually cost him even his life in God's holy cause.

Isaiah was not to be sent to some other land, but to his own stubborn people, with a message designed to finish turning most of them off:

"You may listen and listen, but you will not understand. You may look and look, but you will never know."

And for the rest of his long life, he preached repentance, restoration and most important of all, the coming Redeemer. How long was he to proclaim this message?

"Until cities fall in ruins and are deserted, houses are left without people, and the land goes to ruin and lies waste ..."

A Heavy Burden

What a burden to bear! He saw clearly the coming holocaust and was to warn his fellow citizens daily of its approach. Yet the nation would not listen, and for this cause, the land would be made desolate. Israel's only hope lay in the future restoration of a remnant of God's people and their salvation through the long-promised Messiah.

And now, what about us, God's often timid little spokesmen of today? First, He requires our renewed dedication, so that we may be vessels fit for His use. Dedication to His noble purposes must always be preceded by repentance and cleansing. Even if we have been in His family for years, we often lose sight of our sanctification and must be restored to our holy purpose.

When we have truly met God, high and exalted, we are prepared to respond to His call in our hearts. We will be ready to fulfill His will for our lives. We will be ready to answer, "Here am I, send me," regardless of how or to where.

Called To A Task

We may pay a high personal price for heeding His call. This doesn't really matter, because the Eternal God has called us to a specific task. We, like Paul, are compelled to obey, compelled by His holiness and majesty, compelled by the nobility of any task to which he sets us. Our message, as Isaiah's, may be difficult. It may fall, as that of almost all of God's messengers in Old Testament times, on deaf ears and dulled hearts. The field may be responsive or resistant. This, too, doesn't matter, for our assignment is from the Lord of Hosts.

The important thing for us is to be cleansed of heart and responsive to His call. When we see, with holy eyes, our responsibility set before us, let us answer, as did Isaiah: "Well, Lord, I'm a poor specimen, filthy of thought and word, but if You will wash me clean and can use me, I will be honored to go anywhere with you, to any task, lofty or lowly."



THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT

Isaiah 9

Isaiah's prophetic message included several basic elements. One of these was the same theme constantly trumpeted by the earlier prophets, and heeded in his day no better than in those of his predecessors: "You rebels against God, you idolators, your time is coming; every day it draws closer. The Assyrian and Babylonian 'locust plague' will soon descend on you, to strip the land of its cities and inhabitants."

Faithful To His Promises

Another constant theme was God's patience and love, manifested in the promised restoration to the land of a faithful remnant. Although Israel and Judah would be captured and carried off to pagan lands, the Eternal God would not forget His promises. Israel would once again be peopled by Israelites, this time chastened and more faithful than their fathers.

And a fourth theme was that of eventual salvation for the Gentiles. For example, in Isaiah 11:10, we read:

"On that day a scion from the root of Jesse shall be set up as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall rally to it, and its resting place shall be glorious."

Transmitter Of Light

In Isaiah, Israel is shown as a servant of God, to transmit His Light to a darkened world. The abundant turning of the Gentile world to God is conditioned on

Israel's sharing this eternal Light. In the Bible, darkness represents ignorance and affliction, whereas light represents understanding and resultant happiness. Israel's duty is made plain. She is to arise and give light to the nations about her, rather than follow in their darkness.

That Israel failed one of the real purposes of God in her history is sad, but this in no way obscures the Lord's eternal plan, which He pursued toward a well-defined end:

... Bring my sons and daughters from afar, bring them from the ends of the earth; bring everyone who is called by my name; all whom I have created ... All the nations are gathered together and the peoples assembled." (Isaiah 43:6-9).

"I will make you a light to the nations, to be my salvation to earth's farthest bounds." (Isaiah 49:6).

"... and the nations shall march towards your light and their kings to your sunrise." (Isaiah 60:3).

Light For All Nations

In Isaiah, chapter 2, in a passage identical to that already analyzed in Micah, chapter 4, we learn again of the Lord's intention that all nations should flow into His eternal kingdom. Finally, in chapter 9, we read this stirring promise:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; light has dawned upon them, dwellers in a land as dark as death. Thou hast increased their joy and given them great gladness ... for thou hast shattered the yoke that burdened them, the collar that lay heavy on their shoulders ... For a boy has been born unto us, a son given unto us to bear the symbol

of dominion on his shoulder; and he shall be called in purpose wonderful, in battle God-like, Father for all time, Prince of peace. Great shall the dominion be, and boundless the peace bestowed on David's throne and in his kingdom." (Isaiah 9:2-7).

Our Great Mission

Bringing men to the Light was to be Israel's great mission to the world, just as it is ours today. Never in all history have men walked in greater darkness, a darkness of death (often self-imposed). Our darkness today is political, material, philosophical, moral and spiritual, even in the midst of a supposedly enlightened humanity. But despite our technological advancement, our spiritual darkness is no less dense than it was thousands of years ago. More men than ever today walk along an unlighted path, strewn with every conceivable obstacle.

Light-Bearers By Nature

We are light-bearers by our very nature. The church exists as a universal mirror, to receive and transmit God's eternal light to every land and people. A mirror does not invent light, nor do we. We reflect it in our lives and in the good we share with others. Our task is to share life, to bring joy and gladness to those countless souls who have no real life or purpose. Our task is to shatter the yoke of spiritual slavery, which binds all men to eternal hopelessness. How can this yoke be broken? A child was born one day, in fulfillment of divine prophecy. In him was life, said John, and this life was the light of men. This eternal Prince came to show men the "escape corridor" from their world of eternal darkness to a new world of eternal light, all of which focused in Him.

Completed Light Circuit

But this animating light must be turned on in the hearts of men, just as a lamp must be turned on, in order to complete the circuit and give light. God's circuit includes Christ, the generator of Light, us, His transmitters, and lost men, His receptacles.

But lo, how feeble is the light we transmit! How many lands today still walk in perpetual darkness! How many great cities of the earth, such as Brazil's Recife, Salvador, Fortaleza and so many others, suffer a centuries-long spiritual black out. We grope through these great metropolitan centers, only to find more and more spiritual darkness.

The only reason for this tragic condition is not a lack of light, but rather, a lack of transmission. Will it really be possible to look back on our generation of light-keepers and declare truthfully: "The people who walked in darkness (in the Twentieth Century) have seen a great light; light has dawned upon them..."?

This light has dawned in some areas of the world, but in many others, the darkness is as profound as ever. What are we doing with the Light entrusted to us? And with the lands still so completely enshrouded in darkness?



THE HOLY HIGHWAY

Isaiah 35

Isaiah devoted many years to the development of at least three basic themes: That God's people would be destroyed for their sins, that a remnant of faithful would be brought back from captivity and restored to its traditional home and that, to this faithful remnant and to all humanity, would eventually come an eternal Redeemer. Both the second and third themes are intermingled in Chapter 35, where he described an arid desert blossoming anew and a holy highway that would lead God's chosen to safety.

Extensive Desert Region

Here in tropical Brazil, believe it or not, we have an extensive desert region, rocky, thorny and largely devoid of moisture, except on those rare occasions when the blessed rain falls and the parched land renews itself.

This desert, in the Northeast, is one of the most under-developed regions of vast Brazil. Two vital items it lacks for real development: water and highways.

Ancient Israel also lay in a region composed partially of desert, where wells were rare and where few roads existed. The nation was very cognizant of the barren wastes to its east and south. So the Lord used the national experience to teach, through Isaiah, an important lesson about the nature of the glorious future kingdom of the Messiah.

He began by describing an arid land, laid waste by conquest. But the day would come when the desert would blossom again and bear fruit, just as even the driest deserts of our own United States burst forth in awesome beauty after a spring rain.

A New Royal Highway

Suddenly, there would appear in this desert a new King's Highway, facilitating transportation across an otherwise impassable region. This would be a good highway, an agreeable highway, a safe highway, constructed according to the loftiest standards of its Designer. Along this expressway there would be no wild animals, no cattle crossings and in fact, no dangers of any kind.

This would be a highway constructed by God Himself. For this reason, it would be a Holy Highway. By the very fact of its holiness, this roadway would not be for all men, but only for the true people of God, the redeemed of all the earth. As freeways of today have limited access, even so this holy highway would be limited in its entrance ramps. In fact, it would have only one entrance, according to Jesus in John, Chapters 10 and 14. All men everywhere would be able to enter it, but only by its once approach ramp. Even a person of little understanding would be able to see and follow the Zion Highway, leading to Heaven itself, because this Way would be clearly marked.

Many Positive Results

This holy highway in a barren land would bring with it many positive results, just as the opening of the great trans-Amazon System here in Brazil will bring untold future results for this country and for the world. The desert would be turned into productive fields and suspended life would function anew. Even in the driest depressions on a desert, tiny shrimp remain in suspended animation, awaiting only a rain to become active and reproductive. So the Lord would open His saintly highway in arid hearts and peoples, bringing them into a state of spiritual productivity.

This passage tells us that where once there was little or no life, now life abounds. This holy way means spiritual life. Christ tells us in John 10:10: "I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all of its fullness." He proposes that all men live; that barren hearts blossom. Imagine yourself lost and at the point of death in a vast inferno of sand, when, with your last stumbling steps, you fall onto a highway, complete with shade, drink, food and everything else necessary to restore your life. This is the blessing of God's Holy Highway for lost mankind.

New Vision

Where there were blind men, now they see with a new vision. In the Bible spiritual ignorance is compared to blindness. This is why, for instance, that the Laodicean church was urged to anoint its blind eyes with healing spiritual salve, that it might again see. (Revelation 3:17-18). To discover and follow the Holy Highway signifies to see clearly. The daily prayer of every man should be, "Lord, help me to see Your Truth and to follow it with all of my heart!"

But there is yet more good news about this highway: Where there were deaf men, now they hear. Many deaf mutes have never “heard” about Jesus, nor entoned hymns of praise to God. Then, along comes a man with a “manual message” for these unfortunate souls and they discover an entirely new world. Suddenly, a light shines in their eyes and they begin to see. Spiritual deafness means refusing to hear God’s message. (Mark 8:18, Acts 7:51). But on this Holy Highway, those who once were deaf hear their Lord’s voice and follow Him.

Spiritual Cripple Healed

On this highway the lame leaps and the tongue of the mute sings. As in the case of the lame man in Acts 3:8, the spiritual cripple will be healed, leaping and praising God. Where in the past there was no praise to God, now ceaseless praise flows forth, as we see occurring in Acts 2:46-47. How often we have seen here in the field souls who had never sung any praise to God, but now, years later, these same souls know and love to sing a hundred hymns! Where they were once fierce beasts, now they are domesticated. Dangerous Sauls are turned into noble Pauls. Brute beasts are made safe for humanity.

A Happy Pilgrim

The pilgrim walking along this highway is happy. Here there is no wearisome load to bear, no new slavery under which to bow, but rather, liberty in Christ. There are no more dwarfing limitations to growth, but rather, opportunities. It is absolutely impossible to keep the Good News about this Way to ourselves. We must tell others that there is a saving Highway in this desolate world.

By way of this highway the redeemed will return to God, leaving behind their eternal sadness and their groanings of despair. They are now on a victorious route, as affirmed in Ephesians 5:27 and Revelation 19:1-2.

Away then with discouragement! Strengthen those weak hands, firm up those wobbly knees! Renew your resolve to bring other men and nations to this highway! Be strong, not afraid, for God himself built this Holy Highway and travels by your side along it, as each day you draw closer to your Eternal Home.



GOD'S SUFFERING SERVANT

Isaiah 53

On the day of man's first sin, our eternal, forgiving God had promised a Savior, to counter balance the evil that sin had released in the world. The promise was repeated time and time again, to form a scarlet Messianic Thread through all of the Old Testament.

Man's One Hope Corrupted

But perverse humanity had even corrupted this holy promise; the one hope for its sin-diseased soul. Men began to consider the coming Messiah either a God, and nothing more, or a man, and nothing more. Many, groaning under the yoke of political oppression, sought liberty by means of a new Moses or Joshua, who would lead God's people in a successful rebellion against their earthly masters. Many came to look on the promised Redeemer as another David, or another Solomon, who would restore the kingdom to Israel, reigning here on the earth over a glorious material empire.

Seemingly, it never penetrated the hearts of even God's chosen people, the Jews, that the Messiah would actually come to the earth as a simple servant. The very idea of an humble Messiah was foreign to their concept of how Jehovah operates. God could never be trampled upon by man. Neither could He suffer or die. The Messiah would, of necessity, be royal through and through. He must be all-powerful; a divine ruler; a powerful judge, to right the wrongs suffered down through the centuries by Israel.

A Graphic Description

And so developed a materialistic, political concept of the nature of the Messiah; in spite of remarkably clear passages to the contrary in the Old Testament. One of the most graphic of such references is found, of course, in Isaiah, chapter 53.

This hauntingly beautiful passage actually begins in the preceding chapter:

“... now many nations recoil at the sight of him, and kings curl their lips in disgust. For they see what they had never been told and things unheard before fill their thoughts.” (Isaiah 52:14-15).

Chapter 53 opens with this theme continued:

“Who could have believed that we have heard and to whom has the power of the Lord been revealed?”

Then, Isaiah proceeded to reveal the true nature of the Messiah: God’s Suffering Servant, who would bear humanity’s sins in His own crucified body.

According to Isaiah’s inspired description of Him, there would be nothing king-like nor soft and suave about this Redeemer. Our image of a weak, effeminate type of Christ could not be farther from the truth. This passage informs us clearly that there was no beauty of appearance, by men’s standards, to draw mankind to Him.

In the deepest abyss of human suffering on the cross, God’s Servant hardly resembled a worthy human being, much less a king. He was despised and spit upon; tormented by His oppressors. Those around His cross no

longer even bothered to look on Him as, callously, they cast lots for His robe.

Why did all of this happen, in the name of Eternal Purpose? Because we human beings had dragged ourselves into a state of sinful degradation and there was no way out of it. We had affronted both Deity and humanity. According to Romans, Chapter 1, we had perverted every human impulse, turning them into animal responses, and in the process, we had thoroughly abandoned our eternal Father.

Yet, praise His name, He didn't abandon His creation. He had promised, from the beginning, a permanent cure for our spiritual disease. He sent to us His Joy and Perfection, His only begotten Son, to take our place on that agonizing cross. We deserved to be nailed there, but He voluntarily became our substitute. He was lifted up, that we might be lifted up to the place God intended for His creatures. (John 12:32). He became the Lord's eternal Pascal Lamb (John 1:29), that through His blood all of us might be cleansed. Every stripe laid on Him was a stripe of healing for sin-sick humanity.

But this isn't the end of His story, for after His pain, He was bathed in healing light and after His disgrace, He was fully vindicated—made both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36). He was raised victorious and so, says Isaiah, He will enjoy long life and see His children's children; His spiritual descendants.

In all that He suffered for us, He also vindicated untold millions of His faithful followers, through bearing on His own shoulders the penalty of their guilt. This is a gift above human calculation. To give our life unreservedly to

our Savior and Lord is no price at all, compared to the cost He paid for our redemption.

Certainly, this message of eternal redemption, of Christ's having abandoned Heaven to free enslaved man and purchase him back for God, is Good News. Chapter 54 suggests that the Good News of redemption be sung aloud. We, as God's redeemed, should be breaking into cries of joy. Instead of holding in our freedom, let us proclaim liberty in Christ throughout the land, to all of its inhabitants. (Leviticus 25:10).

Yes, let us shout this message to all peoples. Let us enlarge the limits of our home and spread wide the curtains of our tent. (Isaiah 54:2). Let us break out of our confines right and left to claim all of God's world for Him. (Isaiah 54:3). Surely, we, as beneficiaries of such an awesome sacrifice as His, compelled by such depths of love, have history's most exciting and urgent message to transmit. If we do share His redemptive song with all men, our own spiritual descendents will possess wide regions of the earth, (vs. 3).

Our Father and His Holy Son have always thought in terms of every creature. The Lamb's blood has soaked deeply into our earth. Let us show our hopelessly lost world, then, what His unbridled love has done for it. Let us break into cries of joy over our Suffering Savior, who became our victorious Lord!

What do I see at the foot of the cross?
What do I see on that hill?
Stones splattered red from the blood of a man ...
Blood from a body so still!
Who is that one hanging there on the cross?
What has he done to be there?

Pure, he was killed by a mob for revenge—
He who was just, who was fair.
This is my view from the foot of the cross,
This is my vision of Him—
O may the years and the stresses of life,
This view of my Lord never dim.⁵

⁵ From the song, *At the Foot of the Cross*, written by the author.



A WITNESS TO ALL RACES

Isaiah 55

As we read the Book of Isaiah we can sense that momentum is building rapidly. We can feel the triumphant theme of eventual redemption in God's Deliverer, the Christ. We see Him sacrificed for us, but conquering death, to shine as the stars forever and ever. We hear God calling us to hope, to a renewed life, to new spiritual dimensions found only in our Redeemer.

And our hearts, so parched for lack of spiritual drink and so withered for want of spiritual food, respond to this new abundance provided by His Son.

Many, however, pass their lives at a purely material level, seeking satisfaction for their hunger by short term physical means. Bored and sick, they turn to alcohol, drugs, ... They seek diversion in sex, violence and crime. They marry, divorce and remarry, time and time again. They consult doctors and psychiatrists. They swallow thousands of pills. They seek out spiritualist mediums. They dabble in the most exotic oriental philosophies. They drown their sorrows in a mad cycle of work and play. Inflation eats up their savings. Their money buys less and less. And still they remain ill. Ill of heart and spirit; mere shadows of human beings, puppets on a string, restless waves tossed to and fro.

To such persons, and today's world is filled with them, Isaiah poses some very basic questions about their essential purpose in life!

“Why spend money and get what is not bread, why give the price of your labor and go unsatisfied?” (Isaiah 55:2).

Forever Hungry

All men wish to live abundantly. All have the compelling urge to get their money's worth out of every negotiation and out of life itself. Most, if not all of us, are forever hungry for something, but we are not certain for what. Who has never strolled to the refrigerator, moved by a vague desire to eat something, but closed the door again, not having found anything that tickled his palate? So we are with our spiritual hunger, moved by the desire for something solid and purposeful in life, but never quite finding it.

To all of us, then, the Lord extends His eternal invitation to stop wasting our brief life on things of an un-consequential nature; on that which is not bread and which therefore cannot satisfy our soul-hunger. He urges us to come and quench our thirst at the fountain of living water. (John 4:14). He offers us living bread, totally free of charge. (John 6:35). He pleads with us to listen to Him, to open our hearts to Him and thus, to receive eternal sustenance.

No Substance To World's Food

The world always says that its nourishment is best. It tempts us to turn aside from solid spiritual nutrition to the “junk” food of temporary satisfaction. But the Lord reminds us that the world's offer has no substance. We will only be laboring for that which is not bread, or, as Haggai put it:

“Consider your way of life. You have sown much, but reaped little; you eat but never as much as you wish,

you drink but never more than you need, you are clothed, but never warm, and the labourer puts his wages into a purse with a hole in it.” (Haggai 1:6).

Our living Father wants us to be well-nourished. He pleads with us to listen to His words, to eat of Him and live. If we will do this, He will cover us with His eternal Covenant, sealed by the blood of His Son.

A Witness To All Men

This sacrificial Son is a witness to all men, “a prince and instructor of peoples.” Spiritual sustenance—the Bread of life—was always intended to be shared. In Brazil beggars ask us daily for “pão velho” (old bread). They crave whatever leftovers we have, to keep their undernourished bodies alive. And of course, we do share, just as much as possible. But along with this material bread, we must never forget to share with others the true Bread of Life. This is what God wants of all of us, His family: That we generously share His Bread with men of all races. He wants Jesus the Christ to instruct all men and to be honored by them as their Prince.

This will only occur if we make Him available to all men. What does verse five indicate about this?

“... And you, in turn shall summon nations you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall come running to you ...”

How could it be made clearer than this? If we seek the Bread of Life, and share Him as we should, we will constantly be summoning other nations to Him. Many will listen and will run to us, to receive this eternal nourishment. Our Lord has granted to us this noblest of all tasks and has glorified us in it.

What Is Our Message?

What, then, is our message to all men?

“Inquire of the Lord while he is present, call upon him while he is close at hand. Let the wicked abandon their ways and evil men their thoughts. Let them return to the Lord, who will have pity on them, return to our God, for he will freely forgive.” (Vs. 6-7).

Our God will forgive the wicked, if they return to Him. But, as Romans, chapter 10 warns us, they cannot know to repent and return to God, unless they hear the redemptive message and its terms.

But we bog down in our own private mud puddle, miserable because some person, group, city or country didn't respond as we thought they should, or at least not on our schedule. This stirring chapter ends, however, by reminding us that it is God who sows His spiritual seed, through us, and it is He who sees the crop through to harvest. (I Corinthians 3:6-7). Be assured, then, that the Word which comes from His mouth shall eventually prevail.

Successful Task

We can stand firmly on His promise. His seed shall never return to Him fruitless. It shall accomplish His purpose, in His way and according to His schedule. It shall succeed in the task set for it, whether we immediately see this fact or not.

Therefore, we can always go out to the fields of this world with joy ... We can be led forth by Him with peace in our hearts. What a glorious blessing this is, and yet how often we lose sight of it.

No matter how “small” or “unimportant” we may appear in man’s eyes, if we are diligently sowing the Lord’s seed, cultivating it and reaping His spiritual harvest, we are of all men most successful. Isaiah reminds us, “mountains and hills shall break unto cries of joy.” Before us, and the eternal message we bring, the wild trees shall clap their hands and thorns will be replaced by pines and myrtles. What a noble calling it is to change wild beasts into peaceable men, to turn useless lives into abundant lives, and thus, to magnify the Lord’s holy name here on the earth. “Unperishable” is the word to describe our task. We can rest in the confidence that we are not laboring only for material bread, but for eternal sustenance. Whatever we do in His service does make a difference, forever! We can know, then, that our labor has implications for all eternity. For what nobler task than this could a “mere” human being hope?



YOU HAVE LISTENED TO MY WORDS

II Kings 22 and 23

Israel had been torn asunder by the Assyrian hordes: her most capable citizens and all of her riches had been taken away to Nineveh. Now only tiny Judah remained. Threatened on every hand, she should have learned a thoroughly sobering lesson from what had happened to her sister nation. She should have heeded the voice of God's holy prophets, sent once and again to warn the nation against its downward spiral. But their message died largely unheeded by the people. Even the noble Isaiah, who had so often encouraged King Hezekiah to walk faithfully before the Lord, had passed from the prophetic scene.

With Isaiah's influence no longer present, Hezekiah's descendants, Manasseh and Amon, ruled on the throne of Judah. These two despots were equal to the kings of Israel in their idolatry and rebellion against the Lord.

In The Footsteps Of David

Finally Amon was assassinated by his courtiers and his eight-year-old son, Josiah, came to the throne. This child, Josiah, was of a different cut from his father, for he is identified with such righteous kings as David, Asa and Hezekiah. In II Kings 22:2 we read that he "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord!" He followed closely in the footsteps of his forefather David, swerving neither to the right nor to the left.

The text is silent about Josiah's rule until his eighteenth year. Then suddenly, his reign began to

blossom spiritually, in a most remarkable way. Josiah had ordered the high priest, Hilkiah, to repair the temple, which had suffered great neglect during the previous two idolatrous reigns.

While this work was going on, Hilkiah reported to Shaphan, the king's adjutant-general, that he had discovered the book of the law in some remote, forgotten niche in the temple complex.

Shaphan read this sacred scroll, which, judging by later references to it, contained Exodus or Leviticus, or perhaps both of these books. He wasted no time in reporting this find to the king and reading it in his presence.

Immediate Measures Taken

Josiah was stricken over the words of the scroll, knowing that the people had long since forsaken its laws. In his distress he tore his clothes and fell prostrate before the Lord. But then, instead of remaining forever on his knees, he proved the genuineness of his repentance by ordering immediate measures to correct the many lapses in the nation's worship and obedience.

To his great credit, the king first sought the Lord's guidance before embarking on a restoration of the religious life of the nation.

God's answer to his enquiry came through Huldah, a prophetess, who informed the king's representatives that, because Judah had forsaken her true Lord and turned to idolatry, she would be destroyed. But the prophetess added:

“You have listened to my words and shown a willing heart, you humbled yourself before the Lord ... Therefore, I will gather you to your forefathers ... in peace; you will not live to see all the disaster which I am bringing upon this place.” (II Kings 22:19-20).

Josiah then proceeded to launch a reform that destroyed all vestiges of idolatry in Judah. But he didn't stop there. He journeyed throughout stricken Israel and swept out all of its remaining idolatry, including the infamous golden calf of Jeroboam in Bethel.

Then he returned to Jerusalem and organized the most glorious and worshipful Passover that had ever been held, even including those in the days of the earlier faithful kings of Israel. His heartfelt desire was to obey all that the Book of the Covenant had prescribed. Such was Josiah's zeal at reform and restoration that the Word records of him:

“No king before him had turned to the Lord as he did, with all of his heart and soul and strength following the whole law of Moses; nor did any king like him appear again.” (II Kings 23:25).

Bitter Harvest

But the Lord knew that Josiah's personal zeal still would not be enough to change the nation's ways and so not long after his death, Judah too reaped the bitter harvest that had been sowed for so many centuries.

The dedicated action that Josiah took upon hearing the Word of God is a stirring example for all of us who would be true to our holy calling. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that the Word often remains hidden in the dusty recesses of our own hearts, largely

forgotten and unapplied to our lives and those on whom we might have an influence.

If this is true with individuals, it is also true, on an even larger scale, with nations and mankind in general. Here in Brazil, for example, relatively few people have ever owned or even opened a Bible. Many have a superstitious fear of it, as a mystical book that cannot be understood by the common man. For these, the Bible is to be read and interpreted only by “holy” specialists. So for all practical purposes, the Bible remains hidden from society, a largely forgotten scroll in the temples and cathedrals.

Vital Keys To Restoration

But on those occasions when the Word is revealed to a lost society, some men at least react as did Josiah. They listen to the Lord’s words and obey them from the heart. We, the Lord’s Hilkiahs and Shaphans today, are vital keys to this process of awakening to the Word. We must open it and know of its content, in order to turn others to repentance and reform.

Our task, however, does not cease here. In addition to enlightening men about what God requires of them, we should be leading them in a purge of their idolatry and moral impurity and along with this, we should be guiding them in a restoration of the Lord’s true worship here on the earth. Josiah’s cleansing the land of its idolatry was a bold gesture of spiritual zeal, but it would have availed little without a restoration of true worship, to fill the void left by sweeping out idolatry. Social reform is good, but in itself is not sufficient. Neither is an iconoclastic (idol breaking) approach to spiritual reform. Destruction of false religion must be replaced, in all lands, by New Testament worship, which presupposes the establishment of the

Lord's church, of His memorial Supper and of all of the requirements He left for His Church.

Reform Needed

Our world today, as Josiah's world, is shockingly full of idolatry, even in the most "civilized" nations. It needs today, as in the days of Josiah, great reformers and restorers, to cleanse it and bring it back to the one God. And of course, to be such reformers and restorers, we ourselves must listen to His words. We must first be informed, convicted, and consumed with zeal for His cause. Oh, that it may be said of us, as it was of King Josiah, that no man turned to the Lord as we, with all of our heart and soul and strength.



A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS

Jeremiah 1:1-10

The dismal tragedy was being played out. The Lord had tried, century after century, to draw His chosen back to Him, but the nation of Judah continued to rebel against Him, despite witnessing the destruction of its sister nation, Israel, by the Assyrians. Now Judah stood alone, having abandoned even the Almighty, her only hope for safety, and was slowly being drawn to her inevitable end.

One Final Effort

But the Lord still made one final effort to turn these stiff-necked people to Him. He ordained a man to cry out against and weep over the senselessness and stupidity of Judah's course of action. This man, one of the greatest figures of the entire Bible, was the prophet Jeremiah.

This noble, suffering servant of God was selected even from before his birth to be a divine instrument. As we read in Chapter 1 of the Book of Jeremiah:

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

How awesome it must have been to the young man, Jeremiah, to discover that he had been appointed all the way along for the solemn and so very difficult task of pronouncing God's final pre-captivity message of doom on Judah. His reaction was entirely human. He answered the holy summons with this objection:

“Ah! Lord God, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

Excuses Invalid

Surely, Jeremiah considered this a just reason for not fulfilling the mandate given to him. But had he remembered his history, he would have known that the Lord does not accept our flimsy excuses. Moses begged off for lack of ability to speak fluently. But this did him no good. His God, who had created his tongue, gave him power to prophesy against the Pharaoh and the Land of Egypt.

Jeremiah's second excuse, that of immaturity, was invalid, also. The Lord had used Samuel and Josiah, both children, and the youth David, for His purposes. So the Lord stretched out His hand and touched the mouth of His hesitant young servant, Jeremiah. His was to be a task calling for strength and wisdom from above, which was given to him abundantly.

Then the Lord issued Jeremiah his commission:

“... you shall go to whatever people I send you and say whatever I tell you to say ... I put my words in your mouth. This day I give you authority over nations and over kingdoms, to pull down and to uproot, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant.”

Divinely Granted Authority

Some commission, wasn't it? No wonder Jeremiah was fearful. He was to go where the Lord led him and say what he was told to say, regardless of the consequences. He was to have the divinely granted authority to change the destiny of whole nations. But in face of this fearsome task, he was also told:

“Fear none of them, for I am with you and will keep you safe.”

This lonely prophet certainly needed assurance from the Heavenly Presence, because he was also told never to marry or to have children. He would be ignored by the people and slapped down by the king. He would be severely persecuted, even to the point of being flogged and left in a cold, muddy cistern to die. The general attitude toward him and his message is clearly seen in chapter 18, verse 18:

“Come, let us decide what to do with Jeremiah ... There will still be priests to guide us, still wise men to advise, still prophets to proclaim the word. Come, let us invent some charges against him; let us pay no attention to his message.”

His Land Destroyed

But perhaps the most difficult heartache that Jeremiah suffered was to see his beloved land slowly encircled, choked off and crushed, while his fellow citizens did nothing to change their ways. He not only saw destruction coming, but witnessed it happening, just as he and so many other true prophets of God had predicted through the preceding centuries and decades.

So Jeremiah and his eternal Lord were vindicated in all that had been announced by way of warning to the people. Jeremiah had been given authority over nations and, as he had spoken, so it came to pass.

God's Prophets Today

All true Christians today are God's prophets; in the sense of being His spokesmen. We have been given authority directly from the Word of Christ to preach to all

men, announcing to them their Savior and the terms of their salvation. We are divinely authorized also to preach His return, His Final Judgement of all men and nations and their eternal destiny. In a real sense, then, we are judges of the nations (I Corinthians 6:2). The Word we proclaim either justifies or condemns men for all eternity, depending upon their response to it. For this reason Jesus announced that He had not come to bring peace on the earth, but rather, a sword. (Mathew 10:34). His Word would judge and divide humanity (John 12:48) and so, when we divulge it to others, we bring them to a confrontation with the Master, which, as we have already suggested, has implications for all eternity, both for us and for them.

To Demolish And To Build

It is our solemn task at times, as it was in Jeremiah's case, to pull down idolatry and uproot superstition, to destroy faith in spirits and false gods, to demolish religious division and ignorance of the Word. Some take this phase of our task so seriously that they devote their lifetime to tearing down, even within the Church. But Jeremiah's commission did not end with demolishing, nor does ours. We are also to build and to plant. We are to plant the Word in open fields and hearts and to build up churches wherever we go. Only by planting and building can we counter-balance the negative aspect of our work, that of tearing down. Neither aspect by itself is sufficient. For example, he who only plants a new crop without first clearing the land of rocks and stumps can expect a pretty sparse harvest. On the other hand, he who only clears the land, without planting, can expect no harvest at all.

Sent By The Lord's Will

And one more observation is in order at this point. We rightly emphasize today the need for harvesting the ripe

fields of the world. But at the same time, we must never lose sight of the fact that the Lord sends us where He wants us. Jeremiah was sent to a most unreceptive people, to help precipitate her divine judgment. We, too, may be sent, not necessarily to the easier, riper fields, but to one that is antagonistic to the message. We may be received with open arms or with hostility. This doesn't matter, for if the Lord has sent us, we are authorized to be there and to fulfill His purposes in that land, whatever they may be. Nor does it matter if governments have officially closed their doors against our presence. As His prophets to the nations, we have authority over them and every right to proclaim His message in them, even to risking our lives for the sake of His message. It is our Lord who sends us, where, how and when He chooses. Let us rejoice in this holy sending, regardless of its personal cost in our lives.



LOOK FOR THE ANCIENT PATHS

Jeremiah 6:16-21

In our day we like to play the numbers game. Much depends on quantitative growth—attendances, contributions, baptisms, membership—to indicate success or failure on the part of a local minister and/or his congregation. By these numerical standards, some of the Bible's greatest figures could be considered failures. Noah, for instance, saved only his own family. Elijah's ministry was blessed with very few faithful followers. And Jeremiah passed a long, trying lifetime attempting to turn his people back to God, but at the end, very few had responded positively to his message.

Restoration Theme

One of the Lord's basic themes, as pronounced by Jeremiah, dealt with restoration. He urged Judah to follow the one true way that had been given them long ago by Jehovah Himself. This theme is clearly voiced in chapter 6 of Jeremiah's prophecy:

"Stop at the crossroads; look for the ancient paths; ask, 'where is the way that leads to what is good?' Then take that way, and you will find rest for yourselves."

"Stop," cried the Lord God. "You blind men of Judah are at a crossroad, the last one on the course you are taking. There is only one more chance for you to change direction."

But the people answered, "We will not."

Then the Lord lifted up watchmen, wise men of God who would direct them onto the Holy Highway. He urged them to listen for the warning trumpet call of these watchmen. But their consistent answer was, "We will not."

Because of their total rejection of the word of His prophets, God promised their immediate destruction.

This nation was dedicated to ill-gotten gain. Its favorite prophets and priests were frauds:

"An appalling thing, an outrage, has appeared in this land: prophets prophesy lies and priests go hand in hand with them, and my people love to have it so." (chapter 5, verses 30-31).

These "leaders" did no more than place skin-deep dressings on the near-mortal wounds of the people, all the time intoning, "All is well." (verses 13 and 14).

The Harvest Ready

All well? No, nothing was well with this people. And because Judah refused the last remedy offered to her (the restoration so desperately needed, which was her only possible roadway to salvation), the nation was ruined. The harvest of her scheming was ready to be gathered in. Judah would soon fall over the obstacles placed before her and would be brought to the ground, (verses 19-21).

And so Jeremiah lived to see the end of Judah and wept bitterly over the desolation of Jerusalem. Even as the Babylonian army besieged the city, Jeremiah had counselled surrender, because he knew that Jerusalem had been condemned for its sins. Nothing of the Old Paths had been restored. The ancient landmarks had been removed and there was no spiritual inheritance left for

those whose ancestors had erected these landmarks as permanent guidelines for the nation.

Israel was no more and Judah lay destroyed, simply because they had consistently refused to seek the Old Paths. Many a nation since has gone the same route of sin and rebellion, eventually falling disgraced from history's pages.

No New Theme

This restoration theme of Jeremiah was nothing new. It had always existed even from ancient times. The people of God had inherited a new land and the rich blessings of sonship. But, according to Judges 21:25; "... every man did what was right in his own eyes." Time and again, monotonously so, God's chosen turned from Him, and only by a restoration of right attitudes, service and worship were they freed from enslavement to neighboring lands.

Later on, Kings Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah attempted a restoration of the ancient worship, ordained by God on Mt. Sinai. The prophets called for true worship and sacrifice. Jeremiah pleaded with the people to look for the old paths and walk in them. After the captivity Ezra and Nehemiah led the remnant of Jews in a restoration of temple worship, sacrifices and priesthood, according to the pattern shown to Moses on the Mount.

Then in the New Testament John the Baptist, Jesus Himself and all of the Apostles called for a restoration of true spiritual worship. See, for example, John 4:21-24.

But man always remains the same, ever rebellious against the Way of Righteousness. Even before the end of the New Testament period certain leaders in the church

were attempting to lead others away from the One Way. (Acts 20:29-31, II Peter 2, Jude). In Romans 3:11-12 Paul reminds us that “all have swerved aside” from this pathway.

A Continuous Pattern

And this pattern has continued ever since. In the middle of the Second Century, early church father Tertullian found it necessary to preach restoration to a church already in the process of turning away from the Old Paths. Down through the ages other pioneers have arisen, with a dedicated desire to reform existing religion and/or restore men to the Way. The well known Reformation and Restoration movements of more recent centuries are only two of many such efforts.

Humankind has not changed. Whenever God has ordered, men have neutralized and countermanded His orders by their own traditions and doctrines. Today, as much as ever, our world is in urgent need of restoration to the Old Paths. Many proclaimed of the “Gospel” believe that a literal following of God’s commandments for the church, and for its work and worship, is no longer necessary. They argue that we need a “New Gospel for a New Age.” But the truth is that we need more than ever the One Holy Gospel proclaimed by Christ and His followers two thousand years ago. To be successful in God’s sight, our preaching today must include this ancient message of restoration:

“Stop at the crossroads; look for the ancient paths.”

We must be teaching all humanity to ask the right questions, such as, “Where is the way that leads to what is good?” True rest and peace come only from following Christ. As He tells us in John 14:6, He is the Way, the only

way that leads to life. And in Hebrews 10:20 we find that this is an ever new and living way.

Proclaim Restoration

God's modern day messenger, proclaim restoration to all men and all religions, because all have swerved aside. Men's highways lead in a bewildering confusion of directions, all of them dead ends. There is but one way that leads to that which is eternally good. Point it out clearly and consistently to all men and nations. Many will seek it, follow it and bless you for having given them a direction that led them to life.



FIRE IN MY BONES

Jeremiah 20:7-13

The prophet Jeremiah grew weary and discouraged. Most of the content of his message was of necessity hard and negative and was summarily rejected. So he complained bitterly to the Lord:

“I have been made a laughing stock all the day long, everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak I must needs cry out and proclaim violence and destruction. I am reproached and mocked all the time for uttering the word of the Lord.” (Jeremiah 20:7-8).

Not only this; his own supposed friends watched for his first false step, so that he could be trapped. Surely he felt just as Moses, Samuel and Elijah had felt before him: Ready to give up, even ready to curse the day they had come into the world. How many, many since their day have been trodden under by hard-hearted humanity! The Apostle Paul summed up his own experiences when he related:

“Hard pressed on every side ... bewildered ... hunted ... struck down ...” (II Corinthians 4:9).

Ridiculed And Rejected

We, too, experience such feelings, especially those of us out on some spiritual frontier of the world. We are often ridiculed, accused of being secret agents of the C.I.A. or otherwise misunderstood and mistreated. Our efforts are secretly undermined by a false representation of our teaching and purposes. We are exploited by those who

consider all Americans ripe for financial plucking. We are betrayed by modern-day Judases. We are abandoned by contemporary Demas', whose interests are more material than spiritual. We are victimized by thieves, wrapped up in mazes of official red tape, frustrated by what appear to be meaningless bureaucratic rules. We are ground down by inflation, language and cultural barriers, by the intense pressures of our work and even, at times, by active persecution. We must serve a society ignorant of God's Word and even ignorant of the fact of its ignorance. We must strive to open hearts that often could care less. We are far removed from loved ones and from supporting churches, which sometimes also abandon us.

Weary And Discouraged

So we grow weary and discouraged. All about us there are frightening monsters of superstition, false religion and idolatry to combat. We hammer away at these monsters, but they seem to loom larger and more threatening, rather than shrinking away. There are so many millions to reach and we are so very few. The odds against us are two or four or ten million to one. "What's the use of trying any longer?" we ask ourselves.

In his despair Jeremiah resolved to quit. He decided to cease preaching God's message and even attempted to shut his own Lord out of his heart, vowing:

"... I will call him to mind no more, nor speak in his name again." (verse 9).

This was his decision, but he was totally unable to put it into practice, for:

“... the Lord’s Word was imprisoned in my body, like a fire blazing in my heart, and I was weary with holding it under, and could endure no more.” (verse 9).

A Burning Fire In His Bones

There is the rub, Jeremiah! In your human frailty you wanted to give up; to stop your unending cycle of prophecies, especially since none of your preaching seemed to do any good. But you could not hold it in. When you tried, the Word became as “a burning fire shut up in (your) bones” (KJV). There was absolutely no way to bottle it up. It had to break out in yet more preaching, regardless of the difficulties confronted.

This same experience occurs in the life of every man who takes the Word seriously, especially if he has once proclaimed it. He knows the content of The Book. He carries a burden for souls. His conscience burns within him, if he fails to speak out for the Lord. For this reason I have difficulty understanding how any man can consider himself an “ex-preacher” or “ex-missionary.” If his calling was genuine in the first place, he can no more contain the holy message of God than a bucket can contain the ocean!

Short-Term Fire

Many congregations and messengers today are victims of a “short-termers” syndrome. They commit themselves to a mission of one kind or another, in one place or another, but their commitment is for two years or five years, rather than a lifetime. If the Gospel is worth proclaiming, it is worth proclaiming continually, year after year. If the message lives in the leadership of a church and in the hearts of its members, they cannot help but share it.

For that matter, how can any genuine Christian bottle up the Gospel? If he is really convicted by the message of Christ, he will feel the urgent, compelling need to go and tell others. If he feels truly blessed by the Word, he will be moved to share these blessings with those who have never experienced them. If he tries to hold back his witness, he will weary with suppressing it. He will feel that he is holding back the waters of a dam with his finger, an impossible task. Finally, he can endure it no longer and will begin, however haltingly, to relieve the pressure in his heart by sharing the message. Soul-saving is the normal outflowing of God's Word and blessings, from the saved to the unsaved. We are not generators of God's power; we are transmitters, receiving it and passing it along. If we try to store it up, we will experience a spiritual overload and resulting short-circuit.

Controlled Release

We can be confident in our power to release this fire in our bones, because the Lord who placed it there is also in control of its release and distribution. Jeremiah truly observed:

“... the Lord is on my side, strong and ruthless, therefore my persecutors shall stumble and fall powerless.” (verse 11).

Jeremiah committed his cause to the Lord and was able to overcome the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, the scattering of his people and all of the attendant horror and bloodshed. Let us, as Jeremiah, commit our cause to the Lord. Let us open our hearts and mouths, to release the intense spiritual flame that burns in our hearts and bones. Our cause is the Lord's and that eternal fire which burns in us and moves us out to the homes and hearts of the lost is also the Lord's. We cannot ignore its presence,

for it will neither burn out nor go away. Our only solution, as was Jeremiah's, is to let it consume us.

Burn On, Holy Fire

Burn on then, fire in our bones! Help us, O God, to become so weary with our selfish desire to warm only our own hearts at Your Holy Flame that we will catch fire in our souls and spread this flame from heart to heart. There are billions of souls shivering from lack of spiritual warmth. Use us, Oh Lord, as fuel, to thaw and warm their hearts for Your cause. May the zeal of Your house burn fiercely in us and consume us, Father, is our prayer in Jesus Christ.



A CONTINUING FIRE

The fire which Jeremiah felt, deep within his bones, to declare God's Word did not initiate with him. This same inner fire can be seen powering and moving Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea and Isaiah, all before the times of Jeremiah.

Nor did this *Fire In His Bones* go out when the spark of Jeremiah's life was extinguished. In the lives of God's men who followed him, we see the same eternal flame burning. After him would come on the prophetic stage such ardent giants as Ezekiel, with his messages concerning watchmen on the walls and dry bones coming back to life. Then we see the noble hero, Daniel, who lived and counseled through the reigns of six or seven kings (in two different world empires) and who prophesied about the coming Messiah and His eternal Kingdom. Following Daniel were the able administrators-reformers, Ezra and Nehemiah, with their valuable lessons for our day, and finally, as the Old Testament period ended, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

And the fire continues throughout the New Testament period. Its heat and light can be readily seen in John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, Stephen, Phillip, the apostle John and above all of these, in the eternal flame personified, Jesus Himself.

No, the burning message of redemption does not cease with Jeremiah, but goes right on flaming, brighter and brighter. The Lord granting me life and a tiny portion of that flame, I will attempt to follow this volume with yet

another, setting forth the flame that continued to consume God's messengers from Ezekiel and Daniel to Stephen and Paul and, I am persuaded, still burns in the bones of all dedicated men of God even today. The song which follows was inspired by the compelling sentiments expressed by Jeremiah and is a reflection of that eternal flame, burning in my own bones, that moves me to speak, write, and in all other possible ways, to share my Lord.



FIRE IN MY BONES

Words and Music: Glover Shipp
Jeremiah 20:9

Discouraged, I vowed that I would never more proclaim
The message of my Lord and King.
I felt the world no longer wished to hear its claims;
I'd cease to let the message ring.

REFRAIN: (Pause between hyphenated words for emphasis)
But — there — was — a — fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones,
A Fire in my bones to preach the Word.
Oh — there — was — a — fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones;
I could not help but share my Lord.

I argued, "But, Lord, not very many will accept
The message of redeeming love."
He answered, "Tell the world just how its Savior died,
And how He lives in Heav'n above."

REFRAIN:
So — there — was — a — fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones to preach the Word.
Oh — there — was — a — fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones;
I could not help but share my Lord.

I knew then I was compelled to teach this theme divine,
And lead all others to my Lord.
I went out to the lost, aflame for Jesus Christ,
And in my hand, His two-way sword.

REFRAIN:

Now — there — is — a — fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones to preach the Word.
Oh — there — is — a — fire in my bones,
A fire in my bones;
I cannot help but share my Lord.



THE GLOVER SHIPP FAMILY AT THIS TIME

The author, his wife, Margie,
and their youngest child, Cindy

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

- Born in Yakima, Washington, August 1, 1927, and reared in Western Oregon.
- Baptized by his father, C.H Shipp, in 1940
- Earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from Pepperdine University and did additional graduate work at Pepperdine, Fresno State College, California College of Arts and Crafts, and Harding College
- Married to the former Marjorie Mae Smith of Los Angeles, California
- The ships have five children, four sons and one daughter.
- Churches of Christ served included Beverly Hills, California; Dallas, Texas; Kerman, California; Pinedale, California; McDonald Ave., Richmond, California; and Richland Hills, Ft. Worth, Texas
- Has written for a number of papers over the brotherhood.

- Author of materials in several books, did the layout for Missionary Pictorial, and two of his more recent books include, God Answers His Mail and Fire in My Bones.
- A professional artist and advertiser, has served several prominent firms and has operated his own art and advertising service.
- Has served on the staff of Pepperdine University.
- Missionary to Brazil and member of the team that developed the "Operation 68" movement to Brazil.
- His address in Brazil is: Caixa Postal 1514, 30.000 Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

THE BOOK

As far as we know, this is the first such book printed in our brotherhood. It is therefore different, unique, and interesting. Above all, it is scriptural, spiritual, and inspiring.

Bro. Shipp does a superb job of tracing the theme of missions from Genesis to Jeremiah. He takes the great characters of the Old Testament, and the powerful stories that are woven around them, to show how God worked in their lives and of the purposes that he had for them. From those in-depth studies he draws lessons for our times to inform, encourage, and to prepare us to go on to greater things for the Lord's church and His cause.

This is a good for every member of the family and one that hopefully will be widely read. Its message is eternal and the purpose of it is to edify and to encourage the reader to dedicate his life to God. Surely it will lead many to a stronger faith and a more fruitful life for the Lord.

