

LESSON 1

Adam - Part I

Scripture References

- Genesis Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Meaning of the Name

- Adam means "earth."

The Creation of Man

- God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days, the last thing He made was man.
 - Adam was not born of earthly parents like us. He was made by God out of the dust (a lump of soil) of the earth as a full-grown man, not a tiny baby, and God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being (Gen. 2:7). He was the first man on earth, the first human son of God (see Lk. 3:38), created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27)
 - Note: We lost our sonship because of Adam's fall, but restored through the redemptive work of Jesus, the second Adam.
- * Note: God is a Spirit without physical body like ours. "Image" means "representation of God." "Likeness" means the "character or model of God." Here means that Adam was made in the moral and spiritual image of God, a free rational being, possessing something of God's knowledge, righteousness and true holiness before the fall.

Man's Three-fold Nature (Genesis 2:7; I Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12)

- Man is a creation of God who possesses a three-fold nature:
 1. Spirit - The dimension of man which deals with the spiritual realm, the part of man that knows God.
 2. Soul - The dimension of man which deals with the mental realm, man's intellect, the sensibilities, feelings, emotions and will. The part that reasons and thinks.
 3. Body - The dimension of man which deals with physical realm, the house in which we live.
- Man's soul together with his spirit makes him an immortal spiritual being. That is why the Bible teaches that man has an immortal soul!
- Animal has a soul and a body, but not spirit because God only granted the "breath of life" (the spirit) to man. Animals have souls because they have limited reasoning faculties which are of the soul. Animals also have affection, and this too is a part of soul.
- All plants and vegetation have a body only, because they do not have feelings or emotions, nor can they think.

The First Home in Paradise

- God told him to be fruitful and multiply, and subdue the earth; and made him master of the fish and birds and all the animals (Gen. 1:28).
- Note: man was a vegetarian until after the flood (Gen 1:29; 9:3-6).
- The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him (Gen. 2:18).
- And the Lord caused the man fall into a deep sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the place from which He had removed it, and made the rib into a woman, and gave the woman to Adam as his wife - this must be a very beautiful wedding in that Garden of Eden, the most beautiful place that ever existed; with birds singing, angels watching, God united them in holy marriage. And that was the first human home on earth (Gen. 2:21-25).
- The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20).

Man's Duty and Limit (Gen. 2:15-17)

- Man was to till the earth and keep it.
- Man was to obey God, or he would die.
- Man was given full permission of freedom in the garden with one simple, but significant limitation, that he was not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God is the Maker of all, everything that is in the heavens and on earth.
2. He made the first man, and all human life derives from Adam and Eve. All people in the world are supposed to be of one family under God.

Memory Bible Verse: Genesis 1:27, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

LESSON 2

Adam - Part II

Scripture References

- Genesis 3:1-24; Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15:21-22

The Temptation and Fall

- In Gen. 3:1, serpent was used as a pictorial and symbolic reference to Satan.
- Satan, the fallen evil angel, the adversary of God and His people and all that is good, made Eve doubt about God's word, "Did God really say that you must not eat fruit from any tree in the garden?" The woman answered,, "We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, but God told us, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You must not even touch it, or you will die.'" Then Satan made Eve defy God and listen to his big lie by saying, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:2-5).
- Thus, Satan incited the woman to unbelief and eventually led her to disobedience and rebellion. She took of its fruit and ate; and also gave some to Adam to eat.(Gen. 3:6).
- After Eve and Adam had eaten the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened and they suddenly became aware of their nakedness, and were embarrassed, so they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons, trying to cover their sin and shame; then they hid themselves, for they were afraid to see God (Gen. 3:7 -8).
- And God came and called to the man, "Where are you, Adam?" God already knew what happened; with a sad heart He was patiently and graciously seeking a lost man and his wife (Gen. 3:9-13).
- Ever since then, God has been trying to seek and save lost sinners (Lk. 19:10).

The Judgment of God

- After the fall of Adam, God pronounced judgment upon the offenders:
(1) The serpent, the devil, was cursed; (2) the condition of womanhood was changed in two respects: (a) multiplied pain in childbirth and (b) a status of subjection to her husband; (3) the ground was cursed to produce thorns and thistles; (4) man was to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; (5) physical death was to be the lot of all human beings; (6) man became separated from God, for the Lord drove the man out of the Garden of Eden; henceforth, sorrow, hardship, toil and death have become man's portion.
- Note: Genesis 3:24, "... God placed cherubim... to guard the way to the tree of life." Cherubim (plural of cherub) are winged creatures of some heavenly angelic order. They act as guardian for God and His interests (cf. Ex. 25:18-22; I Samuel 4:4; II Kings 19:15).

The Promise of A Savior

- In the midst of His wrath, God remembered mercy. The Lord graciously promised mankind a Redeemer and Savior. In Gen. 3:15, God said to the serpent, the devil, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He (the promised Redeemer and Savior) shall crush and tread your head under foot, and you will lie in wait and bite His heel."
- Note: this is the first promise of a Savior, picturing Christ's victory over Satan by dying on the cross to redeem us from sin - "He shall crush your head and you (the devil) will bite His heel."
- After this, God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). Here were two goats or lambs killed and sacrificed; they died and shed their blood for Adam and Eve; and their skins were made garments, instead of the tattered aprons made of fig leaves, to cover our first parents' guilt and shame. And years later, God's Son Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, came and died and shed His precious blood for us, to wash and cleanse us from sin and guilt. What a wonderful and gracious Savior we have in Jesus Christ!

Death through Adam, Life through Christ

- When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so everything began to grow old and die, for all have sinned. So Adam brought death to many through his sin (Romans 5:12).
- But Jesus Christ Who became a man, brought forgiveness and eternal life to many through His redemptive work on the cross. What a contrast between Adam and Christ!
- Adam died at the age of 930 (Gen. 5:5).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Obedience to God brings life and blessing; rebellion against God and disbelief in His word lead to destruction and death.
2. Yield not to temptation, resist the devil. Look ever to Jesus, He'll carry you through.

Memory Bible Verse: I Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

LESSON 3

Eve – Part I

Scripture References

- Genesis 2:18-25; 3:1-24; Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Ephesians 5:21-23

The First Woman to Live Upon the Earth

- Eve was the first woman, formed by God out of Adam. In Gen. 2:18-22, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a companion for him, a helper suited to his needs... So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the place from which He had removed it, and made the rib into a woman, and brought her to the man."
- Adam was directly created by God out of the dust of the earth, but Eve was fashioned out of a bone taken from Adam's side. It is noteworthy that she was not out of the man's head, to dominate him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side that she might be equal with him, from under his arm to be protected by him, and from near his heart to be loved by him.
- Eve was the first and only woman born (created) without sin. Coming directly from the hand of God, Eve had enjoyed an advantage no other woman has ever enjoyed; she was created sinless, pure and holy, with the divine image unimpaired - before the fall.

The First Woman to Be Called a Wife

- The first institution ever built and sanctioned by God was the home. He created Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden. This must have been the most beautiful place that ever existed, filled with all that was good and pleasant.
- But Adam was lonely. He needed what every man needs - the love and companionship of a good woman. So the Lord God put him to sleep and performed an operation upon him. When Adam awakened, he saw before him the most beautiful creature his eyes ever looked upon; and he exclaimed, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'Woman,' for she was taken out of Man (Gen. 2:21-23). And Adam fell in love with the woman at first sight and God united them in marriage in the Garden of Eden. This was the first home.
- Thus, woman means taken out of man to be man's companion and helper suitable for him, in other words, to be his wife.

God's Plan for Men and Women

- The way in which Eve was created indicates the intimacy, sacredness and inseparability of the marital state, transcending even that relationship which exists between children and parents. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

- The Lord Jesus was once asked whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife; Jesus answered the question by quoting the Genesis account of creation, "Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:3-12; Mk. 10:2-12).
- The Apostle Paul said the same thing in Ephesians 5:31, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Then in vv. 32-33, he compared husband and wife relationship to illustrate the love of Christ for His church, "This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (cf. Eph. 5:22-30).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Eve was a real person, created by the hand of God to become a companion, a suitable helper for Adam. Marriage was instituted by God when He declared, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him. "On seeing the woman, Adam exclaimed with excitement, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). Then in the following verse we are told that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). This shows that God's plan is for a man to be the husband of one wife.
2. God desires us to establish a Christian home; every one of the family must love each other and love God above all.

Memory Bible Verse: Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

LESSON 4

Eve - Part II

Scripture References

- Genesis 3:1-24; 4:1-2, 25-26; 5:1-5

Satan in the Serpent

- The relationship between man and animal in the Garden of Eden must have been very, very close and sweet before the Fall. Nature was not cursed before sin came in. Today, after Adam's Fall, man is beset by storms, earthquakes, flood, heat and cold, etc. He is attacked by disease germs. Most animals fear him, and many a beast would kill man. But we believe that in Eden the roses had no thorns, and there were no weeds or thistles in the field; and animals were man's best friends. We believe that before sin came in there were no convulsions of nature to threaten man or harm him. Everything was beautiful, pleasant; and all existed in perfect harmony.
- In Eden, the serpent was a beautiful and lovely creature before sin came in. Traces of that beauty remain today despite the curse. Every movement of the serpent is graceful, and many species are beautifully colored. We are also told that the serpent was more subtle and crafty and more clever, than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. But one day Satan entered a serpent, the most intelligent animal, to tempt Eve, causing sin and sorrow among mankind (Gen. 3:1 ff).
- Note: The Bible tells us very little about the origin of Satan. It seems to infer from Isaiah 14:4-17 (here the king of Babylon is set up as a type not only of the Antichrist himself who will come in the end-time, but of Satan, the great and final Antichrist. Note in v.12 that Satan was originally called the "son of the morning star or the son of morning in Ezekiel), and in Ezekiel 28:11-19 (here Satan is addressed through the king of Tyre) were told that Satan was once an archangel of great power and glory. But he became so proud that he wanted to exalt himself above God. As a result he was cast out of heaven, and became an adversary of God and His people and all that is good. He is also called the dragon, the ancient serpent (Rev. 12:33-17; 20:2), the devil (Matt. 4:1-2; I Jn. 3:8; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), the prince of demons or Beel'zebub (Matt. 9:34; 12:24), the god of this age (II Cor. 4:4), etc.
- Demons were a number of angels who were led by Satan in revolt against God. They were expelled from heaven, and became evil spirits. God permits Satan and his followers (demons) to go about in the world tempting people, acting as a mighty adversary; but one day, at the Second Coming of Christ, Satan and his followers (including demons and sinners) will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev. 20:7-10).

Satan's Deceitful Schemes

- Satan is the source of all evil and sin. We see him first appear in Gen. 3:1-5 in the serpent as "an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14). Note the way that Satan worked to tempt Eve: First, Satan tried to cast doubt on God's Word by arousing Eve's curiosity with a question, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the Garden'?" And the woman said to serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the Garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in

the middle of the Garden, and you must not even touch it, or you will die" Then Satan in the serpent replied with an outright lie, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

- Now the woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful, that its fruit was good to eat, and that it would make her wise. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of the fruit to her husband, and he ate it (Gen. 3:6). So Satan succeeded to lead the woman and her husband to unbelief and rebellion; and our first parents, Adam and Eve, would soon face the terrible consequences of their sin.

The Consequences of Sin

- Before the fall Adam and Eve were not ashamed of their nakedness because they were pure and innocent, free from moral wrong and without sin. After the fall they saw they were naked and became ashamed of themselves. So they made coverings of fig leaves to cover their nakedness, their sin and shame; and they hid themselves from the presence of God (Gen. 3:7-8). This shows that they found themselves not only physically naked, but far worse - with guilty consciences and perverted minds and now under the eyes of an angry God, Whose rule they had broken and Whose command they had disobeyed and Whose love they had betrayed! The Bible says, "... you may be sure that you sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23b).
- What were the consequences associated with the sin of Adam and Eve? First they had a sense of guilt as they discovered their nakedness and hid themselves from God. Then followed a sentence of condemnation: (a) The curse on the serpent - "... You will be cursed more than all cattle and all wild animals. You will crawl on your stomach, and you will eat dust all the days of your life" (Gen. 3:14). And so a beautiful and lovely animal became a writhing reptile as a result of being used by Satan; (b) The woman was next judged, and condemned to hard labor of childbirth and submission to her husband (Gen. 3:16); (c) The man was punished with the curse of the ground; and subsequently, hard labor, sweat, hardship, toil, sorrow and death were made his portion (Gen. 3:17-19); (d) Finally they became spiritual dead, separated from God; they were banished forever from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23-24).

God's Gracious Promise of a Savior

- The Lord God in His wrath remembered mercy. In Gen. 3:15, God said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; HE will crush your head, and you will strike His feet." (Note: The woman's offspring was God's promised Messiah, the Redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ.) Here we have the first promise of a Redeemer. Here the conflict of the age is predicted - a conflict between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. The Redeemer will finally bring ruin to Satan (HE will crush his head) and Satan's offspring will strike HIS heel (as Jesus suffered and died on the cross).
- And God was merciful to His erring children. His promise of a Savior was not only in word, for He immediately took action to provide a way of mercy, a way of pardon, a way back to paradise for sinners. In v.7, we read that "Adam and Eve realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." They tried to cover their shame with tattered leaves, but God killed animals and made garments of skins and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). The animals' innocent blood was shed against man's sin. The innocent had died that the

sinful might live. In this picture God had foretold us that one day an innocent Lamb (the Lord Jesus) would shed His blood on Calvary to pay for sin.

- After the expulsion of the guilty pair from the Garden of Eden, Eve became successively the mother of Cain, A'bel, Seth and other sons, and also daughters (Gen. 4:1,2,25-26; 5:1-5). We have no record of her other children apart from the three named sons.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Satan is real. He does not come to you with horns and hooks and pitchforks, but comes as a friend, as an angel of light. In the Garden of Eden, Satan came to Eve with a smile as a friend to show her how to be happy and wise like God. But he is an outright liar. The Bible says that all who tell lies belong to Satan, because he is a liar and father of all lies (Jn. 8:44). All Satan's promises are lies. All Satan's apples have worms. All Satan's good times ends in heartbreak and sorrow. Listen to what Jesus says, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).
2. The root of all sin lies in man's desire to be independent of God (which we call Humanism). Adam and Eve fell because they wanted to go their own way, to be their own boss, their own master. So did Satan. And as a consequence they sinned against their God the Creator; and brought ruin to themselves.

Remember Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Memory Bible Verse: Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

LESSON 5

Cain, Abel and Seth - Part I

Scripture References

- Genesis 4:-5:8; Luke 3:37-38; Hebrews 9:22; 11:4; I John 3:11-12

Family Background

- After God created Adam and Eve, He blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28a).
- We are not told how long our first parents' state of blessedness and innocence lasted. But Paradise was lost just because they listened to the voice of the Tempter (Gen. 3:).
- Some time after Adam and Eve were created, before they had any children, they sinned against their Creator and were expelled from the Garden of Eden. This means that Adam and Eve had no children until after the fall. Before the fall, Adam and Eve had no sin and they would not die; if they had children, their children would remain sinless and not die either.
- After the fall the whole race has been under a curse, and we were all born in sin. We hear David say in Psalms 51:5, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Again Paul told us in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." So we all inherited sinful nature and we are all sinners.

Adam's First Two Sons, Cain and Abel

- After the fall Adam and Eve had many, many children, but only a few names were recorded in the Bible. The first two sons born to Adam were Cain and Abel.
- Cain's name means "acquisition or possessed," for in Gen. 4:1, Eve said, "With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth (or have acquired) a man." Abel's name means "vapor," for his brother Cain murdered him and he vanished like vapor from the earth.

The Offerings of Cain and Abel

- Adam and Eve and their immediate children were no doubt all worshipers of God. Genesis 4:2 tells us that Cain worked the soil (as a farmer), and Abel kept flock (as a shepherd). They both worked and kept busy. However, they not only worked, but also worshiped. Their worship took the form of offering, and this must have always be the case. Worship is giving: giving of oneself, substance, talent, heart, and life to the Lord.
- Now we see Cain and Abel come to bring their offerings to the Lord: Cain brought some of the first fruit of the soil - his farm products; he approached God with his own work, his own achievements, whereas Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.
- Here Abel sacrificed his best lambs, the firstborn of his flock, and shed their blood as sin offering for himself. Abel acknowledged he was a sinner and made atonement for his sin, just as

we acknowledge we are sinners and accept Christ, the Lamb of God as our atonement for our sins on the cross.

- From the very first time, when Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord made garments of animal skins and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). God must have told them the meaning of animal sacrifice that blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sins. In Hebrews 9:22, we read, "in fact, the law (of God) requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."
- This is why in the O.T. times animals sacrifices were offered in the Temple; this is why Jesus offered Himself and shed His blood for our sins.

Cain, the First Murderer on Earth

- We read in Gen. 4:4-5, "The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favor. Because God rejected his offering Cain became very angry and very jealous of his brother; then he committed a terrible crime by murdering Abel (Gen. 4:5-8).
- So the first child became the first murderer. I John 3:11-12 tell us, "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous."

God's Judgment Upon Cain

- Soon after Cain killed his brother Abel, God pronounced punishment upon him as recorded in Genesis 4:10-14:
 - a) Cain was under a curse and driven from the ground.
 - b) Even though he worked hard, the ground would not be so easily and quickly yield its crop.
 - c) He became a restless wanderer, a fugitive on earth.

Abel, the First Martyr for His Faith in God

- Abel refused to be influenced by Cain; he died for his faith in God.
- In Hebrews 11:4, we read, "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Hatred and jealousy lead to murder; pride and self-righteousness keep us away from God.
2. We are all sinners. We all need Jesus to save us from sin, and make us children of God instead of the devil.

Memory Bible Verses: I John 3:11-12, "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belong to the devil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his actions were evil and his brother's were righteous."

LESSON 6

Cain, Abel and Seth - Part II

Scripture References

- Genesis 4:1-26; 5:1-29; Matt. 23:35; Luke 3:38; Heb. 9:22-28; 11:4; I Jn. 3:12; Jude 11

A Brief Review

- Why did Cain bring fruits of the ground as a sacrifice to God, while he knew all along from his parents' teaching that one must approach God by confession of sin as well as by the shedding of blood in the sacrifice of animals?
- Note: Blood sacrifice was necessary in O.T. times for man to approach a holy and righteous God in order to atone for his sins and restore fellowship with God. In N.T. times, we approach God through the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. We need no more animal sacrifices.
- When God killed animals and made garments of skin to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness and shame, He taught the significance of blood sacrifice (Gen. 3:21). Why then did Cain bring the wrong sacrifice in his hands and have the wrong attitude in his heart?
- The answer was that Cain was too proud to confess his sins to God. He thought that he could come to the presence of God and earn God's favor by his own achievement, and by the works of his hands.
- Abel, a shepherd, brought to the Lord fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock the best parts of his best sheep. Abel's offering expressed the surrender and gratitude to God. Above all, his sacrifice, in which atoning blood was shed, was his confession of sin and the expression of his faith in the Lamb of God Whom God had promised (Gen. 3: 15), and Who would come to take away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). Abel had faith in God. He believed that through his offering he would be forgiven, cleansed, and accepted in the presence of a holy and righteous God.
- Cain was a farmer who worked the soil. Abel was a shepherd who kept flocks. It was not occupation that divided the brothers before God; rather it was their attitude of what was pleasing and acceptable to God. Though they had been told of the necessity for a blood sacrifice as an expression of true faith, Cain defiantly decided to disregard God's will, whereas Abel feared God and did what was right and acceptable.

The way of Cain

- In Jude v.11, we read these words, "Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Bal'laam's error; they have been destroyed in Ko'rah's rebellion." Here Cain was associated with false teachers and wicked people who rebelled against authority, against divine revelation. In Cain began all false religion, the essence of which is man's coming to God in his own way - the way of Cain.

- Cain belonged to the evil one (I Jn. 3:12). He was wicked in life and in religion. He was a liberal, a humanist, in other words, an unbeliever.
- The way of Cain shows us:
 - a) Human thought (or reason) as opposed to God's Word
 - b) Human willfulness (rebellious will) as opposed to God's will
 - c) Human pride as opposed to God's way of humility
 - d) Human hatred and jealousy as opposed to God's love

The Righteous Abel

- The Lord Jesus in Matthew 23:35 refers to Abel as "righteous Abel."
- 1 John 3:12 says that Abel was righteous.
- Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel was a man of faith as well as a righteous man.
- The righteous Abel teaches us:
 - a) God is to be approached and worshiped through atoning sacrifice. This is important that today we approach and worship God on the basis of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross.
 - b) God is to be worshiped through atoning sacrifice by faith, not by lip service.
 - c) God is worshiped with an honest heart.
 - d) God is worshiped with a humble spirit.
- In Luke 18:10-14, we see two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector going up to the Temple of worship and pray. The Pharisee prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank you. I'm not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector there. I never cheat, I don't commit adultery, I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes of all that I get." The tax collector, with his head bowed low, beat his breast in sorrow, crying out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Then Jesus made this comment, "I tell you that this tax collector went home justified - forgiven and made right with God - rather than the Pharisee; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Seth, a Substitute for Abel

- Seth was born after Cain killed the "righteous Abel." His name means "substitute," for in Gen. 4:25 Eve said, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him."
- Seth was a God-fearing man. Gen. 4:26 says, "Seth also had a son, and he named him E'nosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord." This means that beginning with Seth and his children, people began to form a regular way of prayer and sacrifice to worship the Lord like those of Abel. In other words, Seth brought a spiritual awakening to the people of his day.
- According to Gen. 4:16-24, Cain was banished from the presence of the Lord, and his descendants were all irreligious; nothing is said about any of them serving the Lord.
- On the other hand, Seth feared and loved God. His descendants recorded in Gen. 5: down to No'ah were all people of godliness.

- Seth was given to Adam and Eve as a substitute for Abel in order that the Promised Messiah, Eve's offspring (Gen. 3:15), might be born through the only line.
- Luke 3:38 listed, Seth as one of the ancestors of Christ.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. We must come to God's presence, at home or in church, with a humble heart and right spirit.
2. We should form a good and regular habit to worship God, at home or in church, as did Seth and his children.

Memory Bible Verse: Matthew 23:12, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

LESSON 7

Noah and His Sons - Shem, Ham, Japheth - Part I

Scripture References

- Genesis 5:28-10:32; Matthew 24:36-39; Hebrews 11:7; I Peter 3:20-21; II Peter 2:5

Family Background

- Noah means "relief and comfort." Gen. 5:28-29, "When Lamech (la'mek) had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said 'He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.'" Here means that Lamech feared the Lord, trusting in God that this child would lead them to a better life under God's blessing.
- Nothing is known of Noah's early life. He descended from the godly line of Seth, the 10th man from Adam. All his ancestors recorded in Gen. 5: were all God-fearing people. The best known saint was Enoch (e'nuk) who walked with God for 300 years (Gen. 5:21-24).
- Noah lived in a time when the sons of God mixed with the daughters of men in marriage, and the wickedness of man was found rampant all over the earth (Gen. 6:1-13).
- Note: "The sons of God" in Gen. 6:2-4 refer to those descendants of Seth who feared the Lord, but whose children intermarried with women descended from the ungodly line of Cain, and out of this union they produced the Nephilim (ne'filim) - which means "giants." - who were strong, violent, tyrannous men of great wickedness.
- "The sons of God" mentioned in Gen. 6:2,4 were not angels, for Jesus says in Matt. 22:30 that angels neither marry nor given in marriage.
- Because of this marriage people had become corrupt. God declared in Gen. 6:3, "My Spirit must not be forever disgraced in man, wholly evil as he is. I will give him 120 years to mend his ways." So God waited patiently for 120 years before He sent the flood to destroy the earth.

The Conditions of Noah's Time

- Gen. 6:5-6 tell us that man's wickedness had become so great that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was sorry that He had made man on earth, and it grieved Him to His heart.
- The crime was rising rapidly across the land; the whole earth was filled with violence and became rotten to the core (Gen. 6:11-12).
- Then the Lord decided to wipe out mankind, including the animals and the reptiles and the birds. For the Lord was very sorry that He had made man (Gen. 6:7).

Noah, a Righteous Man

- Amidst all the evil and wickedness of men, Noah walked with God, and was righteous before God and blameless in his generation (Gen. 6:9).

- Noah was God's man and found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8).

The Command to Build the Ark

- God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them (Gen. 6:13).
- Then God told Noah to make an ark (a vessel) of cypress wood (or gopher wood, trees of pine family) covered with pitch (tar) to make it watertight. The ark was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high, divided into three stories about 15 feet high each. A window (skylight) about 18 inches high extended all around the vessel. A roof protected the occupants from rain and sun. A door in the side furnished entrance and exit (Gen. 6:15-16). The ark is similar to the proportions of modern ocean liner, estimated as 43,300 tons.
- The ark was designed for the accommodation of Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives (eight persons), and the animals which were selected to be preserved (Gen. 6:18-22).
- In Gen. 6:19-22, God commanded Noah to select two of each living creatures, a pair of every animal and reptile, also a pair of each kind of bird - a male and a female for the preservation of the species - and place them in the ark.
- In Gen. 7:2, Noah was told to take seven pairs of the clean beasts for sacrifice, for food and reproduction.
- Note: A general distinction between clean and unclean animals was made by the Law of Moses later. Some animals were recognized as fit for food and sacrifices, while others were not. Clean animals include animals of ox, sheep, and goat kind, etc. (See Leviticus 11: and note Deut. 14:4).
- The task of constructing the ark, gathering the building materials, storing food, etc., was tremendous. It may well have taken the labors of hundreds of people, and 120 years to complete the job. (Genesis 6:3 indicated that God patiently gave men 120 years to mend their ways.)
- Noah was 600 years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth (Gen. 7:6).
- Noah and his family, eight in all, were shut in the ark, with them were all the selected animals. Then all the fountains of great deep burst forth, and windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth 40 days and 40 nights and the waters rose higher and higher till all the earth was covered. But those in the ark were safe, because Noah had found favor in the eyes of the Lord....Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:8-9).

What Have We Learned Today?

- God hates sin and punishes the wicked.
- God is also loving and kind and merciful. He loves those who trust and obey Him, and gives the wicked plenty of time to repent of their sins, to mend their ways.

Memory Bible Verses: Genesis 6:8-9, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.... Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God."

LESSON 8

Noah and His Sons - Shem, Ham and Japheth - Part II

Scripture References

- Genesis 5:28 - 10:32

A Brief Review

- Remember why God decided to destroy the whole earth with a flood? When the descendants of Seth (children of God) mixed and intermarried with the descendants of Cain (children of the ungodly), the world soon became corrupt and wicked. God saw that all mankind was vicious and depraved and the earth was filled with violence; it deeply grieved Him to His heart. He was sorry that He made man on earth. He decided to clean up the wicked mess by a flood of waters (Gen. 6:1-7).
- Among all the wicked people on the earth only one man, Noah, found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). The Scripture tells us how Noah lived his life before the Lord (Gen. 6:9):
 - a) He was a righteous man - he lived an obedient life to God, a life that was pleasing in God's sight.
 - b) He was blameless among the people of his time - he lived an honest and upright life, a life of witness to God among those with whom he was associated.
 - c) He walked with God - he had intimate, close friendship and fellowship with God; he separated himself from worldly, sinful people, and devoted himself wholly to following God.
- God told him to make a big ship (the ark), then He kept Noah and his family, along with some selected animals, safe in the ship while the flood of waters swept over the land (Gen. 6:13 - 7:24).

The 120-Year Grace Period Before the Flood

- In Gen. 6:3 we read, "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit will not contend (or strive) with man and remain in him forever, for he is mortal; but his day shall yet be 120 years.'" The term of 120 years refers to the time yet to be given to mankind before the flood should come upon the earth. It was a grace period for man to heed God's warnings and mend his ways.
- During those years while the ark was being constructed, Noah was God's spokesman. He must have urged people to repent of their sins and turn from their wicked ways. But no one heeded his warnings. They all laughed at him and thought that he was out of his mind, trying to build such a huge ship. So they went on with their own way till the flood came.
- In Matt. 24:38-39, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them away." Imagine what surprise and panic it caused them when the flood did come!

The Terrible Flood

- Noah was six hundred, two months, and seventeen days old when the rain began to pour down in mighty torrents from the sky. All the springs (oceans) of the great deep burst forth, and the flood gates of the heavens were opened. And the rain fell on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights (Gen. 7:11-12).
- This Flood was not simply caused by a downpouring of torrential rain from the sky. The Scripture indicates that "All the springs or fountains of the great deep" were broken up. There must be earthquakes, tidal waves; and the ocean floors may have been raised up until the waters covered all the earth.
- The waters continued to cover the earth for 150 days. By this terrible flood, God reduced the earth to its original state of chaos and darkness as described in Genesis 1:2. In His great wrath, God sent a terrible judgment upon sinful, wicked mankind! "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

The Return to Dry Land

- But God remembered Noah and all the animals in the ark. He sent a wind to blow across the waters, and the floods began to go down. At the end of 150 days the water had gone down so much that the ark came to rest on one of the mountains of A'rarat in Arme'nia, E. Turkey, and N.W. Iran (Gen. 8:3-4).
- In the year 601 of Noah's life, on the first day of the first month the waters were drying off the land. And on the twenty-seventh day of the second month the land was entirely dry. And God said to Noah, "You may go out. Bring forth with you all the animals, birds, and reptiles, so that they may breed abundantly on the land, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth. Then Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives all went out, along with all the animals, reptiles, and birds, after being in the ark one year and ten days (Gen. 8:12-19).

God's Covenant with Noah - the Rainbow

- The first thing Noah did after he left the ark was that he worshipped God; he built an altar and sacrificed on it some of the clean animals and birds as burnt offerings to the Lord (Gen. 8:20).
- The Lord was pleased with the sacrifice and promised that He would never curse the earth again because of man, even though his thoughts are always toward evil from his earliest childhood (Gen. 8:21-22).
- God said to Noah and his sons, "I establish my covenant with you; never again will all the life be cut off by the waters of a flood;... This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature on earth. I have set My rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant between Me and all flesh upon the earth" (Gen. 9:8-17).

Note: (A) The sign or seal of this covenant was the rainbow across the sky. This was God's guarantee against a similar visitation. Scripture does forecast that the next universal judgment will take place by means of fire (II Peter 3: 10-11).

(B) Hitherto men were vegetarians, after the flood God allowed men to have meat also, but forbade them to eat flesh with blood (Gen.1:29; 9::3-6)

Noah's Three Sons - Shem, Ham, Japheth

- Shem, whose name means "renown," was probably the second son of Noah. He became the ancestor of Abraham, and therefore ancestor of Christ (Gen. 11:10-26; Luke 3:33,36).
- Ham means "hot or dark." He was the youngest son of Noah and father of Canaan. His indecency, when his father lay drunk, brought a curse upon Canaan (Gen. 9:20-27). Ham's generations went to the South, the continent of Africa; he became the ancestor of the dark races (Gen. 10:6-20).
- Japheth (ja'feth) means "beauty and enlargement." He was the eldest son of Noah (Gen. 10:21). His descendants spread north and west over the whole continent of Europe and considerable portion of Asia (Gen. 10:2-5).
- These three sons and their children repopulated the earth after the flood.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God always judges the wicked, those who hate Him and rebel against Him; but He always blesses the righteous, those who love and obey Him.
2. The ark saved Noah and his family because they believed and obeyed. Today Jesus has become our Ark (refuge from God's judgment); He saves us from sin and judgment when we believe and obey Him.

Memory Bible Verse: Genesis 9:13, "I have set My rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth."

LESSON 9

Abraham - Part I

Scripture References

Gen. 11:27-25:10; 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Act 7:2-8; Gal. 3:6-9, 14, 29; Heb. 11:8-12; James 2:21-23.

The Meaning of the Name (Gen. 11:26; 17:5)

- Abraham's original name was Abram, meaning "exalted father."
- His name was changed to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude," or "father of many nations," when God renewed His covenant with him to make him a father of many nations.

Family Background (Gen. 11:27-30; 17:15-18)

- Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldeans (Kalde'ans). Ur was an ancient civilized city near the Persian Gulf in today's Iraq. He was a well-to-do rancher with large flocks and herds and many servants. His father Te'rah died before they migrated to Canaan (Palestine.) His wife was Sarai, meaning "my princess." Later God changed her name to Sa'rah, meaning "princess," at the same time when Abram was changed to Abraham.
- Sarah was Abraham's junior by ten years. She remained childless till age 90.
- Note: Chaldeans were descendants of Shem who ruled in Babylonia from the 9th century till 539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar who died in 562 B.C. was a Chaldean King.
- Abraham was born several hundred years after the Flood. In the course of time, people had backslidden and forgotten God. The world had again become corrupt and idolatrous. Abraham was a righteous and God-fearing man; like Noah, living among the wicked people, he was deeply distressed by the idolatry of his days, with all its attendant evil practices.

God's Call to Abraham (Gen. 12:1,4)

- When Abraham was 75 years old he received a call from God to leave his native land. God said, "Leave your country, your relatives and your father's house to the land that I will show you."
- This simply means that God called Abraham to separate himself from his own people and friends who were idol worshipers. It means that God says, "Abraham, leave your old life behind. Come and follow and serve me in a land I am going to give you."

God's Covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3)

- When God called Abraham to follow Him, He made a covenant with him: "I will cause you to become the father of a great nation; I will bless you and make your name famous, and you shall be a blessing to others."

- Here we see that Abraham was selected to be God's chosen man of whose descendants the Promised Messiah, the Savior, would be born to bless the world. He was the first ancestor of the people of Israel.

Abraham's Obedience (Gen. 12:4-5)

- "So Abraham departed as the Lord told him..." Although his roots were entrenched in Ur's familiar, highly civilized culture, Abraham, age 75, moved his family and all his possessions to an unknown, strange land.
- Here we see how he trusted God's guidance and believed in His promises.

Canaan the land of Promise (Gen. 12:6-7)

- Shortly after Abraham arrived in Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am going to give this land to your descendants."
- And Abraham built an alter (a worship center) to offer his prayer of thanks to the Lord.

The Promise of Offspring

- Abraham was an old man, and his wife was long since past the time when she could bear a child. Since they were childless, God's promise to make his descendants a great nation was, in reality, hard to believe.
- Sometime later in 13:16, God renewed His promise, "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so numerous that they can't be counted."
- A few years later, this promise was repeated in 15:5, "Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that - too many to count!"
- Here God meant that Abraham not only would have his own offspring, but he would have spiritual children also.
- Gal. 3:29, Paul says that all who belong to Christ are Abraham's offspring.

An Enduring Patience

- Abraham must learn the lesson of patience, of waiting upon the eternal God. There were three things God promised: 1) a land (Canaan); 2) posterity numerous to count; 3) a spiritual seed (the Savior Messiah). It was many years before these promises were fulfilled one by one.

What Have We Learned Today?

- We must learn to have a complete faith in God, believing God will keep His promises even if it takes time, in the meantime we must live a life pleasing to Him.
- We must learn to trust and obey God. Do whatever He tells us to do, go wherever He wants us to, as He commands us through His Word in the Bible.

Memory Bible Verse: Genesis 17:5, "No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."

LESSON 10

Abraham - Part II

A review of Last Sunday's Lesson

- The main reason why the Lord told Abraham to leave his native land was that his own people were all heathen who worshipped idols and practiced immorality.
- Note: Years later Joshua told the people of Israel in his book 24:14-15, "...Throw away the gods (idols) your forefathers (Abraham's ancestors in Ur) worshipped beyond the Euphrates River (where Abraham's kinsfolk lived), and serve the Lord."
- Abraham alone was a worshiper of God. He protested against the idolatry of his times, and refused to follow his people's evil practices. According to tradition, he suffered bitter persecution for conscience' sake.
- First he left Ur and moved to Har'an, several hundred miles to the northwest. While in Haran, at the age of 75 he received a call from God to go to a strange place to start a new life, and God promised to make him a great nation.
- Abraham obeyed. He took his family and migrated to Canaan, believing that God would ultimately give this land to him and his descendants.
- However, in Gen. 15:1-3, Abraham became anxious about the promise of a nation being found in his descendants because he was an old man and childless. The Lord then in 15:4-5 reaffirmed the earlier covenant.

Abraham's Dilemma or Failure (Gen. 16:1-6)

- All human beings subject to failure, and Abraham was not excepted.
- In spite of God's repeated promise that he would become the father of a chosen nation, Sarah remained barren. When she was 75, and Abraham 85, after ten years in Canaan, she decided that the only way to realize God's promise was to present her Egyptian maidservant Hagar, by whom he could father a child (a kind of surrogate mother). Abraham gave in, and a year later, Hagar bore a son named Ishmael who would become the future father of the Arab nations (Gen. 21:18).
- Abraham made the mistake of rushing into a relationship without inquiring God. Later, Sarah would have her own promised child, Isaac, who would be the heir of Abraham's blessing. And these two families, Ishmael's and Isaac's were at enmity with each other from the very beginning. Generations to come would feel the constant pain of the decision they made in haste.
- Note: The modern Arab/Israel conflict began here, as the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Isaac comprise two nations respectively.

The Covenant Renewed (Gen. 17:1-19)

- Thirteen years of silence elapsed between chapters 16 and 17 since the Hagar affair. Finally

when Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah 89, God spoke to him again, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly."

- In this chapter Abraham and Sarah received their new names. (Their old names were Abram and Sarai.)
- Here also God promised that Sarah would bear a son whose designated name would be Isaac.
- In order to receive all these blessings Abraham must "walk before God and be blameless!"

The Arrival of the Promised Heir (Gen. 21:1-7)

- God promised to make Abraham's descendants a great nation that would become God's Chosen People. But the promised heir was a long time in coming.
- Finally, at the appointed time, when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90, Isaac was born.
- Imagine Abraham and Sarah's joy as they cuddled their precious and long-awaited child. Their home must have filled gladness, and their mouths with laughter.

The Crucial Test of Abraham's Faith (Gen. 22:1-4)

- The days went by and the child was in his teens. Abraham's love for his only son grew faster and deeper till he loved his son more and more, and loved God less and less.
- Then one day God said, "Abraham! Take with you your only son whom you love so much, and go to the land of Mori'ah. There offer him as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains. I will tell you about."
- What a demand God made! But Abraham was humble enough to be obedient. He was willing to give up his beloved son, to make his total surrender to God. What God really wanted was Abraham's heart and love, not Isaac's life. So when the knife was raised to slay Isaac, God intervened and saved the boy. And God provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac.

God's Blessing Flowed

- As a result of Abraham's unquestioning obedience, God's promise of his descendants as numerous as the stars of the heavens was once again reaffirmed.
- So God's blessings flowed, not only to his offering, the nation of Israel, but to the entire world as well, through his Seed Jesus Christ.

Abraham, the Friend of God (II Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23)

- Abraham's story of offering his son was written in tears and blood. His loyalty and obedience to God earned him the honor, "Abraham, My friend."
- There is no greater honor than to be God's friend. Yet such privilege is ours also when we have

the same obedience of faith in Christ; "You are My friends if you do what I command." (John 15:14)

What Have We Learned Today?

1. We learned that Isaac was a type of Christ "obedient unto death" (Phil 2:5-10); Abraham was a type of God the Father Who "spared not His only Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Rom 8:32; Jn 3:16); the ram was a type of substitution – Christ was offered as a burn offering in our stead (Heb 10:5-10).
2. As Abraham's spiritual children, we ought to share his faith as God-fearing persons, always ready do God's wil
- 3.. Be willing to offer our best to God for His love's sake.

Memory Bible Verse: John 15:14, "You are My friends, if you do what I command."

LESSON 11

Isaac - Part I

The Meaning of the Name

- Isaac means "laughter."
- When God told Abraham that Sarah his wife should bear him a son in his old age, Abraham laughed in his heart at such a wild promise! Should a child be born to a man 100 years old? And Sarah, a withered old woman of 90 - could she conceive and bear a child? Oh, if God would only bless Ishmael (the slave woman Hagar bore to Abraham.) But God said, "No, Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac, who shall surely fill your heart and life with laughter." (Gen. 17:15-19 - paraphrased)

Background Scriptures

- Gen. 17:19-21; 18:9-15; 21: thru 27; Heb. 11:17-20; James 2:21

Family Background

- God had ratified His promise and reminded Abraham that he would father a child. However, instead of waiting, Abraham and Sarah began to rationalize their situation, and their impatience produced a foolish plan.
- At Sarah's suggestion, Abraham took Hagar, the Egyptian maid and fathered a child named Ishmael. Abraham was 86 years old at this time (16:1-16).
- That child, Ishmael, would become the Arab nations (21:18). They eventually became enemies of the people of Israel.
- Fourteen years later when Abraham was 100, and Sarah 90, Isaac was born. His birth brought laughter to their aged parents.
- Isaac was the father of the twins, Esau and Jacob.

Isaac, the Promise Heir to the Covenant

- Before Isaac was born, God had made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation and all peoples would be blessed through him (12:2-3).
- As the years went by, God reaffirmed His promises several times (15:5; 17:4-8).
- A year before Isaac was born, God specifically promised that Sarah would bear Abraham a son and his name should be called Isaac, and God would establish His covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him (17:19,21).
- Years later, after Isaac was born, God renewed His covenant with Isaac in Gen. 26:3-5, "Do as I say and stay here in this land. If you do, I will be with you and bless you and bless your

descendants, just as I promised Abraham your father. And I will cause your descendants to become as numerous as the stars!... and they shall be a blessing to all nations. I will do this because Abraham obeyed My commandments and laws."

- Here we see that Isaac was the Promised Heir to the covenant which God first established with Abraham.

The Offering of Isaac as A Living Sacrifice

- Abraham must be overjoyed at Isaac's birth. His heart became affectionately entwined with Isaac as he watched him grow. Oh, how he loved his only son, the promised heir to the covenant!
- When Isaac grew to his teens, God tested Abraham's loyalty; He told him to take Isaac from Beershe'ba (where they sojourned) to the land of Mori'ah (in Jerusalem), a 3-day journey, to offer him up as a living burnt sacrifice.
- While we see Abraham's unquestioning faith in his obedience to God's command, we must not forget Isaac's complete confidence in his father, also his willingness to submit himself to God's will as a burnt offering.
- Because of this strong father-son relationship and the total surrender of their lives together to God, God's everlasting covenant was firmly established with them.
- In Isaac, we have a type of Christ, who gave Himself up to die for our sins.
- From the day of his surrender to death on God's altar, Isaac became a new creation, a dedicated man.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God is faithful, He never lies. Whatever He promised He will fulfill, if we wait on Him patiently and obediently.
2. We must obey God's Word in our daily walk with Him, even though we have to sacrifice our worldly pleasure and comfort, believing that He will bless us in the end.

Memory Bible Verse: I Samuel 15:22, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."

LESSON 12

Isaac - Part II

Isaac, the Rightful Heir to Carry On the Covenant

- There was no scriptural record of Isaac's early life, except that he was circumcised on the eighth day after he was born (Gen. 21:4).
- Note to the teacher: Simply explain circumcision to the children as a part of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. It was a religious rite as spiritual purification.
- As Isaac grew, his presence as Abraham's rightful heir brought him into conflict with Ishmael, his half brother by Hagar. The strained relationship compelled Abraham to send away Hagar and Ishmael. But God also promised that Ishmael would become the father of a great nation (Gen. 21:9-21).
- Ishmael eventually became the father of the Arabs.
- Isaac was the only rightful heir of Abraham to inherit the covenant which God first established with Abraham.

Isaac's Sorrow

- At the age of one hundred and twenty-seven, thirty six years after the birth of Isaac, Sarah died (Gen. 23:1). Sarah was a devoted wife and loving mother. She was a God-fearing woman, and her faith in the promises of God was strong.
- To Isaac, the death of his mother was a great loss. Although he was about 36 years old, he had always lived at home under his mother's loving care and devotion. And he was surely the subject of her constant hope and prayer.
- In Gen. 24:67, we are told of Isaac's sorrow on his mother's death.

Isaac's Comfort

- Abraham did not wish his son Isaac to marry a local Canaanite girl lest he be tempted or somehow tainted with the awful wickedness of the inhabitants where they lived (Gen. 24:2-4).
- So Abraham sent the eldest of his servants of his house (Elie'zer of Damascus - Gen. 15:2-3) who had charge of all that he had, to go to his own country and to his kindred to find a wife for Isaac. The faithful servant, led by God, came to the city of Nahor, home town of Abraham's brother, and brought back Rebekah, a beautiful young woman, a virgin, daughter of Bethu'el, the son of Nahor, to be Isaac's bride.
- Isaac loved Rebekah very much, and was comforted after his mother's death. It was a very beautiful story recorded in the 24th chapter of Genesis.
- Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to wife (Gen. 25:20).

Isaac and the Twin Boys

- For many years, Isaac and Rebekah were childless. And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and finally Rebekah conceived (Gen. 25:21).
- God's answer to their prayer was very striking. Rebekah soon found out that she was to have twin boys, and the babies were fighting each other within her. Then God told her that the two sons would represent two nations which were to be opposed to each other from the very first; and last of all, that the elder was to serve the younger (Gen. 25:22-23). Rebekah must have remembered what God said, and determined to carry out God's will.
- Note: Esau was also called E'dom (Gen. 25:30; 36:8-9). He was the father of E'domites in the hill country of Se'ir, South of Palestine. Edom had long since ceased existing.
- When the time came for Rebekah to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first came out was red, all his body was covered with reddish hair; so they called him Esau (meaning "red"). Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so they called him Jacob (meaning "grabber" or "supplanter" or "usurper"). Isaac was 60 years old when the twins were born (Gen. 25:24-26).
- The elder twin, Esau, a skillful hunter, was Isaac's favorite son; although God had declared that the older should serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). Jacob, a quiet man, staying among the tents, was Rebekah's favorite.

Isaac, a Man of Character

- The Bible has many references to Isaac's good character:
 - (a) His submission and trust in God as he let his father offer him as a burnt sacrifice (Gen. 22:6-10).
 - (b) His meditation and prayer life (Gen. 24:63).
 - (c) His devotion to his wife (Gen. 24:67).
 - (d) His meekness, peaceful nature - even though he was provoked, he did not fight back (Gen. 26:20-22).
 - (e) "The Fear of Isaac," mentioned twice by his son Jacob in Gen. 31: 42, 53, means that God was deeply revered and greatly adored and worshipped by Isaac. He was indeed a very God-fearing man!

What Have We Learned Today?

1. In Isaac, we see how God fulfilled His purpose when he submitted himself to God (on the altar as a living sacrifice) and trusted in Him.

2. Isaac was a good son to his parents and a faithful follower of God. We ought to follow his example in our Christian life.

Memory Bible Verse: Psalms 119:10, "I seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands."

LESSON 13

Jacob - Part I

Scripture References

- Gen. 25:20-34; 26:34-35; 27:1-40; Hebrews 12:6

The Meaning of the Name

- Jacob means "grabber" or "supplanter."
- Jacob was also known as Israel which means "a prince."

Family Background

- Jacob was one of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah and the younger brother of Esau.
- He was named Jacob because, at the birth of the twins, "his hand took hold of Esau's heel" as a grabber (Gen. 25:26). He seemed to be born a grabber as he later grabbed his brother's birthright (Gen. 25:29-34), and his father's blessing (Gen. 27:1-29), and his father-in-law's flocks and herds (Gen. 30:25-43;31:1).
- Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. He was his mother's favorite while the father preferred Esau, the active, skillful hunter.

Esau Sells His Birthright to Jacob

- Jacob must have been taught by his mother what God told her before the children were born that the elder should serve the younger, that Jacob should have the birthright instead of Esau. So Jacob had been waiting for an opportunity to make the bargain.
- One day Esau came in from hunting, tired and hungry, Jacob chanced to have pottage of lentils ready cooked, but relieved his brother's necessities only after he had compelled him to surrender his birthright. And Esau traded his birthright for a meal of red lentils. Thus Jacob made use of his brother's hunger and grabbed the birthright; thus Esau despised his birthright (Gen. 25:29-34).
- Note: In Bible times, in Israel, as in the rest of the ancient world, the birthright of the firstborn son included temporal and spiritual blessings; it entitled him to inherit a double portion of his father's property; it gave him the right to succeed his father's rank and position, as head of the family or tribe (Duet. 21:15-17).
- In this case, the birthright made Jacob the heir to the blessing of promise (Gen. 27:29), which included the future possession of Canaan, and of covenant fellowship with his fathers' (Abraham and Isaac's) God (Gen. 28:4).
- A birthright might be forfeited on account of misconduct (I Chronicles 5:1), or sold to a younger brother, as Esau did.

- After he sold his birthright, Esau, at the age of 40, married two Hi'tite women (Ca'naanite natives) against his parents' will and made life bitter for them (Gen. 26:34-35). It seemed that he was a dissolute character who neither feared God nor regarded man.

Jacob Receives Isaac's Blessing

- Now old Isaac schemed to make his favorite son Esau the legal head of the family over his younger son Jacob, although he knew that God had already designated the younger as the head instead of the elder, even before they were born (Gen. 25:23).
- On the other hand, Rebekah was very conscious of God's promise. She had prayed when the twins struggled in her womb, and God revealed to her: "The sons in your womb shall become two rival nations. One will be stronger (Israel) than the other; and the older shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:23).
- One day, in Isaac's old age when his eyes were dim and he could not see, he said to Esau, "Go out into the field and kill an animal (a deer) and prepare it just the way I like it - the tasty food that I love. Bring it to me that I may eat. Then I will give you the blessing as my first-born before I die." Here we find Isaac trying to thwart (alter or change) God's purpose by transferring the blessing from the one (Jacob) for whom it was designated by God Himself (Gen. 27:1-4).
- Next we find that Jacob, aided by his mother Rebekah, personated Esau and deceived his father and obtained the blessing (Gen. 27:5-29).
- Note: The blessing here in this case carried the full force of a modern day testamentary bequest.

The Parental Dilemma

- According to ancient custom, the first-born son was entitled to receive the blessing from the father. Isaac was legally and perfectly right as he tried to give Esau the blessing, but in so doing he ignored God's purpose.
- Note: Why did God reject Esau? The answer is found in Heb. 12:16, "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son." - Here the indication is that Esau was an immoral and godless man.
- Rebekah's main concern was to preserve for Jacob the blessing that God intended for him. She saw that the purpose of God was in danger, so she took the matter in her own hand and helped Jacob obtain the blessing by cheating his father. Both mother and son thought God as unable to carry out His own purpose, that He needed human craft and cunning to fulfill His promises. But they were deadly wrong!
- We are sorry to see a family filled with strife and distrust, all began with the father, Isaac, who tried to manipulate God and tamper with His plans.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God's purpose cannot be manipulated or controlled by man as Isaac tried to; God always accomplishes what He has said or promised.

2. We must never use deception or trickery to help God carry out His purpose as Jacob and Rebekah did. The result of their wrong doings was that Jacob became an exile and Rebekah never saw her son again before she died.

Bible Memory Verse: Proverbs 12:19, "Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment."

LESSON 14

Jacob - Part II

Scripture References

- Genesis 27:41-28:5, 10-22

A Review of Last Sunday's Lesson

- Before the twin boys, Esau and Jacob, were born, God told Rebekah, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one (Jacob's descendants, the Israelites) shall be stronger than the other (Esau's descendants, the Edomites), the elder (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob).
- Unfortunately the family life was full of jealousy and deceit and strife because the father neglected to follow God's word with respect to his two sons, and lost control over his family.

Jacob in Exile

- When Esau was told that his brother took the blessing, he wept and begged his father to give him another blessing and when he received it he hated it, because it made him the servant of his brother. He hated Jacob and intended to kill him (Gen. 27:30-41).
- Rebekah, heard of Esau's vow to kill Jacob, obtained Isaac's permission to send Jacob away to her brother Laban, in Haran, that she wished him to choose a wife from his relatives, not from the native Canaanites as did Esau (Gen. 27:42-46).
- Isaac now realized that God's purpose was accomplished in spite of his own willful attempt to divert the promise from Jacob. He finally accepted the unchangeable God's will, so he blessed Jacob again and sent him away (Gen. 28:1-5). Thus Jacob began his 20-year exile in Haran, away from his home (Gen. 31:38, 41-42).

The Lone Traveler

- Now his departure from home in search of a wife was very different from that of his father's servant when Abraham sent him to bring back Rebekah. Jacob was alone, no servants accompanied him, no Ca'valcad'e (no carriages, no attendants); he was really fleeing for his life.
- As a lone traveler, Jacob had ample time to review his past as well as contemplate his future; his heart was filled regret and remorse, even guilt. Would he ever be able to return to his father's house? Should he ever possess the blessing his father bestowed upon him? In what respect was he better than his brother Esau? Would it not have been better if he had not sought the birthright and obtained the blessing? Jacob was tearful as these painful thoughts ran through his mind.

Jacob's Dream at Bethel (Read Gen. 28:10-22)

- So Jacob left Beersheba and began his long journey toward Haran (450 miles). As the sun went down the weary traveler stopped at Luz, he took a stone and put it under his head and lay down to sleep. That night he had a life-changing experience. He had a dream of ladder reaching from

earth to heaven with angels going up and down on it! Here the ladder tells us about three things:

- (a) The ladder showed Jacob that there was a gulf between his soul and God. By craft he had obtained his brother's birthright, by lying and deceit he had snatched away the blessing, and now the fugitive was reminded of the separation between his soul and God.
- (b) It also showed him the way in which his soul could come back to God in spite of his sin, and the fact that it reached from earth to heaven signified the complete provision of God's grace for sinners.

Note: Jesus is the Ladder between us and God as He says in John 1:51, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

- (c) The angels on the ladder was intended to symbolize the freedom of communication between earth and heaven through the Ladder, the Mediator Christ Jesus, the Promised Savior yet to be born.
- Above the ladder stood the God of Abraham and his father Isaac, and there God confirmed to him the promises given to his fathers, and promised him protection on his journey and a safe return to his home.
 - In recognition of the divine presence, Jacob took the stone which he had put for his pillow and sent it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel (meaning "the House of God"), but the name of the city was Luz at the first.
 - Jacob was a different person since his experience at Bethel, and yet he had much to learn to grow toward spiritual maturity, to carry on the covenant, which God had established with Abraham and his father Isaac, to bless the world.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God never breaks His promises. He had promised the blessing to Jacob before he was born and God would surely bring it to pass. He did not need Jacob's cleverness and deceit to help achieve His promises. Jacob suffered the results of his own impatience and imprudence by becoming a fugitive, and an exile.
2. God was very gracious to Jacob to bring him to his senses as He revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream at Bethel in which He provided a ladder for him to reach heaven. Jesus is the Ladder, and the only Way by which we may come to God.

Memory Bible Verse: John 14:6, Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

LESSON 15

Jacob - Part III

Scripture References

- Genesis 29:1-30:24; 35:16-25

Jacob's Journey to Ha'ran

- All the way from Jacob's home in Beersheba in the southern part of Palestine to Haran, beyond the northern boundaries of Palestine proper was about 450 miles. Jacob had to travel on foot; he trudged along rough highways, climbed over rocky mountains and cross crooked streams. It probably took him about one month to reach his destination.
- But the gracious Lord promised him protection on his journey. There was a new hope born in his breast since that memorable night at Bethel; The revelation of God and the assurance of God's presence and blessing had brought new life and new light and cheer to his lonely and aching heart. Fresh from the experience of meeting God for the first time, he went on his way rejoicing and arrived in Haran, the country of his kinsfolk, the people of the east (Gen. 29:1).

Jacob Meets Rachel - "Love at First Sight"

- As Jacob neared his journey's end he came across a well with flocks of sheep lying by it, and there he met Rachel, the beautiful younger daughter of his uncle Laban. He revealed himself to Rachel, telling her who he was then he kissed his cousin and wept aloud. We can sense the loneliness in Jacob, compelled to leave mother and father because of the fear of an angry brother. How glad he was to meet his relatives and dear ones after a long and exhausted journey (Gen. 29:2-14).
- A surprised Rachel ran at once to tell her father. Laban, who had not seen his sister Rebekah since she left home to marry Isaac many years before, and never seen his nephews, gladly welcomed Jacob to his home. He stayed with him a month (29:14).
- Jacob soon asked Laban for Rachel as his wife. He fell in love with her when he first met her at the well-side. It was a love at first sight. He proposed to serve seven years for Rachel, and Laban gladly agreed. (Gen. 29:15-19)
- So Jacob spent the next seven years working hard to pay for Rachel. But those long years seemed to him but a few days, he was very much in love (Gen. 29:20). It was such a beautiful love story!

Jacob Is Deceived

- As Jacob deceived his father Isaac, now he was deceived by Laban. Seven long years he labored for Rachel, the beautiful girl he loved. Then on wedding night he met his bride in the darkened tent and did not know until the next morning that it was Leah, the elder sister of Rachel, in his arms (Gen. 29:21-25).
- Laban's excuse was that it was not their custom to give the younger before the first-born. He

would give Jacob the other daughter a week later, provided that Jacob would serve him seven more years. And Jacob agreed to do so (Gen. 29:26-30).

Jacob's Children

- Although Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, Rachel envied Leah, who gave birth to four boys, while Rachel remain childless (Gen. 29:31-35).
- When Rachel saw that she was barren, she gave her maid Bilhah to Jacob as a wife, and she bore Jacob two boys (Gen. 30:1-8).
- Note: According to this ancient custom, the child or children of the mistress' maid would be counted as belonging to the mistress.
- When Leah saw that she ceased bearing children, she gave her maid Zilpa as a wife, and she gave birth to two boys (Gen. 30:9-13).
- After this, Leah bore Jacob two more sons and one daughter (Gen. 30:17-21).
- Finally, Rachel conceived and bore a son (Gen. 30:22-24).
- A few years later Rachel gave birth to the youngest son (the twelfth) and she died in childbirth (Gen. 35:16-20).

The Twelve Sons of Jacob - The Twelve Tribes of Israel

- Born to Leah, Laban's elder daughter
 - 1) Reu'ben - Gen. 29:32
 - 2) Si'mean - Gen. 29:33
 - 3) Le'vi - Gen. 29:34
 - 4) Ju'dah - Gen. 29:35
 - 5) Iss'achar - Gen. 30:18
 - 6) Ze'bulum - Gen. 30:20
- Born to Bilhah, Rachel's maid
 - 7) Dan - Gen. 30:5-6
 - 8) Na'phtali - Gen. 30:7
- Born to Zil'pah, Leah's maid
 - 9) Gad - Gen. 30:11
 - 10) A'sher – Gen.30:12-13
- Born to Rachel, Laban's younger daughter
 - 11) Jo'sheph - Gen. 30:22-24
 - 12) Ben'jamin - Gen. 35:18 (Of all Jacob's children he alone was born in Palestine when the family was returning home from Haran.)
- From these twelve sons, came the twelve tribes of Israel. Let's try to remember their names.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. When we have God's protection we shall not be afraid whenever we go as Jacob took that long journey on foot to Haran. But we must make sure that we know God and love Him.
2. Jacob had a hard life in that he toiled many long years (20 years) to have a family in exile all because of his past wrong doings. But God was so gracious to him. He forgave him and blessed him, because of His faithful covenant He had established with His fathers.

Memory Bible Verse: Psalms 30:5, "For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a life time; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

LESSON 16

Jacob - Part IV

Scripture References

- Gen. 31:1-35:26; 46:1-47:12; 48:1-50:14

Jacob's Life in Haran

- In Haran Jacob began to reap what he had sown. He deceived his father, and now he was in turn deceived by his uncle Laban.
- First he was promised Rachel, and then he was given Leah. And he had to work fourteen years for Rachel, the girl he loved so much.
- Altogether he served Laban 20 years - 14 years for Laban's two daughters, 6 years for his flock. And Laban cheated him by changing his wages ten times (Gen. 31:7, 38-42).
- But God was gracious to him, and was with him and blessed him all the while he was in Haran; he grew exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, servants, and camels and asses (Gen. 30:43).

Jacob Flees from Laban

- Jacob's remarkable prosperity could not be unnoticed. Soon he heard the sons of Laban grumbling, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's; and has gained all this wealth from what belong to our father." (Gen 31:1-2)
- Jacob became alarmed for he noticed that Laban and his son were envious of his success. In the midst of this crisis God said to him, "Return to the land of your fathers, and to your relatives. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to Me. Now leave at once and go back to your native land." (Gen. 31:3, 11-12)
- Realizing that Laban would not let him go free with all his household and possessions, Jacob planned to leave without saying goodbye to Laban. He gathered his wives and children and all his possessions and fled toward Canaan (Gen. 31:17-21).
- On the third day when Laban heard of Jacob's departure he took some men with him and chased hard after Jacob, and overtook him seven days later. But God appeared to Laban in a dream and warned him not to hinder Jacob's return (Gen. 31:22-25).
- After much quarrel and accusation and mutual abuse and blame, a reconciliation and peace treaty took place between them, and Laban returned to his home (Gen. 31:26-55).

Jacob Seeks Peace With Esau

- Jacob had paid the price in long years of exile; he was disciplined by God through much hardships and afflictions. Now freed from the hard life endured at Haran he went on his way towards the old home, only to realize before long that another problem confronts him in his brother Esau. As he neared the border of the old country, memories began to move and

conscience to work. He knew that there would be no peace until his relationship with Esau restored and reconciliation made for his past sins.

- Jacob had learned some profound lessons of life during his exile, he had become a rather humble person. He knew he must right the wrong before he could set his mind at rest. Unconfessed sins and unforgiven wrongs must be dealt with and put right before he could be used of God to carry on His plans to bless the world.
- So he sent messengers to Esau with a humble and friendly greeting, but the messengers returned with an alarming report that Esau was coming to meet him with an army of 400 men (Gen. 32:3-6).

Jacob's Prayer for Deliverance

- Greatly alarmed and distressed, Jacob divided his people, with the flocks and herds, into two companies, so that if one was attacked the other might escape (Gen. 32:7-8).
- He also prepared a generous present for Esau, hoping to appease his brother (Gen. 32:13-21).
- In his distress, Jacob called on God to deliver him from the hand of his brother. In his prayer he humbly confessed his unworthiness, a lonely, runaway boy, fleeing from his brother with only a staff in his hand and now returned a rich man with families, flocks, herds and servants. He acknowledged that all this came by the hand of God and not of his own merit. We can see the spirit of humility in his prayer. God was indeed at work in his soul (Gen. 32:9-12).
- And God answered his prayer and he was reconciled to Esau (Gen. 33:1-17)

Wrestling with God - Jacob Becomes Israel

- The night before Jacob's meeting with Esau, he was left alone for he wanted to spend time to pray and wrestle with God until he had the assurance from God that his past sins were forgiven, that he had made peace with God. During that long night of prayer the angel of God wrestled with him and touched his thigh and it went painfully out of joint. But he would not give up until he received a blessing from God (Gen. 32:22-26).
- And that night God changed his name from Jacob to Israel, from a supplanter or a schemer to a "Prince with God" (Gen. 32:27-30).
- That night was the turning point in Jacob's life. As the sun rose he started on, and he was limping because of his thigh; and from that day on he became a truly humble servant of God, ready to carry on God's work. The Hebrew nation, as descended from Jacob, is often called the Israelites, the people of Israel (Exodus 14:16, 29; 15:1, etc.).
- Jacob was 130 years old when he went to Egypt to live with his famous son Joseph. He died at the age of 147 and was taken back to Canaan and buried in the family burial ground (Gen. 47:1-12, 27-28; 50:13)

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Remember the unchanging law of sowing and reaping; Jacob paid dearly for his scheming (deceiving).
2. God was very merciful and gracious and long suffering in His dealings with Jacob. Finally, He brought him to his sense on that night when Jacob earnestly prayed and wrestled with God and sought His blessing. Physically he became crippled, but spiritually he became whole. God has been dealing with each of us as He dealt with Jacob.

Memory Bible Verse: Deuteronomy 8:5, "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord God disciplines you."

LESSON 17

Joseph - Part I

Scripture References

- Gen. 37, 39 through 50

The Meaning of the Name

- Joseph means "may God add." In Gen. 30:27, we read that she (Rachel) became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph and said, "May the Lord add to me another son."
- Later on, after Jacob returned to Canaan from Haran, Rachel did bear another son, Benjamin, but the mother died in childbirth (Gen. 35:16-19).

Family Background

- Joseph was the 11th of Jacob's 12 sons, and the first-born son of Rachel. He was born in Haran when Jacob was 90 or 91 years old, and Joseph was about 6 when his father returned Canaan.
- Note: Joseph was born at the end of Jacob's 14 years sojourn in Haran (Gen. 30:25), then Jacob continued to serve Laban for 6 more years before he returned to Canaan (Gen. 31:41). Joseph became prime minister of Egypt at the age of 30, nine years later when he was 39 and Jacob 130, they were reunited in Egypt (Gen. 41:46; 45:6-11; 49:9,28).
- Joseph was his father's favorite child, because he was the son of his old age and Rachel's child. Jacob made a brightly colored robe with long sleeves such as was worn by youth of richer class (Gen. 37:3).
- This, plus the fact that he reported to his father the bad things his half-brothers were doing, caused his brothers to hate him (Gen. 37:2-4).
- Jacob loved Joseph also because of his fine character.

Joseph's Dreams

- The hatred of the brothers was soon intensified by Joseph's two dreams.
- The first dream was that Joseph and his eleven brothers were binding sheaves in the field, but all of his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his sheaf. They hated him for that, and said, "Are you indeed to reign over us?..." (Gen. 37:5-8).
- Again he dreamed that the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowed down before him. This time he told his father as well as his brothers; Jacob, the father, rebuked him, "Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come and bow before you?" His brothers envied and hated him, but the old man kept the saying in mind (Gen. 37:9-11).

- Note: The reference to the mother in v.10 must be Leah, Rachel's sister, for Joseph's mother Rachel died earlier (Gen. 35:16-19).
- Joseph's dreams were realized when he became prime minister in Egypt years later (Gen. 41:46).

Joseph Sold into Slavery

- When Joseph was 17 years old his father sent him to check upon his brothers who were feeding their flocks in Shechem, about 60 miles from Hebron where the family lived (Gen. 35:27), to see how they were doing. On reaching Shechem, he found that they had gone to Dothan, several miles further east, and he followed them there (Gen. 37:12-17).
- When the brother saw him afar off, they said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer, " and planned to kill him, then report to the father that a wild beast had devoured him (Gen. 37:18-20).
- Reuben, eldest son of Jacob, intervened in Joseph's behalf, and persuaded them to cast him into a pit, intending to deliver him to his father later. While they were eating and drinking, a company of Arabian merchants (Ishmaelites) appeared, and, at the suggestion of Judah and in the absence of Reuban, they sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the merchants, who took him into Egypt. Then they dipped Joseph's long robe in blood of a goat, and sent the robe to their father, telling him that Joseph had been eaten by a wild animal. When the sad news reached Jacob, the aged father tore his clothes and mourned many days and refused to be comforted (Gen. 37:21-35).
- Meanwhile, in Egypt, the merchants sold Joseph to Po'tiphar, an officer of the Pha'raoh- the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard. Thus Joseph, at the age of 17, became a young slave far away from home (Gen. 37:36).
- Note: "Pharaoh" is a common title for Egyptian Kings.

Joseph's Prosperity

- So Joseph yet in his teens came to work as a slave in Potiphar's house. Instead of being bitter and blaming God that he was sold into slavery, so far away from home and utterly hopeless, he put his whole trust in God and proved himself faithful and loyal to his master. And God was with him and greatly blessed him and caused all that he did to prosper in his hands (Gen. 39:1-3).
- So Joseph soon found favor in his master's sight, and Potiphar made him supervisor over his house, and put all that he had in his charge, and paid no attention to anything he had except the food he ate, and the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Joseph, by the way, was a very attractive and handsome young man (Gen. 39:4-6).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Human nature is utterly corrupt; the root of all trouble here is envy or jealousy which caused the brothers to sin against Joseph. The Bible says in Proverb 14:30 that envy rots the bones, or envy is the rottenness of the bones which is like the cancer of the bones, a deadly disease.

2. We must examine ourselves and ask Jesus to forgive and cleanse us, and let His love fill our hearts for "love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy ..." (I Corinthians 13:4).

Memory Bible Verse: James 3:16, "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."

LESSON 18

Joseph - Part II

Joseph and Potiphar

- Young Joseph had been brought to Egypt, serving Potiphar who was captain of the bodyguard of Pharaoh, the king. Now he was far away from his loving father; he had to learn a new language, new custom. In fact, everything was new and strange to a boy at such a young age. He must be scared and apprehensive; but he trusted God!
- He served Potiphar faithfully with honesty and diligence as a slave boy. And soon he earned his master's complete trust and respect and was promoted to a position as supervisor over Potiphar's entire household, all because he trusted God and God was with him (Gen. 39:1-6).
- It seemed now that fame, position, access to power and prosperity, good looks and charm were all his to enjoy.

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

- All was going well with Joseph. He was trusted by his master and blessed of his God. Then something happened.
- Joseph was young, well built and handsome and attractive. His master's wife began to take note of him, trying very hard to seduce him to go to bed with her (by this time Joseph must be well over 20), but her repeated seduction were rejected by Joseph on the basis that he could not betray his master's trust and do such a great evil and sin against God. He was sorely tested, but did not yield to sin (Gen. 39:6-9).
- Finally the woman turned against him; she falsely reported to her husband "that Hebrew slave" had sexually molested her. The result was that Joseph was thrown into prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined (Gen. 39:10-20).
- Note: The fact that Potiphar only placed Joseph in prison in stead of ordering him to be put to death, indicates that he did not really believe his wife's story, but was compelled to take some action against Joseph to please his wife.

God With Joseph in Prison

- Poor Joseph! He had been sold into slavery, forced to perform menial tasks, accused of attempted rape; now he was locked up in prison, forgotten by the world. Silently he endured all these hardships and sufferings; but his trust in God never wavered; God was using these things to prepare Joseph for a great future.
- In fact, Joseph's godlike character soon won the prison keeper's complete confidence, so the keeper put Joseph in charge of the entire prison; he paid no attention to anything that under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with him(Gen. 39:21-23).

Joseph and the King's Cupbearer and Chief Baker

- In the course of Joseph's incarceration two notable officials became inmates of the same prison, the king's cupbearer and chief baker, who had been imprisoned for having offended the king. They remained in prison for quite some time, and the captain of the guard, Potiphar, assigned Joseph to wait on them (Gen. 40:1-2).
- Note: The duty of the cupbearer was to fill and bear the drinking vessel (cup) to the king. The baker's duty was to prepare food by baking it.
- Then one morning Joseph found the two officers very sad, because they each had a dream and no one could tell them what their dreams meant. Joseph told them that interpretations belong to God; then he proceeded to interpret their dreams, and his interpretation in each instance was found correct. Three days later, on Pharaoh's birthday the king's cupbearer was restored to his former position, but the chief baker was hanged (Gen. 40:3-22).
- Though Joseph asked the cupbearer to do him a favor to help him get out of prison, the cupbearer forgot all about him after he was freed (Gen. 40:14-15,23).
- So Joseph remained in prison for two more years (Gen. 41:1).

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams

- Two years went by while Joseph languished in prison, Pharaoh in his palace had two strange dreams one night. When he awoke and was deeply troubled by the dreams, but no magicians or wise men in his kingdom could suggest what his dreams meant (Gen. 41:1-8).
- Then the king's cupbearer remembered Joseph in prison, how he correctly interpreted the dreams for him and the chief baker, so he recommended Joseph to Pharaoh. Then Joseph was summoned to appear before the king in a great hurry. With humility Joseph told Pharaoh that he could not do it, but God would give Pharaoh the right answer (Gen. 41:9-24).
- Joseph interpreted the king's dreams, predicting seven years of plentiful food, followed by seven years severe famine. He also advised the king to appoint a commissioner to store up supplies during the plentiful years, as a reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that would follow, so that the country might not be ruined (See Gen. 41:25-36).

Joseph Made Prime Minister

- Joseph's counsel greatly pleased the king and his ministers, who all perceived that he possessed God's supernatural wisdom and insight. And to Joseph's surprise, he was appointed ruler over Pharaoh's house, and over all the land, second in rank only to the king (Gen. 41:37-40).
- From the position of a slave in prison to that of the second ruler in Egypt, God surely vindicated Joseph's faithfulness. He was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Gen. 41:46).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Joseph trusted God under all circumstances. In suffering he was not bitter, in duty he was loyal, in temptation he was strong, and in prison he was faithful. His faith in God never faltered. He

was a perfect model youth!

2. In Gen. 39:2,3,21,23 we find four times "the Lord was with him." How wonderful it would be, if all of us could feel this way!

Memory Bible Verse: Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

LESSON 19

Joseph - Part III

Joseph, the Prime Minister

- Joseph was sold into slavery and brought to Egypt at the age of 17. He was 30 years old when he became prime minister of the great ancient Egyptian empire. Thirteen years stood between the Hebrew shepherd boy and the Egyptian Prime Minister. It was a marvelous change by which, at one bound, Joseph leaped from a slave to the second ruler in a great kingdom. This is a wonderful story of a young man's steadfast faithfulness toward God amidst severe trials and afflictions. God once said in I Samuel 2:30, "... Those who honor Me I will honor, but those who despise Me will be despised."
- Now Pharaoh gave him As'enath, daughter of a priestly family at On, to be his wife who bore him two sons Manass'eh and E'phraim (Gen. 41:45, 50-52).
- During his first seven years as prime minister the land produced plentifully and abundantly beyond measurement. He carefully stored up food in the cities, preparing for the seven years of famine to follow (Gen. 41:47-49).
- The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and seven years of famine began to come, as predicted, however Joseph was well prepared. He opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians (Gen. 41: 53-56).

Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt for Grain

- The famine had spread over all the land, it affected not only Egypt, but all the known world then. The famine also struck Canaan. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent his sons, except Benjamin, to Egypt to buy grain (Gen. 42:1-5).
- When they met Joseph, they did not recognize him, though he knew them. When they prostrated themselves before him, he saw the fulfillment of the dreams which had caused him so much trouble and pain (Gen. 42:6-9).
- Now Joseph tried to make his brothers feel and acknowledge the wrong they had done to him. So he pretended to be a foreigner toward them; through an interpreter, he spoke harsh words to them, inquired where they had come from, and accused them of being spies, and put them all together in prison for 3 days (Gen. 42:6-17).
- After 3 days he released them and sold them grain only on the condition that Simeon (the second older brother) be kept as a hostage until they bring Benjamin, the youngest brother (who was Joseph's fullblood brother born of the same mother), with them on their next trip to Egypt to buy food (Gen. 42:18-20).
- Now the brothers became deeply conscience-stricken. Speaking among themselves in front of Joseph, they said, "All this happened because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his terror and anguish and heard his pleadings, but we wouldn't listen." And Reuben asked, "Didn't I tell you not to do it? Now we will all die because we murdered him." Joseph listened to them and was greatly moved. He went into an inner room and wept (Gen. 42:21-24).

- The brothers returned to their homeland. But the famine grew worse and worse. Jacob was forced to send Benjamin along with his brothers to buy food again. It was certainly a very humble group that came down to Egypt this second time and stood before Joseph, but Joseph treated them royally. After Simeon was released they were brought to Joseph's house to dine with him (Gen. 43:1-34).
- After purchasing their grain, they started home. But they did not go very far when they were stopped by Joseph's servants who accused them of stealing Joseph's silver cup. The cup was found in Benjamin's bag, where Joseph had placed it. It was Joseph's plan to bring his brothers back, to make them feel guilty before he would forgive them and reunite with them (Gen. 44:1-15).

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

- The brothers returned to face Joseph, who demanded that Benjamin must be detained in Egypt because of the theft he committed. At his point, Judah pleaded with Joseph, saying that their aged father would surely die in grief if Benjamin failed to return with them. Then Judah offered himself to stay in Benjamin's place. It was one of the most moving scenes in the O.T. (Gen. 44:16-34).
- Finally Joseph could not stand it any longer. After he dismissed all his servants, with deep emotion and tears he wept aloud and said in his native tongue, "I am Joseph,... your brother whom you sold into Egypt. Don't blame yourselves because you did this to me, for God did it! He sent me ahead of you to preserve your lives..." (Gen. 45:1-8). Thus Joseph forgave all the terrible things his brothers did to him! It was one of the most touching stories in the Bible.

Jacob Goes to Egypt - The Final Family Reunion

- Jacob had forgiven his brothers, and persuaded them and their father to settle in Egypt that he would provide for them during the five remaining years of famine. These events reached the ear of Pharaoh; and he extended an official invitation to welcome them to move to Egypt and enjoy the best of the land (Gen. 45:9-20).
- So Jacob went to Egypt. There were 66 people besides Jacob who came with their wagons and camels, with herds of sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. etc. Then added Joseph and his two sons that would make a total of 70 souls altogether (Gen. 46:26-27). At long last they were all together in God's good time!
- Jacob was 130 years old when he went to Egypt, and died at age of 147. (Gen. 47:7-9,28).
- Joseph was sold into Egypt when he was 17; he became Prime Minister of Egypt at the age 30, reunited with his family at 40, and died at 107 (Gen. 37:36;41:46;50:26).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Joseph was a man of vision, and his dream came true. He labored as a slave, but was faithful in hard places. He was silent amid false accusations and endured unjust punishment and all afflictions. He resisted temptations and kept himself pure before God and man. He was not

spoiled by sudden prosperity; he did not yield to sin. He manifested great wisdom, brotherly love, filial devotion and complete submission to God. He knew how to return good for evil.

2. Joseph is a perfect type of Christ. We should try hard to make him our model.

Memory Bible Verses : Ephesians 4:31-32, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

LESSON 20

Judah - Part I

Scripture References

- Gen. 29:31-35; 38:1-30; 49:8-12; Joshua 15:1-12; II Samuel 12:1-4; Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38

The Meaning of the Name

- Judah means "God be praised." - Gen. 29:35, "She (Leah) conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son, she said, 'This time I will praise the Lord.' So she named him Judah.

- **Family Background**

- Judah was the 4th son of Jacob by his wife Leah, and full brother to Reuben, Simeon and Levi (Gen. 29:31-35).
- Note; Leah bore six sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and later Issachar, Zebulun; one daughter Dinah (Gen. 29:31-35; 30:14-21).
- Judah was born in a large and complex household. His father Jacob had two wives and two concubines, who were two sisters, Leah and Rachel, and their two handmaids. Jacob loved Rachel, who was childless at the time. Leah bore him four children first, and Judah was her 4th son. Eventually Judah had eleven brothers and one sister born to Jacob by four women. It must be quite an experience to grow up among so many siblings in a such big family.
- Note: When God made Adam and Eve and united them in marriage. He sets the perfect pattern which is for one man and for one woman. After the fall, people gradually practiced "polygamy", because of their sinful nature. So we see in the O.T. times even some well-known male Bible characters had more than one wife, which was also the practice of all ancient countries. Today, in New Testament times, we Christians are strictly allowed only to have monogamous marriage (one man and one woman) which has been God's intention in the first place.

The Family Shame

- Judah had 3 sons, Er (pronounced Ur), O'nan and Shel'ah from his wife, the daughter of Shu'a, a Canaanite (Gen. 38:1-5).
- When Er, the first born grew up, Judah arranged for him to marry a girl named Ta'mar. But Er was an evil man, and the Lord killed him (Gen. 38:6-8).
- Now it was the custom, later put into Mosaic Law (see Deuteronomy 25:5-6), that if a man's brother died without a son, his widow should not marry outside the family, instead her husband's brother should marry her. The first son born to him would be counted as the heir of the dead brother, so that his name might not be forgotten. So Judah instructed Onan, his second son, to take as wife Tamar. But Onan was rebellious and wicked; he refused to produce offspring for his brother, and God killed him too (Gen. 38:8-10).

- Then Judah sent Tamar away to her childhood home until his youngest son Shelah was old enough to marry her. But Judah didn't really intend for Shelah to do so, for fear God would kill him also (Gen. 38:11).
- In the process of time, Judah's Canaanite wife died. After the time of mourning was over, Judah met a woman on the wayside with her face covered. He went in to her (slept with her), but he didn't know that wayside woman was Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law in disguise. The result of this painful affair was the birth of twin boys, Pe'rez and Ze'rah (Gen. 38:12-30).
- All this happened because Judah associated himself with the ungodly people of Canaan, and married a Canaanite woman, and produced three sons, two of them died at the hand of God because of their evil deeds. Then the sin of Judah and Tamar culminated in this sad story, though later Judah admitted his wrong when he became aware of what he had done (Gen. 38:36). But we can imagine that Judah must have felt very guilty and deeply regretted that he made a mess of his family as well as his own life.
- Note to the teacher: It won't be easy to talk to children about Judah's sin; but we can't deny the fact which has been recorded in Gen. 38. Use discretion when you tell the story; do not elaborate.

Judah's Leadership Among His Brothers

- Judah was born a leader, though his disgraceful actions left a stain upon him. It was he who saved Joseph's life by proposing that he should be sold to the Ishmaelite merchants in stead of murdered (Gen. 37:26-28).
- Though not the firstborn, we find him gradually taking a decisive lead in all family affairs. When it became necessary to make a second trip to go to Egypt for food, he persuaded his father Jacob to allow Benjamin to go along with them, and undertook the responsibility for the safe return of the lad (Gen. 43:8-9).
- When the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack and punishment to detain Benjamin was pronounced by Joseph, Judah made a earnest and passionate plea for mercy on behalf of his aged father and brothers; and offered himself to remain as a prisoner provided Benjamin would be set free (Gen. 44:18-34).
- His eloquent speech so deeply moved his princely brother Joseph, who could no longer control himself; as a result, a tearful reunion of brothers soon took place. It was a very touching scene indeed (Gen. 45:1-15).
- And in this speech, we see his profound humility before Joseph, and his sincere willingness to suffer imprisonment, even death for his father and brothers.
- Here Judah, long smitten with remorse for his sinful past, was making a confession before God and man! From now on he was a changed person. His later life proved that he was a different man; molded and remade by God, he became the undisputable leader among his brothers.

What Have We Learned Today?

- Judah was a sinful man, so are we. Only by God's grace can our sins be forgiven provided we are humble enough to admit our sins and seek His face.
- God works in His own way; He dealt with Judah by bringing him to his knees through intricate family problems and tragedies, so that God could use him to accomplish His purpose - We'll learn more about Judah in Part II of his story.

Memory Bible Verses: Psalm 30:4-5, "Sing to the Lord, you saints of His; praise His holy name. For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts for a lifetime; weeping remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

LESSON 21

Judah - Part II

Judah's Reckless Early Days

- Oftentimes we think that the great characters of the Bible were some sort of superhuman beings, immune from sin, but the truth is that many of them were sad sinners just like most of us.
- The 38th chapter of Genesis shocks us to know that Judah in his early days led such a reckless, irresponsible and dissipated life. His main trouble was his close association with bad companies, the ungodly Canaanites; and he married a Canaanite woman (Gen. 38:1-5).
- As a result, two of his three sons, Er and Onan, were so wicked that they incurred God's wrath and died at the hand of a righteous God (Gen. 38:6-10).
- The infamous sin of Judah was that he committed adultery with his dead son's wife, though unknowingly and unintentionally (Gen. 38:12-18).

Judah Rises Above His Brothers

- Judah did admit his wrong doings when he realized what he had done, and he never commit such shameful act again (Gen. 38:16).
- He must have felt deeply remorse for having lived a careless and loose life in the past, and resolved to amend his ways and doings; therefore, we find him gradually rising above his brothers, and subsequently assuming the leadership among them, as we mentioned in our last lesson.
- When Jacob and his offspring were invited to go to Egypt for lack of food in Canaan owing to severe famine, he chose Judah, not the eldest son Reuben, to go before him to Joseph, to make ready for him in the land of Go'shan, their temporary home in Egypt (Gen. 46:26-29).
- Then we hear nothing more of him till he received along with his brothers the final blessing of his dying father Jacob (Gen. 49:1-33).

The Blessing of Dying Jacob to Judah

- Jacob arrived in Goshan, Egypt at the age of 130 years, and died 17 years later at the age of 147 (See Gen. 47:9, 28).
- During those seventeen years Judah must have proved himself a worthy man, both morally and spiritually, and attained distinguished leadership among his brothers.
- Just before Jacob died, he gathered his 12 sons about his bed to tell them what should happen to them in days to come. He addressed them in the order of their birth. Harsh words were pronounced against the first three sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi for their sins; they were passed over, and the blessing of birthright was bestowed on Judah (Gen. 49:3-10).

- Judah had now fully redeemed his character, and his future, as foretold by his father Jacob, was full of blessing and glory. Read Gen. 49:3-10 and see what you find in these verses:
 - 1) V.8, "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your father's sons will bow down before you." Judah means "Praise." Years later, while still in Egypt, the tribe of Judah, his descendants, became much superior to the rest of the tribes. The tribe of Judah was first in numbers as well as in territory (it had the largest population, and occupied the greater part of south Jerusalem.) The tribe of Judah was the first to be called to fight the Canaanites after Joshua's death, a battle ending in decisive victory for Judah (Judges 1: 1-10).
 - 2) VV.8-9, "Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; you are a lion's cub, O Judah. ... Like a lion he couches and lies down..." Here was the prophesy of a conqueror, the anticipation of the figure of the lion, which was the emblem of the flag of Judah (according to rabbinical authority, Judah's standard was green with the symbol of lion.) The lion-king of the forest became the symbol of Judah, as the king of the tribes (cf Numbers 2:3-4); and the Lord Jesus Christ was called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." Note that Christ was a lamb in His humiliation and death, but a lion in His resurrection glory and power (Rev. 5:51 0).
 - 3) V. 10, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between His feet, until He (Shiloh, the Messiah) comes to Whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is His." The scepter was the staff of a ruler, symbolizing authority. Here the scepter or the ruler's staff refers to the Messiah's kingship, especially during the period of His Millennial Kingdom on earth. During which time He will rule the whole world from Israel, from the tribe of Judah in particular.
- Jesus Christ is the One Who holds the scepter of the universe today in His nail-pierced hands, and one day, at His Second Coming, He will reign over all as King of kings and Lord of lords in His great glory and power!
- This blessing of dying Jacob to Judah is usually called a Messianic prophecy.

Judah, Ancestor of Christ

- Remember in our second lesson we talked about how God promised Adam and Eve a Savior through the woman's (Eve's) Seed, or Offspring, after they sinned? (See Gen. 3:14-15). The line to produce the "Seed," or "Offspring," went from Adam to Seth; from Seth it went through Noah to Shen, then to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now to Judah.
- From Judah the line of Savior-Messiah proceeded through Pe'rez, Bo'az by Ruth, Jesse, David and on to Mary under Joseph's name. So Judah was one of the ancestors of Christ (Matt. 1:2-3; Lk. 3:33).

Understanding Three Significant Words of the Bible

- 1) 'Hebrew' - Abraham, or Abram, was the first person in the Bible to be called a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13). Therefore, his descendants through Isaac and Jacob were known as Hebrews (Gen. 40:15; 43:32).

- 2) "Israel" - the name was given to Jacob by God (Gen. 32:28). Then the name was applied to Jacob's descendants, the twelve tribes of the Hebrews; later it belonged to the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom.
- 3) "Jew" - Originally it denoted to the one tribe of Judah or to the two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) of the Southern Kingdom (II Kings 16:6; 25:25), but later it was also applied to anyone of the Hebrew race (Esther 2:5; Matt. 2:2).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Judah almost ruined his life by associating with bad company, the ungodly Canaanite people. Fortunately he woke up early in time to amend his ways, and return to the Lord.
2. God is merciful and gracious to forgive us, and remake us to fit for His work.

Memory Bible Verse: I Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good characters.'"

LESSON 22

Moses - Part I

Background Scriptures

- Exodus 1-20; 24; 32-34; 40; Numbers 11-14; 16-17; 20; 33:38-39, 50-56; Deuteronomy 31-34; Acts 7:2-38; Hebrews 11:23-29.

The Meaning of the Name

- Moses means "taken out of the water," or 'drawn forth." Ex.2:10 – “When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, ‘I drew him out of the water.’”

Trouble for the People of Israel (Exodus 1:1-22)

- The descendants of Jacob who went with him to Egypt numbered seventy in all, including Joseph and his two sons who were already there. In due season Joseph and all his brothers died, ending that generation (Exodus 1:5-6).
- But the people of Israel had many children, and they grew greatly and fast, and became very strong, so the land of Egypt was filled with them (Ex. 1:7).
- Then a new king began to rule Egypt, who did not know about Joseph. He made life very hard for the people of Israel by forcing them to build the store-cities Pith'om and Ram'esses for him; he made slaves of them. But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites grew and multiplied. This made the Egyptians much alarmed. Finally the king commanded his people to cast all the newborn Hebrew boys into the Nile River (Ex. 1:8-22).

The Baby Moses

- At this time a baby boy was born to a young couple of the house of Le'vi. When the mother saw that he was an unusually beautiful baby, she hid him for three months. Then, when she could no longer hide him, she took a basket and cover it with tar to make it waterproof. She placed the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds at the edge of the Nile River, and left the young sister (Miriam) to watch the result (Ex. 2:1-4; Heb. 11:23; Acts 7:17-20).
- Note: Moses had only one sister Miriam, and one brother Aaron. Their parents were A'mram and Joch'ebed (Num. 26:59).
- By God's providence, Moses, the child of a Hebrew slave, was rescued by an Egyptian princess, the daughter of the Pharaoh himself. As the story goes, the princess came down to bathe in the river. As she and her maids were walking beside the river, she spotted the basket. So she sent her maids to bring it to her. The king's daughter opened the basket and saw a Hebrew baby boy crying, and she felt very sorry for the little one. She knew the baby was abandoned to die because of the king's edict (Ex. 2:6).

- Right there God's Spirit was working in the heart of the princess, so she decided to save the baby and rear him as her own son. At this critical moment, the young sister (Miriam) stepped forward, and, with a flash of wisdom and tact, asked the princess if she wanted a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for her. When the princess consented to her suggestion, the boy's mother was hired to nurse the child until he was weaned. Then he was brought back to the princess and became her son. The princess named the boy Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water" (Ex. 2:7-10; Acts 7:21).

Moses Grows Up in the Egyptian Royal Court

- For the next 40 years (or the first 40 years of his life), Moses was reared and grew up as a prince of the Egyptians. As a prince, he received a special princely education in the royal court. The Egyptians were unsurpassed in civilization by any people in the world in those days. And Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and became a mighty prince, powerful in speech and action (Acts 7:22).
- The royal education was designed to fit him for high office in the royal court under the Egyptian government. But in God's plan, it was to prepare Moses for the future leadership of his Hebrew people. He was possessed of great natural ability, and the training he received in the royal court of the great Egyptian empire equipped him for the great task for which he was called to undertake; he would later deliver his own people from Egyptian slavery, and become their leader and lawgiver during their 40 years of wondering in the wilderness.

Moses Remembers His Origin

- Although Moses was reared as an Egyptian prince, he had not forgotten his origin that he was born a Hebrew. When he became forty years old, he resolved to cast in his lot with his own people. One day he saw an Egyptian mistreating a man of Israel. He killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. When this became known, however, he feared for his own life, so he fled from Egypt to the land of Mi'dian (most in northwest Arabia, in the desert between Egypt and Canaan).
- For the next forty years, Moses sojourned in the land of Mi'dian until one day he received God's call to deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God works in mysterious ways to achieve His purposes. When Joseph was sold into slavery, He made him a prime minister. When Jacob and his children were starving because of the severe famine, He brought the whole clan to Egypt through the influence of Joseph. When the people of Israel were suffering oppression under the Egyptian government, He raised Moses to be their deliverer. We must always trust in God, for He will never forget us or fail us.
2. Don't forget your origin as a Chinese Christian. Be concerned about your own people's fate and welfare. Pray for them and try to win them to Christ.

Memory Bible Verse: Psalm 20:1-2, "May the Lord answer you in distress; and the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May He send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion."

LESSON 23

Moses - Part II

A Brief Review

- One day when Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his fellow Hebrews and observed the miserable condition they were under. Then he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew; he defended his countryman, and avenged him by killing the oppressor, and hid his body in the sand (Ex. 2:11-12).
- The next day he attempted to act as a peacemaker between two Hebrews who were striving together. But his good-willed offer was rejected by them (vv. 13-14).
- Then the king heard about what Moses had done, he ordered him arrested and executed. But Moses fled the country into the land of Mi'dian near the peninsula of Sinai. He was 40 years old when this occurred (Ex. 2:15; Act. 7:23-29).
- “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He considered abuse suffered for the Promised Messiah (Christ) greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking only for God's reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing Him Who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:24-27).
- Thus Moses began the next forty years of his life in exile (Act. 7:29-30).

Moses' Forty Years in the Land of Midian

- On arriving in Midian, Moses rested himself by the city well, where he graciously and courteously aided the daughters of Jethro, a Mid'ianite priest, to water their sheep. In return Je'thro showed Moses unusual hospitality. He invited him to stay with them and gave him one of his daughter, Zippo'rah , as his wife. Later she bore Moses two sons, Ger'shom and Elie'zer (Ex.18:3-4) Moses then became a shepherd assuming charge of his father-in-law's flock (Ex. 3:1). He remained in Midian 40 years, intimately associated with a people who were descended from Abraham, and perhaps worshiped Abraham's God.
- Note: After his first wife Sarah died, Abraham took another wife, Ketu'rah, who bore him six sons. Midian was the 4th son listed (Gen. 25:1-2). His descendants became Midianites.
- Jethro was a Midianite priest, who acknowledged Jehovah, the God of Israel, as supreme and worshiped him (Ex. 18:9-12).
- Though Jethro (also called Reuel) was very friendly to Moses, his son Hob'ab refused to join Israel (Num. 10:29-30). This probably happened after Jethro had died. During Moses' later years, the Midianite, allied with Moabites and others, consistently opposed the Israelites (Num. 22:1-4). Finally God commanded Moses to attack the Midianites and destroyed them (Num. 25:16-18).
- About 200 years later, during the days of judges, the Midianites invaded Israel and inflicted

unbearable suffering and devastation on the people. Then God raised up Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6-7; 8:10-12).

- After this the Midianites were no longer mentioned. They have long since disappeared from the earth.

Moses Endures Hardship and Is Prepared for His Future Task

- During his 40 years sojourn in Midian, Moses must have endured loneliness and sadness in his heart. He often recalled with pain how he risked his life and everything he had, attempting to deliver his own people from the Egyptian oppressors, but they did not understand him and rejected him. He often brooded over the hopeless plight of his people under the tyrannical government. He must have cried often to God, "How long, O Lord, how long shall my people go free and enter the Promised Land as you have promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?"
- In the meantime, Moses, as a shepherd, learned much patience and gained a first-hand geographical knowledge of the territory surrounding the peninsula of Sinai. Little did he realize that one day he would be called to lead God's people through this vast wilderness on their way to Canaan, the Promised Land.

The Call of Moses at the Burning Bush

- At the end of his forty years in exile, one day, while tending his father-in-law's flock, near the mountain of Sinai, he was astonished to see a bush burning and yet remained unconsumed. As he turned aside to investigate, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses! Do not come near, take off your shoes, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moses covered his face with his hands, for he was afraid to look at God (Ex. 3:1-6; Act. 7:30-34).
- Then God went on to speak to Moses from the midst of a burning bush, charging him to go back to Egypt to deliver His people out of the bondage of slavery. At first, he was very reluctant to accept this challenge. He made the following excuses to God: (1) Ex. 3:11, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (2) v.13, "When they ask me, 'Who is that God? What's His name?' What shall I tell them?" (3) Ex. 4:1, "What if they don't believe me?" (4) v.10, "O Lord, please send someone else."
- God was so gracious and patient with Moses. He assured him that He would be with him. He showed Moses two miraculous signs to verify (prove) His divine authority by changing Moses' staff into a snake, and causing his hand to be infected with leprosy, and later become whole again (Ex. 4:1-7).
- Furthermore Moses was assured of his brother Aaron's support in his divine commission to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians bondage (vv. 10-17).
- Finally Moses accepted God's call without any further excuses. He then bade his father-in-law Jethro farewell, and returned to Egypt for a confrontation with Pharaoh, the powerful Egyptian monarch (vv. 18-19).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God raises up leaders to accomplish His purpose in every generation. He also calls you and me, who have accepted Jesus as Savior, to a place of service if we are willing to do His bidding.
2. There are no excuses if God calls us to a work, for He will also provide all we need.

Memory Bible Verses: Hebrews 11:24-25, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time."

LESSON 24

Moses - Part III

Moses Returns to Egypt

- Just before Moses left Midian, the Lord spoke to him again, "Go back to Egypt. The men who wanted to kill you are dead now." So Moses took his wife and his (two) sons and started back to Egypt. As he stopped at a resting place for the night, the Lord met him and tried to kill him (Moses became seriously ill suddenly, and was at the point of death.) But Zipporah took a flint knife and circumcised her son (the younger one), then the Lord let him alone (Ex. 4:19, 24-26).
- Note: Moses had not circumcised his younger son since he was born, because of his wife's opposition. But circumcision was the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. And God warned that any male who is not circumcised should be cut off from his people (Gen. 17:9-14).
- When God made Moses seriously ill and was about to die, because he was returning to Egypt with an uncircumcised son, Zip'porah immediately realized her fault. She circumcised her son there and then, and thus God's wrath ceased and Moses was spared.
- Since Jesus accomplished His redemptive work on the cross, real circumcision has been of the heart and not of the flesh (Rom. 2:29; Gal. 6:15).
- (The above information was furnished for teacher's sake. Children may not be able to comprehend this. You may skip it and begin with the next section.)

Moses's Confrontation with Pharaoh

Now God had designated Aaron, elder brother of Moses, as his spokesman and assistant. Aaron was told to meet Moses in the wilderness; then he introduced Moses to the elders of the people, and persuaded them to accept him as their God-sent leader to deliver them out of the Egyptian bondage (Ex. 4:14-17,27-31).

Together they went to see Pharaoh and said, "The Lord, the God of Israel says, 'Let My people go, for they must hold a feast for Me in the desert.'" But the king retorted, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know Him, and I will not let Israel go" (Ex. 5:1-4).

Furthermore, the king deliberately defied this God of the Hebrews by increasing their work burden. As a result, the people bitterly grumbled against Moses (Ex. 5:5-21).

- So Moses complained to God, "Why did You ever send me when You knew that Pharaoh would do more evil to the people instead of letting them go?" Then the Lord reassured Moses that He would do all He had promised to bring His people out of Egypt into the Promised Land (Gen. 5:22-6:8).
- Note the seven "I wills" in 6:6-8. Underline each of them to find out what God had told Moses here.
- Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron was eighty-three at this time of confrontation with

Pharaoh (Ex.7:7).

The Ten Plagues - God's Judgment Upon Pharaoh

- Moses, assisted by Aaron, repeatedly conveyed to Pharaoh God's commands, "Let My people go, so that they may worship Me in the desert." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen; though he witnessed the miracles performed by the hands of Moses and Aaron, he stubbornly stiffened his neck against God's commands (Ex. 7:8-23).
- The result of his rejection of God's commands brought ten terrible plagues on the obstinate king and his people from God through Moses and Aaron. The following is a list of the ten plagues:
 - (1) The Plague of Blood - All the waters of Egypt turned to blood (Ex. 7:14-25).
 - (2) The Plague of Frogs - Vast hordes of frogs came up and covered the whole land (Ex. 8:1-8).
 - (3) The Plague of Gnats or Lice - The dust of the ground became gnats and infested the whole nation (Ex. 8:16-19).
 - (4) The Plague of Flies - Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh's palace and all Egyptian homes, except the land of Go'shen where God's people lived (Ex. 8:20-32).
 - (5) The Plague of Livestock - A deadly disease destroyed all Pharaoh's cattle, horses, flocks and herds, but none of the Israeli's herds and flocks died (Ex. 9:1-7).
 - (6) The Plague of Boil - When Moses and Aaron tossed ashes toward the sky, it became boils that broke out on men and animals throughout all Egypt (Ex. 9:8-12).
 - (7) The Plague of Hail - Terrible hail storm with lightening struck violently everything in the fields. All Egypt lay utterly in ruin. Only in Goshen there was no hail (Ex. 9:13-35).
 - (8) The Plague of Locusts - Hosts of locusts invaded the land and covered the face of earth until it was black. They devoured all that was after the hail (Ex. 10:1-20).
 - (9) The Plague of Darkness - A total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see or move. But the Israelites had light where they lived (Ex. 10:21-23).

Note: Pharaoh's heart became hardened all the more after each plague; he would not let Israel go. God's patience was running out; and Pharaoh would not see the face of Moses again. Then the last plague struck.

- (10) The Plague on the firstborn - This was the most devastating of all. The death angel went through the land of Egypt and slew all the firstborn of animal and people. The Hebrews were spared because they obeyed God's instruction to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their houses. The death angel "passed over" the houses where the blood was applied - hence, the name PASSOVER for this religious observance by the people of Israel (Ex. 11:1-12:30).

Note: Passover was observed on the 14th day of the first month (According to Jewish calendar which is our April). Passover commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt by God's redemptive act.

The Lamb slain at Passover was a type of Christ, the Lamb of God, Who would come into the world to deliver, by His own blood, all who believe in Him, setting them free from sin and eternal death (John 1:29; I Pet. 1:19).

Israel Leaves Egypt - The Exodus Begins

- Finally the last plague brought judgment on all the Egyptians and their gods, as the first-born sons were slain throughout the land. Then Pharaoh was compelled to comply with Moses' demand to let the Israelites go. The Egyptians urged the people of Israel to hurry and leave the country. For they were afraid they would all die (Ex. 12:29-36).
- After the Israelites left, Pharaoh's armies chased after them to the Red Sea, threatening to destroy them. As the people appealed to Moses, divine protection was provided in a pillar of cloud and fire that barred the Egyptians from overtaking them. When Moses stretched his hand and lifted up his staff over the Red Sea, the waters parted. The people passed safely on dry ground to the other side. When the hosts of Pharaoh attempted to follow, they were all buried beneath its watery graves (Ex. 14:5-31).
- There were about six hundred thousand (600,000) men, besides women and children leaving Egypt that night (after the Egyptians' firstborn sons were slain). Also a mixed multitude (non-Israelites) went up with them. Altogether it must be well over two million people (Ex. 12:37-39).
- The sons of Jacob and their descendants had lived in Egypt 430 years, and it was on the last day of 430th year that the hosts of God's people left the land (Ex. 12:40-42).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. In Exodus we see a family of 70 immigrants into a race of slaves. Then, after 430 years, according to God's plan, they were flinging away the shackles of generations of slavery, and emigrating to a new country and a new life. With miraculous deliverance, God had preserved them as a people and a nation. Our God is a great and awesome God!
2. The Israelites (or Hebrews, or Jews) are God's chosen people, and salvation came from the Jews (John 4:22 - Jesus was born a Jew.) It's very important for us to be acquainted with the Biblical history of the Jews.

Memory Bible Verse: Psalm 33:8, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him."

LESSON 25

Moses - Part IV

A brief Review

- Exodus means "a going out." It marked the departure of the Israelites from Egypt at the end of their 430 years' sojourn in that land (Ex. 12:40-42). It was the great deliverance extended to the people of Israel as the Lord brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders (Deut. 26:8).
- Exodus also marked the birth of a Hebrew nation. God had commissioned Moses to lead them out to the land of promise, Canaan - a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:-4:).
- A large group of 600,000 men, besides all the women and children, plus a multitude of non-Hebrew people, with both mixed origins and mixed motives, went with them; and there were flocks and herds - a vast exodus of cattle (Ex. 12:37-38).
- Exodus began the third period of 40 years in Moses' life - he spent his first 40 years in the royal court as an adopted son of the Egyptian prince, his second 40 years as a fugitive in the land of the Midian, and his final 40 years in the wilderness as leader of a new nation. He died at the age of 120 years (Act. 7:23; cf. Ex. 2:11,15; Act. 7:30; cf. Ex. 7:7; Deut. 34:7).

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire

- After leaving Egypt the Lord guided them by a pillar of cloud during the daytime, and by a pillar of fire at night, so they could travel either day or night. The cloud and fire, representing the presence of God with His people, were never out of sight throughout the entire journey in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21-22).
- When Pharaoh's forces pursued the Israelites to the Red Sea, the pillars of cloud and fire stood between them as a wall. When Moses stretched his hand over the sea, the waters were parted, and the people walked through the sea to the other side on dry ground! When the Egyptian forces attempted to follow, Moses again stretched his hand over the sea, and the waters returned, and the Egyptians were all buried beneath the watery graves (Ex. 14:19-31).

The Manna and the Quail

- When Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, God provided the people with a special food by raining bread (man'na - something like white corian'der seed with a honey taste)) from heaven each morning. It was their chief food during their 40 years wandering in the wilderness until they arrived in Canaan (Ex. 16:1-31; Joshua 5:11-12).
- God also provided meat for the people by bringing them quails (small game birds) on at least two occasions in response to their craving for flesh (Ex. 16:11-13; Num. 11:4-6, 31-34).

God's Covenant with Israel through Moses at Sinai

- The Israelites arrived in the wilderness of Sinai three months after the night of their departure from Egypt (Ex. 19:1). Moses responded to the call of God and went up into the mountain for

40 days to receive divine instructions for the national, social and religious life of the nation, including the Ten Commandments, which became the covenant between the Lord and Israel (Ex. 20:-23:).

- The law that the Lord gave to the people at Sinai laid down His requirements for them. In order to enjoy God's love and blessings of the covenant, they must respond to God's love and grace in faithful obedience. The Ten Commandments were the principles by which the nation was to exist, and formed the basis on which all other laws of Israel were built (Ex. 20:1-17).
- In His law, God expected the Israelites to be a holy people, separated from the pagan immorality and idolatry of their surroundings (Deut. 28:-29:).

Moses Intercedes for Sinful and Rebellious Israel

- While Moses was on the mountain top with God, the people quickly corrupted themselves by making a golden calf and worshipping it, and indulging in sexual immorality. The Lord in His wrath wanted to destroy the whole nation, but promised to make Moses into a great nation instead of the sinful and rebellious Israel. Moses earnestly pleaded with God not to destroy the people; he even offered to die on their behalf. Then God graciously accepted his petition, but allowed a limited judgment to fall upon the people (Ex. 32:1-14).
- For about one year the Israelites camped at Mt. Sinai, preparing themselves for the new life that laid ahead in Canaan (Ex. 19:1; Num. 10:11-12).
- The Lord had instructed Moses to set up a tabernacle, a tent, in the center of the camp. The tabernacle was the symbol of God's presence, showing that God dwelt in their midst (Ex. 25:8-9). It served as the worship center known as the Tent of Meeting where God met with Moses and His people (Ex. 25:22; 29:42-46; 39:32).
- When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled it. The cloud rested upon the Tabernacle during the daytime, and at night there was fire in the cloud so that all the people could see it. This continued throughout all their journeys (Ex. 40:33-38).

The Ten Spies and the Rebellion of Israel

- When the cloud lifted from the tabernacle on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year of Israel's leaving Egypt, the Israelites left the Sinai wilderness and followed the cloud toward the land of Canaan till they arrived in the wilderness of Pa'ran at Kad'desh (Num. 10:11-12).
- Kad'desh (or Kadesh Barner) was on the border of the Promised Land. From this site God commanded Moses to send 12 spies, one from each tribe, into Canaan to explore the land (Num. 13:1-25).
- At the end of 40 days the spies returned. The majority report, given by ten spies, sent the people into spasms of fear; they rebelled and threatened to stone Jos'hua and Cal'eb, the two spies who believed that they could conquer and occupy the land as the Lord promised (Num. 13:25-14:10).

- In response to the people's unbelief and rebellion, God condemned all of that generation, who were 20 years of age and older, except Caleb and Joshua, to perish in the wilderness (Num. 14:10-38).
- For the next 38 years, the people of Israel remained in the wilderness until the entire generation, that is, the ones who were 20 years of age and older had died (Duet. 2:14-16).
- Note: the Israelites already spent 2 years in the wilderness before they reached Kadesh and spied out the land of Canaan. All together they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years according to God's verdict pronounced on them (Num. 14:34-35).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God expected the people of Israel to be a holy nation and His obedient children. God also expects us Christians to be a holy people and faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Memorize the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17), and learn to follow them.
2. Israel's greatest sin was disbelief in refusing to go into Canaan, therefore they were sentenced to die in the wilderness. Let us not commit the same sin of disbelieving in God. Let us learn to trust and obey Him always.

Memory Bible Verses: Leviticus 20:7-8, "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Keep My decrees and follow them, I am the Lord, Who makes you holy."

LESSON 26

Moses - Part V

Brief Review

- Following the people's disbelief and refusal to accept the minority report given by Caleb and Joshua and move ahead into Canaan, the Lord in His anger said to Moses, "How long will these people despise Me, in spite of all the miracles I have done among them? I will strike them down with pestilence and destroy them, but I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they" (Num. 14:11-12).
- Again Moses earnestly interceded for the rebellious people, asking God to forgive them. Again God hearkened Moses' prayer and spared them, but imposed upon them 40 years wandering in the wilderness till that unbelieving adult generation, aged 20 and older, should die out (Num. 14:13-35).

Moses' Patience is Sorely Tried

- After the above incident, the Israelites remained in the wilderness for the next 38 years to complete their life of 40 years in the desert (Deut. 2:14-16).
- During these 40 years of wanderings, Moses' patience had been sorely tried by the murmurings, grumbings, complaints and oppositions of the people, including his own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, who once became jealous of his supreme authority over the people (Ex. 16:1-3; 17:1-3; Num. 12:1-16; 20:2-5; 21:4-9).

Moses loses His Temper and Disobeys God

- Finally, near the end of the 40-year wilderness wanderings the Israelites returned to Kad'esh near the border of Canaan; there again the people rebelled against Moses, grumbling about not having enough water to drink at that place (Num. 20:1-5).
- And God told Moses to gather the assembly together in front of a rock, then speak to that rock and tell it to pour out its water (Num. 20:6-8).
- But Moses lost his temper with the people. By his careless words and rash actions, he struck the rock twice. Though God allowed water to gush out for the people and their cattle to drink, Moses brought judgment upon himself by his disobedience to God (Num. 20:10-13).
- Because of his unique leadership, the cost of his failure to obey God (even only once in his life time) was high. God punished him by not allowing him to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land (Num. 20:12; 27:14; Deut. 3:23-27). That privilege would be given to Joshua, his successor (Num. 27:18-21; Deut. 3:28; 31:14,23).

Moses Continues to Be Faithful in God's Service

- The verdict was a sore chastisement to Moses, but he showed no bitterness, made no change in his loyalty and faithfulness to God. After the condemnation he continued to serve the Lord wholeheartedly as he had been before. He started the people once again on the march toward

Canaan. Shortly after this he led Aaron up Mount Hor to die there, as directed by God, and transferred his office to his son Elea'zer (Num 20:22-29).

- When the people rebelled again and were bitten the fiery serpents sent by God, Moses interceded with God for them again. Then he was told to erect the brazen serpent (A type of Christ) and bid the dying people look at it and live (Num. 21:4-9).
- He then led the people to conquer some large areas of good land east of the Jordan River, territories of the Am'orites [kingdom of Sih'on] and Bash'an [kingdom of Og] (Num. 21:21-35).
- He also led a successful campaign against the Midianites (Num. 31:1-12).

Moses' Farewell Speeches to His Beloved People

- During the remaining weeks, Moses in his farewell speeches, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, reviewed the journey, beginning from Mount Horeb (Sinai) where God made a covenant with Israel. He reminded them of their murmurings, disobedience, rebellion and disbelief. As a result, they were denied entrance into the land that the Lord had promised them for a possession. So Moses, with a pastor's heart, admonished them: "Acknowledge and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. Keep His decrees and commandments, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you forever" (Deut. 1:4-40).
- In his second speech (Deut. 4:44-30:20), God's law, including the Ten Commandments, was reviewed. He told the people that love as well as obedience is essential in their relationship with God: "And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep His commandments and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good (Deut. 10:12-13)?"
- Finally, he concluded his speech with a list of curses and blessings (Deut. 27:15-28:), then he declared, "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil... loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers" (Deut. 30:15-20).

The Death and Burial of God's Faithful Servant Moses

- Moses now had well prepared the people of Israel for their future home in Canaan; the God called His faithful servant climb Nebo's lonely mountain which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, where, upon its summit he viewed the land of Canaan which God had promised the Israelites for a possession (Deut. 32:48-52; 34:1-4).
- There Moses was kissed to sleep by the angels and God buried him - the only man in the Bible to have God as his undertaker (Deut. 34:5-6).
- Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyesight was perfect and he was as strong as a young man. There has never been another prophet like Moses, for the Lord talked to him face to face. And at God's command he performed mighty miracles which have never been equaled. He did great and terrifying wonders before Pharaoh and all servants, and before the people of Israel

in the wilderness (Deut. 34:7-8, 10-12).

- Moses has been always remembered as the founder of the nation of Israel, an outstanding leader, a great teacher and lawgiver. He was truly a man of God.
- Moses was acknowledged as the author of the first 5 books in the O.T., commonly called, "the five Books of Moses." The account of his death (Deut. 34:5-8) was believed to be written by Joshua.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Moses was an outstanding leader in view of the fact that he had constantly endured murmurings, grumbings, complaints and all kinds of opposition against him during the 40 years in the wilderness; yet he loved his countrymen, he taught them God's law, he prayed for them, and cared deeply for them that he was even willing to die for them. One of his touching prayers was, "But now, please forgive their sin - but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written" (Ex. 32:32). God help us learn to love other people even when they are unlovable.
2. God punished Moses through his once disobedience by not permitting him to enter the Promised Land. But Moses did not become bitter at all. He continued to serve the Lord faithfully even unto death. Let's emulate his spirit in our walk with Jesus.

Memory Bible Verses: Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

LESSON 27

Aaron - Part I

Scripture References

- Exodus 4:10-17; 24; 30; Leviticus 8; Numbers 16:-20:

The Meaning of the Name

- Aaron means "a teacher or lofty," for the Lord in His foreknowledge had chosen Aaron to be Moses' prophet and spokesman (Ex. 7:1-2).

Family Background

- Little is known about Aaron's early life. He was born during the Hebrew people's sojourn in Egypt, and assumedly before Pharaoh's edict that all new-born Hebrew baby boys should be destroyed (Ex. 1:15-22).
- Aaron's parents were A'mram and Jock'ebed of the tribe of Levi; he was the fourth generation from Levi. His older sister was Miriam and Moses was his junior brother by 3 years (Num. 26:59-60; Ex. 7:7; cf. Ex. 2:1-10).
- * Aaron's wife was Elish'eba and they had four sons: Na'dab, Abi'hu, Elea'zar and Ith'amar (Ex.6:23).

Aaron, Spokesman of Moses

- Aaron's name was first mentioned in Exodus 4:14 when the Lord called Moses to deliver his countrymen, the Hebrew people, out of slavery in Egypt. Moses tried to make excuses; he said to God that he was slow of speech and tongue, that he would not be able to speak persuasively to Pharaoh. But God replied, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well... You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him" (Ex. 4:14-16).
- Then in Ex. 7:1-2, God again said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your spokesman (or prophet). You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of this country."
- So Aaron was designated by God as Moses' spokesman. We can imagine that Aaron was an eloquent speaker. He must have spoken with convincing power when he and Moses confronted Pharaoh with God's command, "let My people go" (Ex.5:1; 8:1; 9:1).

Moses' Assistant and Agent

- Aaron also acted as Moses' assistant and agent. He first introduced Moses to the elders of the Israelites, and convinced them that God had sent Moses to deliver them out of their bondage of slavery, because the Lord had become concerned about them, and seen their misery (Ex. 4:29-31).

- In their first interviews with Pharaoh, Aaron accompanied Moses and performed the first four miracles before the king and his court, by using the staff which God had given Moses, as follows:
 - (1) Aaron turned the staff into a snake, and then swallowed the staffs of the Egyptian magicians (Ex. 7:10-12).
 - (2) He raised the staff and struck the water of Nile River and all the water was changed to blood, so all the fish in Nile died, and the Egyptians could not drink water from the river (Ex. 7:19-24).
 - (3) He stretched out his hand with the staff over the waters of Egypt and caused the frogs to come up and covered the land (Ex. 8:5-7).
 - (4) He used the staff to strike the dust of the ground, and all the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats [small flying and biting insects] (Ex. 8:16-19).
- Note: the staff (or rod) was given to Moses by God as a symbol of power and authority. It was also called "the staff of God" (Ex. 4:20; 17:9), because great miracles and wonders were performed whenever Moses and Aaron used it in accordance with God's command.
- After the first four miracles performed through Aaron, Moses began to take the decisive lead. Later on, whenever "the staff of God" was used, it was in the hand of Moses himself. Aaron, however, continued to support Moses throughout the 40 years in the wilderness till he died.

Aaron Shares Moses' Leadership

- From the beginning Aaron played a very important part in the leadership with his brother Moses. Together with Moses he confronted Pharaoh, the tyrant of Egypt, and witnessed God's mighty signs and wonders in bringing His people out of the land of slavery.
- On the way to Sinai, after they left Egypt, in the battle with A'malek, Aaron and Hur supported Moses' arms which held "the staff of God" till Israel won a decisive battle over the enemy (Ex. 17:8-13).
- Note: Hur's name was mentioned in connection with Moses and Aaron on two occasions: Ex. 17:10-12 and 24:14. He was one of the top leaders of the people, and, according to tradition, the husband of Miriam, the sister of Moses.
- During the years of the wilderness wanderings, Aaron often assisted Moses in keeping law and order, and executing judgment and justice to the people (Num. 15:33).
- When Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandments, Aaron and two of his sons, Nad'ab and Abi'hu, and the seventy elders of the people and Joshua were allowed to accompany him part of the way. They were granted a glimpse of the divine presence and told to worship far off, while Moses alone was allowed to come near to the Lord (Ex. 24:1-2, 9-18).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God chose Aaron to speak for Moses, and he has chosen all Christians to do His work, to speak

for Jesus. Are you willing to be Jesus' spokesman to tell people about God's love and salvation?

2. We noticed that God also called Aaron to be Moses' assistant or helper. In a church the pastor needs many assistants and helpers in order to keep the church work going. Are you willing to give your time and talent and money in the service of the Lord?

Memory Bible Verse: John 15:16, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name."

LESSON 28

Aaron - Part II

Aaron's Serious Blunders

- We noticed in our last lesson that Aaron maintained an important leadership of the people because of his work with his brother Moses, but he proved to be vulnerable to persuasion and temptation (easy to be persuaded and tempted.)
- While Moses was away for 40 days and 40 nights on the Mount Sinai to receive the tables of the law from God, the people became impatient at the prolonged absence of their leader. They demanded that Aaron make them gods to go before them. In a moment of weakness and under pressure from the people, Aaron committed a gross sin against God. He made a golden calf for the people, similar to the bull-god of Egypt. The people hailed this golden calf as the god who had brought them out of Egypt. Then Aaron proclaimed a day of festival to the Lord, and the people celebrated with revelry and indulged in sex immorality (Ex. 32:1-6).
- As a result, God's wrath burnt hot against them and was ready to destroy the whole congregation. Moses responded with earnest intercession in behalf of the rebellious people. Finally, the people were spared but severely chastised. Moses then ordered the faithful Levites (the sons of Levi) to kill 3,000 rebels; and the Lord also sent a great plague upon the people because of it (Ex. 32:7-35).
- For this great blunder which Aaron committed, God was angry enough to destroy him. Aaron repented of his sin, and then Moses prayed for him and gained forgiveness for him (Deut. 9:20).

Aaron, the High Priest

- While on the mountain to receive divine instructions, Moses was told that Aaron and his 4 sons, Na'dab and Abi'hu, Elea'zar and Ith'amar, were to serve the Lord as priests - with Aaron being the high priest (Ex. 28:1-4).
- Accordingly, after the tabernacle - the temporary worship center in the wilderness, had been completed, Aaron and his 4 sons were solemnly consecrated to the priestly office by Moses (Lev. 8:1-13).
- Aaron was given special robes of glory and beauty for dignity and honor, signifying his status as the high priest within the priesthood (Ex. 28:2; Lev. 8:7-9).
- Aaron, in spite of his blunders and shortcomings, was thus chosen by God to serve as the first high priest of the people of Israel in charge of the national worship, an office he held nearly 40 years and served faithfully during those years of wandering in the wilderness till he died (Num. 20:24-28).

About the Office of the Priest

- Priests were mediators between the people and God. They carried out daily functions in the tabernacle (later in the temple) by presenting the people's sacrifices to God, and passing on God's instructions to the people. They were to be teachers and spiritual guides of the people

(Deut. 31:9-13).

- Only priests could enter the Holy Place of the tabernacle (or the temple), and the high priest alone was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies). Even then he could do so only once a year to represent the people on the Day of Atonement, to atone for their sin (Lev. 16:2-3,34; Heb. 9:6-7).

Aaron, a type of Christ, the Great High Priest

- In the New Testament times, the office of priest was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Aaron and his sons offered animal blood that, in reality, could never take sins away; those sacrifices only served as reminder of sins. But Christ offered His own blood (Heb. 9:12) once for all to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 7:27; 9:26; 10:10,12).
- A permanent and perfect sacrifice has been made by Jesus Christ through his death on the cross. Hence, there is no longer a need for any human priests to offer a sacrifice to atone for man's sins. There had been many of those priests, because they died (Heb. 7:23); Christ has a permanent priesthood, because He lives forever (Heb. 7:24).
- Christ, the Great High Priest, is today seated in heaven at the right hand of God. "Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25).

All God's People Are Priests

- God told the people of Israel through Moses in Ex. 19:5-6, "Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession; for all the earth is mine, you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Although Israel had an established order of priesthood, the people were expected to serve God both by bringing Him worship, and by making Him known to all the nations. And this is the main function of a priest.
- In the N.T., we are told in I Pet. 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." As Christians, we have the privilege of worshipping God, and offering prayers on behalf of others and making Christ known to the world (Heb. 13:15; I Tim. 2:1-4).
- So today all true Christians are priests (or ministers) for God - with Jesus Christ being our Great High Priest.

The Death of Aaron

- Aaron shared Moses' guilt by disobeying God, when, in anger at the people's constant complaining, Moses struck the rock at Me'ribah. Consequently, neither Moses nor Aaron was permitted to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:6-13).
- Nearly the end of the wilderness wandering, when the Israelites reached Mount Hor, Aaron, accompanied by Moses and his eldest surviving son Eleazar, went up to the top of the mountain at God's command. There he was stripped of his priestly robes, which were passed in succession

to his son Eleazar; then he died and was buried in the mountain (Deut. 10:6).

- This occurred on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, when he was 123 years old (Num. 33:38-39).
- His brother Moses died six months later on the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year of the wanderings in the plains of Moab (Deut. 1:3,5), soon after he finished his farewell speech to the people of Israel (cf. Deut. 32:48-34:8).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Aaron was chosen of God to share leadership with Moses, yet in his human weakness he sinned grievously. He was saved from God's wrath only because Moses interceded on his behalf (Deut. 9:20). We are all human, and sinful. But we thank God that if we confess our sins, Jesus is always ready to plead for us before God and gain forgiveness for us (see I John 2:1-2).
2. Aaron was the high priest and his sons were priests. Today Jesus is our Great High Priest, and we who are His children are priests. We all have the privilege to be His representatives before the world.

Memory Bible Verse: I Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (Note: Jesus is the Son of God, but He became a man in order to be our Mediator.)

LESSON 29

Joshua - Part I

Scripture References

- Exodus 17:8-13;24:12-18;33:11; Numbers 13:1-16;14:4-10,26-30; Deuteronomy 31:14-15,23; Joshua 1:-11;;13;;22:-24:

The Meaning of the Name

- Joshua's earlier name was Hoshe'a which means "salvation" (Num. 13:8), but Moses changed his name to Joshua which means "the Lord is salvation" (Num. 13:16).

Family Background

- Joshua was born and brought up in Egypt, the son of Nun of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8, 16).
- He was born a slave during the painful years of bondage when his people suffered terribly in Egypt under Pharaoh. He shared in the bitter experience of hardship and misery. He knew something of the lash of the whip of the Egyptian taskmasters. He and his people must have cried day and night to the Lord for deliverance and liberty. Little did he know that he would one day become the successor to Moses, and the man who led the nation of Israel to take possession of the Promised Land.

Moses' Chief Assistant and Personal Aide

- Two months after the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites camped at Rep'hidim before they reached Sinai. There Moses struck a rock to get water for the people and their cattle to drink (Ex. 17:1-7). At this place when the Am'alekites (descendants of Esau, also known as Ed'omites) attacked the Israelites, Moses appointed Joshua to command a fighting force against the enemy. Through God's help the people of Israel won their first battle (Ex. 17:8-16).
- From now on Joshua became Moses' chief assistant and personal aide (or servant). He accompanied Moses part of the way to Mount Sinai and kept watch when the latter went into the mountain to receive for the first time the two tables of the law and commandments (Ex. 24:12-13), and was the first one to meet Moses on his return (Ex. 32:17-18).
- Moses also assigned Joshua to guard the Tabernacle (the Tent) when he returned to the camp (Ex. 33:7-11).
- Note: the Tabernacle (or the Tent of Meeting) was first set up in the center of the camp as a symbol of God's presence with the people. After the incident of the golden calf worship, Moses moved the Tabernacle outside of the camp and left it in charge of Joshua (Ex. 33:7-11).

A Worthy Leader and Loyal Representative of His Tribe

- At the age of 40, Joshua was chosen to represent his tribe Ephraim in spying out Canaan (Josh. 14:7). Among the twelve spies, only he and Cal'eb, the representative of Judah, opposed the

majority report. They both firmly believed that God could give them victory over the Canaanites to possess the land. But the congregation chose to accept the unbelieving report of the ten spies, and threatened to stone them (Num. 13:1-16; 14:6-10).

- As a result, God rewarded Joshua and Caleb for their loyalty and faithfulness by keeping them alive to enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:30-38).

God's Chosen Successor to Moses

- Forty years later, as Moses was near his death, God said to him, "Now the days of your death is near. Call Joshua and present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting, where I will commission him. So Moses and Joshua came and presented themselves at the Tent of Meeting" (Deut. 31:14).
- The Lord also said to Joshua, son of Nun, "Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I Myself will be with you" (Deut. 31:23).
- Then we read, "So the Lord said to Moses, 'Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him'" (Num. 27:18-20).
- Then Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the Lord instructed through Moses (Num. 27:22-23).
- Upon Moses' death, Joshua assumed the leadership of the nation of Israel. He was now eighty years old and "was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Joshua was a faithful aide to Moses. He served Moses, the man of God, with unswerving loyalty and devotion, and later God chose and trusted him to lead His people after Moses. If we are faithful to God, He will entrust us with great things.
2. Joshua had perfect and complete confidence in God that He would fulfill His promises to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land in spite of the negative opinion of the other ten spies. We all must learn to trust in God's Word, not what man says.

Memory Bible Verse: Deuteronomy 7:9, "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments."

LESSON 30

Joshua - Part II

A Brief Review

- Near the end of the forty years of wandering, God told Moses that he was soon to die (for he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land.) Then Moses requested that the Lord would appoint a new leader for the people, who would lead them into battle and care for them, so the Lord's people would not be left like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord replied that He would choose Joshua to succeed him. Then Moses did as the Lord commanded; he publicly ordained Joshua as his successor (Num. 27: 12-23).
- Note: Joshua was probably over 40 years old when Moses sent him, along with other eleven tribal leaders, to explore (spy out) the land of Canaan. Forty years later, now in his late eighties, he was chosen by God to be the new leader of the nation of Israel.

God's Charge to Joshua

- Upon the death of Moses, the Lord instructed Joshua to get ready to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. In the meantime, God gave Joshua special encouragement for the great task ahead, "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them" (Josh. 1:6).
- Then God assured him of victory, success and prosperity as long as he heeded what the Lord told him, "Be careful to obey all the law My servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful whenever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Josh. 1:7-8).

Rahab and the Two Spies

- Before he launched his attack on Canaan, Joshua sent two men to spy out Jericho, the first city they would want to take. The men entered a prostitute Rah'ab's house who protected them from the local authorities, and in return asked protection for herself and her family when the Israelites attacked the city (Josh. 2:1-16; Heb. 11:31).

Crossing the Jordan River

- Three days after the return of the spies, Joshua ordered Israel's advance across the Jordan River with the priests bearing the Ark of Covenant before the people (Josh. 3:1-6).
- Now it was the harvest season and the Jordan was overflowing all its banks; but as the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark touched the river, the water parted and the people walked across the river on dry ground (Josh. 3:7-17; 4:1-13).
- That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses (Josh. 4:14).

The Conquest of Jericho

- One day as Joshua was near Jericho, the Lord, the Commander of the Lord's army, appeared to him. It was a visible confirmation of Joshua's divine call, similar to the Angel of the Lord's appearance to Moses at the burning bush (Josh. 5:13-15; cf. Ex. 3:2-6).
- Joshua worshipped and then carried out the God-directed siege by marching the people around city daily for six days. On the seventh day they circled it seven times, then shouted and blew their trumpets and the wall fell flat, so the people went up into the city and took it. The city was devoted to God (doomed to destruction by God), totally destroyed and burned, only Rahab who cared for the spies, with her family were saved (Josh. 6:1-27).
- Note: Many people have great difficulty with God commanding Moses and Joshua to utterly destroy the Canaanites. But God was concerned about the excessive and extreme wickedness of the Canaanites, and the evil influence that could affect His Covenant People. Leviticus 18: is a list of the wicked thing done by the Canaanites - note in vv.24-30 how God warned his people not to defile themselves in any of their sinful ways. That was why God ordered them to be destroyed (Read Deut. 7:1-6; 20:16-18). This command represented God's judgment against sin and immorality.

His Successful Campaigns (Joshua 8:10-11:)

- Joshua's strong faith in God, combined with his long years of experience under Moses as an army general enabled him to carry out the work God entrusted him. The entire operation for the conquest of Canaan showed Joshua's patience, courage, faith, obedience and integrity. He administered judgment and justice to all his people, and dealt promptly with those who were willfully rebellious and disobedient (Josh. 7:).
- Victories followed him wherever he went as God fought for His people from heaven by hurling large hailstorms on their enemy (Josh. 10:10-11); and when Joshua needed more time to finish the battle, God stayed the sun and moon in answer to his prayer (Josh. 10:12-14).
- In about six years, Joshua was the undisputable conqueror of the whole land. His conquests were six nations with thirty-one kings (Josh. 12:7-24).

The Fulfillment of God's Promise

- After the conquest of Canaan, Joshua supervised the division of the territory among the tribes (Josh. 13:8-21:42). But he had constantly to remind them to drive out the Canaanites from the scattered areas they still occupied (Josh. 13:1; 17:16-18:3).
- "So the Lord gave Israel all the land He had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as He had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; not one of the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" (Josh. 21:43-45).

The Final Days of Joshua

- The people of Israel served and obeyed the Lord throughout Joshua's life time and the time of the elders who outlived him and who had personally witnessed the mighty works which the Lord had

done for them (Josh. 24:31).

- Many years passed, when the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies and Joshua was very old, he summoned Israel's leaders, urging them to be faithful and obedient to the instructions written in the Book of the Law of Moses, and warning them not to associate with the heathen people still remaining in the land or serve their gods... (Josh. 23:).
- Later, he assembled all the tribes at Sche'chem (Josh. 24:1) and challenged them to maintain their faithfulness to God. He said to the people, "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.... But if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:14-15).
- After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 (Josh. 24:29).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Joshua was successful in carrying on Moses' work and leading Israel to conquer the land. The key of his success is found in Joshua 1:8, "Do not let this Book of the Law (of Moses) depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." We, too, must read our Bible daily, meditate on it and practice it that we may be able to lead a prosperous and successful life.
2. Joshua was preeminent as a military leader and a wise administrator, but his accomplishment did not result from his own talent or ability. He was a great man because he was filled with the Spirit of God (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9) and followed the Lord wholeheartedly (Num. 32:12). Let us remember what the Lord tells us in Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

Memory Bible Verse: Joshua 1:8, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

LESSON 31

Rahab

The Meaning of Name

- Rah'ab means "spacious or wide or broad." She was a woman of Jericho who played an important role at the time of Israel's entrance into Canaan.
- Note: There is another "Rahab" mentioned in Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps.87:4; 89:10; Isa. 30:7; 51:9, which is a mythological sea monster or dragon, representing the evil forces of chaos, and has no connection with the personal name of Rahab of Jericho.

Scripture References

- Joshua 2: & 6;; Matt. 1:5-6; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25.

Family Background

- Rahab was a prostitute, a wayward woman, whose house was built on the city wall of Jericho. She lived alone, although she had a father and mother, brothers and sisters living in Jericho (Josh. 2:1-13).
- She probably also carried on a trade in dyed linen, for she had piles of flax upon the roof and stocks of scarlet (bright red) thread (cord) in the house (Josh. 2:6, 18).
- Rahab was an A'morite by race, so were all the people of Jericho, one of major tribes or national groups living in Canaan before Israel's conquest of Pal'estine (the land of Canaan). Gen. 10:15-16 cite Canaan, one of Noah's grandsons, as the ancestor of the Amorites (Gen. 10:6, 15-16).
- The Amorites were a very wicked people, for God foretold Abraham that He would punish this people when their wickedness had reached its full measure (Gen. 15:16). This was fulfilled when the Israelites, led by Joshua, invaded the land and destroyed the Canaanites (cf. Deut. 7:1-4; 20:16-18).

Rahab and the Spies

- Just before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, Joshua sent two men to spy out Jericho, the first city they would meet. In Jericho they came upon Rahab the prostitute and were received into her house (Josh. 2:1).
- Rahab knew that these two men were spies, but instead of turning them over to the local authorities, she decided to cast in her lots with them; for she had heard how the Lord dried up the Red Sea for the Israelites when they left Egypt and how they destroyed the two kingdoms of the Amorites (Sih'on and Og) east of the Jordan. She knew perfectly well that this God of Israel would give Jericho and all Canaan to the Israelites. Above all, she was convinced that the God of Israel was the supreme God of heaven and earth (Josh. 2:8-11).
- When the King of Jericho was told that two Israelites had come to the city to spy out the land, he immediately dispatched his police officers to Rahab's home, demanding that she surrender them.

But she had hidden them under the piles of flax on the roof of her house, and told the officers that they had left the city. The officers started in pursuit; meanwhile, the city gates were all kept shut (Josh. 2:2-7).

- Then Rahab went up on the roof and informed the men of what had happened. She told them why she wanted to risk her own safety to save their lives; and she made them swear to spare her life and the lives of her kindred when the Israelites attacked the city (Josh. 2:8-14).

The Scarlet Cord in the Window

- In returning her favor, the men promised her own safety and the protection of her family on the condition that she hang out a scarlet cord (rope) in the window, that she and her relatives should stay inside her house when the siege took place (Josh. 2:15-20).
- Since her house was on the top of the city wall, Rahab let the two spies, under cover of darkness, down the outside wall from a window by a cord; then she tied the same scarlet cord in the window through which she let them down - the scarlet cord (in strong and vivid red color) was a sign or token to indicate that her house was under the mercy and protection of God, sealed by blood.
- Thus Rahab, along with father and mother, brothers and sisters, and all her father's household who took refuge in her house were spared (Josh. 6:22-25).

Saved by Grace

- The Bible repeatedly refers to Rahab as a prostitute (Josh. 2:1; 6:17,25; Matt. 1:5; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25), but she was saved by grace through her faith in Israel's God (cf. Eph. 2:8). We are sure that she must have repented of her sins and lived a new life among God's people after she left Jericho.
- The salvation of Rahab, the prostitute, a deep-dyed sinner, illustrates that even in a doomed city a wicked individual could find grace and mercy by turning to God in faith. The people of Jericho, hopelessly depraved (cf. Lev. 18:24-26), chose to fight Israel instead of seeking mercy as did Rahab. If they did, they would be spared (see Deut. 20:10-11).

Faith and Reward

- According to Matthew's genealogy, Rahab was the wife of Sal'mod of the tribe of Judah. Thus she became the mother of Boaz (the husband of Ruth), and the grandmother of Ob'ed, and the great-grand mother of Jesse (Ruth 4:18-21).
- Since Jesse was the father of King David, Rahab became the mother (an ancestress) of the line from which came Christ the Promised Messiah. What a great honor she had gained, indeed!

Rahab's Faith Is Exemplified

- In Hebrew 11:31, Rahab is commended for her faith, "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

- James 2:25 cites her as an example of one who has been justified by her work - by what she had done she proved her faith in God, "... was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did..?"

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Rahab was a shining example of faith. Once she learned to know the true God of heaven and earth, she gave up everything, her land, her people, her country, her gods, etc., even risked her life to follow God.
2. We are all sinners, only by God's pure grace we are saved. Then we must also by our good works to prove ourselves to be worthy children of God.
3. **Memory Bible Verses:** Ephesians 2:8-10, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

LESSON 32

Ruth

The Meaning of Name

- Ruth means "friendship and beauty."

Scripture References

- The Book of Ruth and Matthew 1:5

Historical Background

- We find the beautiful story of Ruth in the Book that bears her name. She was a Mo'abite woman. Nothing is known about her childhood life.
- The events occurred in Ruth's life at a dark time in Israel's history - "In the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1), and "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25).
- This was a period when the people of Israel slipped into the worship of false gods; and it was characterized by anarchy, savagery, lust, strife and lawlessness.
- The story of Ruth presents a sharp contrast. Instead of war, bloodshed, cruelty and selfishness, there is love, simple trust, honesty and purity; in spite of the wide spread of apostasy, there were still a few faithful ones who exercised simple faith in God amid the spiritual darkness of their age.
- What a contrast this is to Ruth, who adhered steadfastly to her mother-in-law and to the God of Israel, although she was from a dark gentile background.
- There are only two books out of the sixty-six books of the Holy Bible named after woman, namely, Ruth and Esther. Ruth was a Gentile (a Mo'abite) who married a Hebrew (a Jew), and Esther was a Hebrew (a Jewess) who married a Gentile (Xerxes the king of Persia).

Famine in Judah

- The story begins in the time of the Judges when Elim'elech and his wife Nao'mi, and her two sons, Mah'lon, and Chil'ion, left Bethlehem in Judea and went to sojourn in the neighboring land of Mo'ab to escape famine in Israel (Ruth 1:1-2).
- Soon after this Elim'elech died and Nao'mi was left with two boys. Then these two sons married native girls, named O'pah and Ruth, the latter being the wife of Mahlon (Ruth 4:10). They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, leaving their widowed wives and mother in a desperate situation (Ruth 1:3-5).
- After this, Naomi decided to return to her own country and kindred with her daughters-in-law, for she heard that the Lord had blessed His people with bumper crops again (Ruth 1:6).

Ruth's Loyalty to Naomi

- Through the years both Ruth and Orpah must have learned from the Naomi family that the Hebrew God, the God of Israel, was the only true God, not the idols of the Moabite people. Ruth, particularly as a warm and honest person, must have wholeheartedly embraced the Hebrew God without reservation (Read her confession in Ruth 1:16-17).
- Shortly after the three had begun their journey toward Bethlehem, Naomi stopped and urged Orpah and Ruth to go back to their own people that they might marry again and settle down. At first, both of them insisted to go with Naomi (This showed how much the two girls loved their mother-in-law; that there was an excellent relationship between them and Naomi!)
- After much tears Orpah embraced and kissed her mother-in-law with a broken heart and returned to her childhood home, but Ruth clung to her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:6-14).
- When Naomi again urged Ruth to follow her sister-in-law to return to her people and to her gods, Ruth adamantly refused; she was willing to leave her own land and share the unknown future with the aging widowed mother-in-law. With her face bathed in tears, she cried out, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back to you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and you God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16-18).
- This is surely the most beautiful confession of love in all the world. Ruth's love for her dead husband's aging mother is as strong as death; her faith in her dead husband's family God, the God of Israel, is as deep as ocean!

Back to Bethlehem

- So the two women returned to Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem. On their arrival, the whole town was stirred. In only ten years' time, Naomi changed so much. She looked so old; her husband and two sons were dead, and by her side was the Moabite young woman. "Is this really Naomi?" the women asked (Ruth 1:19-21).
- Now their return from Moab and arrival in Bethlehem was just at the beginning of harvest time (Ruth 1:22).

Ruth and Boaz

- In Bethlehem, Ruth went out to the fields to glean some free grain (to pick up the leftover grain) to get food for Naomi and herself. She happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Bo'az, who was a close relative of the late Elimelech - Ruth's late father-in-law (Ruth 2:1-3).
- Boaz was an honorable, wealthy and godly man. When he was told that the girl gleaning grain in his field was the Moabite young woman who returned with Naomi, he showed particular kindness to her; he protected her from local people, gave her food and drink, and allowed her to pick up as much grain as she could to take home (Ruth 2:4-23).
- When Ruth expressed her gratitude to Boaz, he replied, "I have been told all about what you

have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband - how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:10-12).

- His kindness to her induced Naomi to suggest that Ruth ask Boaz to marry her to produce through her a child who, according to custom (cf. Deut. 25:5-10), would be recognized as child of her deceased husband. This child would grow up to carry on the dead man's name and inheritance. Boaz was willing to do as Ruth requested provided that the other closer kinsman would not perform his duty (Ruth 3:1-18).
- As it turned out that the other closer relative would not perform his duty (Ruth 4:1-6), Boaz was ready to fulfill his responsibility toward the lovely young woman who had won his heart (Ruth 4:7-12).

A Rich Reward for Ruth

- God did richly reward Ruth, for Boaz married her, and the child born to them became the grandfather of the famous King David (Ruth 4:13-22; Matt. 1:5-6).
- Thus, Ruth, a gentile by birth, found herself among God's chosen ones, through whom later the Savior of the world was born (Matt. 1:5-16).
- Note: Ruth's son O'bed was born in about 1200 B.C., and David in 1040 B.C. Jesus was born about one thousand years after David.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Naomi was a good, old-fashioned, godly woman. She was a loving and caring mother-in-law; and she treated her daughters-in-law very well and in return they both loved her deeply. Unfortunately Orpah turned back, but Ruth steadfastly clung to her and her God. In order to have happiness and harmony in our home, we must let the love of God reign in our heart and our home.
2. Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law, and her faith in Israel's God should have inspired us to love God more and serve Him better.

Memory Bible Verses: Ruth 1:16-17, "But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.'"

LESSON 33

Samuel - Part I

The Meaning of Name

- Samuel means "heard or asked of God." In I Samuel 1:20, we read, "So in the course of time Han'nah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel saying, because I asked the Lord for him."

Scriptures References

- I Samuel 1:16-19; 25:1; Acts 3:24; 13:20; Heb. 11:32-34

Family Background

- Samuel was the son of Elka'nah of E'phraim. His father, a descendant of Levi, had two wives, Penin'nah and Han'nah. Hannah had no child and prayed earnestly to God that she might give birth to a boy, vowing that if her prayer were answered, the boy would be dedicated to the Lord's service for lifetime (I Sam. 1:1-11).
- Hannah's petition was granted. She named the boy Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him" (I Sam. 1:12-20).
- She kept her promise; when the boy was weaned (or old enough), the parents brought him to the Tabernacle in Shi'loh where Samuel was dedicated to the Lord's service for lifetime. When his parents returned home, Samuel remained at Shiloh to be brought up by the high priest E'li (I Sam. 1:21-27).
- Note: At this time the permanent temple had not been built until 120 years later by King Solomon.
- So at a young age as a little boy, Samuel went to live in the Tabernacle. Each year when his parents came to Shiloh to worship, to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord, his mother brought a little robe for him, such as worn by priests - we suppose that she brought him lots of goodies to enjoy also (I Sam. 2:19-20).
- Samuel grew up to become Eli's helper in the duties of the Tabernacle (I Sam. 2:11, 18).

Eli and His Two Wicked Sons

- Eli was both a judge and high priest in Israel. He was a good man and served the Lord faithfully, but he was a weak father who had no control over his two sons, Phi'nehas and Hoph'ni. These two sons were also priests under their father, but they were wicked men and had no regard for the Lord. Their conduct so shocked the people that they treated the people's offering to the Lord with contempt; they took meat by force and threat from sacrificial animals before they were dedicated to God (I Sam. 2:12-17).
- They also engaged in immoral act with the women-servants at the entrance to the Tabernacle. So the sin of these young men was very great in the eyes of the Lord (I Sam. 2:17, 22).

- Eli was now very old, but he was aware of what his sons were doing. Instead of exercising the stern authority of a father and rebuking them as a judge, he only mildly warned them of their wrong doings. His sons, however, no longer listened to their father's rebuke. So the Lord was ready to kill them (I Sam. 2:23-25).
- One day the Lord sent a prophet (a preacher) to announce the severe punishment of the house of Eli that his two sons should be slain in one day. The Lord declared, "Those who honor Me I will honor, but those who despise Me will be disdained... I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in My heart and mind" (I Sam. 2:27-36).

The Call of God to Samuel

- Meanwhile the boy Samuel was serving the Lord before Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days. Eli was almost blind with age by now. One night after Eli had gone to bed, and Samuel was sleeping in the Temple near the Ark (He was about 12 years old.) The Lord called out, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "What is it?" He jumped up and ran to Eli, saying, "Here I am. You called me." But Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel again jumped up and ran to Eli, "Here I am. You called me." "No, I didn't call you, my son," Eli said, "Go on back to bed (I Sam. 3:1-6).
- Samuel did not yet know the Lord; the Lord had not spoken directly to him yet. So the Lord called the third time, and once more he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." By this time Eli realized it was the Lord Who had spoken to the boy. He told Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if He calls again, say, "speak, Lord, your servant is listening" (I Sam. 3:7-9).
- And the Lord came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" and Samuel replied, "Yes, Lord, Your servant is listening." Then the Lord revealed to Samuel a clear and shocking message of impending doom against Eli's guilty household for the foolish indulgence which the father had shown to his unworthy sons (I Sam. 3:10-14).
- And the Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and He let none of his words (his messages) fail to come true. Then all Israel knew Samuel was a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord continued to give messages to Samuel at the Tabernacle in Shiloh, and he passed them on to the people (I Sam. 3:19-21).
- Soon afterward Eli died upon receiving the tragic news of the deaths of his two sons in the disastrous war with the Philistines, and the capture of the Ark by the enemy (I Sam. 4:1-22).

Samuel Succeeds Eli

- The Ark was soon restored to the Israelites. During the next twenty years all Israel was in deep sorrow for what had happened to them, and began to seek the Lord. Gradually, at the end of the twenty years, Samuel emerged as the national leader, and succeeded Eli as judge and priest. He told the people to get rid of foreign gods and give themselves fully to the Lord and serve Him only. Then the Lord would save them from the Philistines (I Sam. 7:1-4).
- For many years, Samuel served as a traveling judge. From year to year, he went on from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah. He judged the people in all these towns. But he always went back to

Ramah, his hometown, which was his birthplace. He also judged Israel there (I Sam. 7:15-17).

- Now the religious life of Israel centered on Samuel. Since the Philistines had destroyed the Tabernacle in Shiloh, Samuel built an altar of Sacrifice to the Lord in his hometown Ramah (I Sam. 7:17).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Samuel's birth shows the great faith of his mother, Hannah. Hannah was childless and she prayed earnestly for the Lord to give her a son. She vowed (promised) that if the Lord would answer her prayer she would dedicate her son to the Lord's service. Eventually, Samuel was born and Hannah kept her promise to give her son to the Lord. Many times we made promises to the Lord in prayer, but as soon as our prayers were answered we forgot all about our promises. God help us to be faithful and true to Him always.
2. Samuel received early training in the things of God under Eli, the high priest. It is important for children to be taught the things of Christ and the knowledge of the Bible by parents and Sunday School teachers as early as possible.

Memory Bible Verse: Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

LESSON 34

Samuel - Part II

Israel Demands a King

- When Samuel became old, he appointed his two sons, Jo'el and Abi'jah, as judges for Israel in his place. But his sons did not live as their father did, for they were greedy and corrupt. The people complained that his sons did not walk in his ways but took bribes and perverted justices; they asked Samuel to appoint a king to lead them such as all the other nations have (I Sam. 8:1-5).
- At first Samuel was very reluctant to grant the people's request, but the Lord told him to go ahead to appoint them a king. The Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to whatever the people say to you. They have not rejected you. They have rejected Me from being their King. They are doing as they have always done. When I took them out of Egypt, they left Me and served other gods. They are doing the same to you. Now listen to the people, but warn them about what the king who rules over them will do (I Sam. 8:6-9).
- The people's trouble had not come from the system of government, but from their own sins. If only they would turn to God in repentance and faith, and humbly walk with the Lord!

The Anointing of Saul as King of Israel

- God soon revealed to Samuel that He would send to him the man whom He had chosen to be Israel's first King. Following God's direction, Samuel met Saul, the son of Kish, whom Samuel anointed in a private ceremony (I Samuel 9:15-16; 10:1).
- Accordingly, Saul was chosen to be the first King of Israel. He was the most handsome young man of Israel, and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else. In other words, he was handsome and tall.
- But Samuel remained as prophet and judge - "he judged Israel all the days of his life" (I Sam. 7:15). And he never ceased to teach the people the way of God, and pray for them (I Sam. 12:23-25).

The Rejection of Saul as King

- Unfortunately, Saul turned out to be a failure. He became selfish and impatient; he wanted complete power, both religious and political. One time he exceeded his power by offering Sacrifice himself, which was a duty only belonging to the priests. He was rejected by God because he intruded into the priest's office; therefore, Samuel told him, "You acted foolishly. You have disobeyed the commandments of the Lord your God. He was going to make you and your descendants kings of Israel forever. But now your kingdom will not last long. The Lord has sought out a man after His heart and appointed him ruler of His people, because you have acted presumptuously (I Samuel 13:5-14).
- On a later occasion, Saul deliberately disobeyed God's command through Samuel. After this, Samuel parted with Saul and never saw him again, although he continued to grieve for Saul; and the Lord, too, was very sorry that He had ever made Saul King of Israel.

David Selected and Anointed King

- Since Saul had been rejected by God, Samuel was instructed to go to Bethlehem to choose a person who would one day replace Saul as King of Israel. That person was the young shepherd boy David, son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah (I Sam. 16:1-13).
- Note: We'll learn more about Saul and David in later lessons.

Samuel As a Prophet

- A prophet is one who speaks for God and communicates God's message to the people. In other words, a prophet is a spokesman for God. Samuel was called to be a prophet for we read in I Sam. 3:19-20, "And all Israel recognized that Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord." In I Sam. 9:9, 18, Samuel was called a "seer" which is the same as a "prophet." In I Sam. 12:23, we are told that Samuel taught people the way of God.

Samuel As a Priest

- Samuel was born a Levite and the Lord had chosen him as His faithful priest, while he was yet a little boy living in the Tabernacle with Eli (I Sam. 2:35).
- Samuel's priestly functions are as follows:
 - (1) The offering of sacrifice (I Sam. 7:9-10, 17)
 - (2) Praying for God's people (I Sam. 7:9; 12:23-25)
 - (3) Teaching God's people the way that is good and right (I Sam. 12:23)
 - (4) The anointing of kings (I Sam. 10:1 and 16:13 - Saul and David)

Samuel As a Judge

- In I Sam. 7:15-17, we read that Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he served as a traveling judge to administer justice to Israel.

The Death of Samuel

- Samuel died while Saul was still King. He was buried in his hometown of Ramah, and was deeply mourned by the nation (I Sam. 25:1; 28:3).
- Throughout the centuries that followed his death, Samuel was highly respected by the people of Israel (Jeremiah 15:1).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Samuel lived before God blamelessly; he served God faithfully as prophet, priest and judge. He taught the people to walk in the way of the Lord and brought a great revival to the nation of Israel. If we, too, live a godly life as Samuel did, God would use us to do great things.
2. The deep reverence and love the nation of Israel had for Samuel is seen by the grief manifested at

his death. "All Israel mourned for him" (I Sam. 25:1; 28:3). He has long been remembered after his death as one of the great prophets of the Lord. Surely the influence of a godly man affects future generations always.

Memory Bible Verses: I Samuel 12:23-24, "As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things He has done for you."

LESSON 35

Saul - Part I

Scripture References

- I Samuel 8:-28;; 31;; I Chronicles 10;; Acts 13:16-21

The meaning of the Name

- Saul means "asked for" or "demanded."

Historical Background

- From the beginning of Joshua's rule till Eli, the priest (also a judge), Israel had been under the rule of judges for 450 years. "In those days there was no King in Israel; every one did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25; cf. Acts 13:19-20).
- Judges were military leaders who were raised up by God to deliver the nation of Israel from their enemies, with the exception of Joshua who led the people of Israel to conquer the land of Canaan. The stories of Judges are found in the Book of Judges, except Joshua and Eli.
- After Eli died, the priest Samuel became the leader of the nation of Israel, who was a judge and priest. When Samuel had grown old, he appointed his two sons to be judges over Israel in his place. And the people complained that his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. So the people requested a king to govern them like all the other nations; and the king may go out before them and fight their battles (I Sam. 8:1-5, 19-20).

The Appointment of Saul as King

- Israel's demand to have king as other nations rejected the Theo'cracy (a government in which God Himself is the King). The Lord said to Samuel, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not be King over them." (I Sam. 8:7).
- The people lacked confidence in their God; they were turning from faith in a invisible God to put their confidence in a visible King. Samuel warned them what they would have to endure from a king, but on their persisting in their demand, he reluctantly promised to do as they wished (I Sam. 8:10-22).
- Following God's direction, Samuel met Saul, a very impressive young man, perhaps in his late thirties, when he was searching for some lost asses of his father. Samuel invited him as a guest of honor to a sacrificial feast; next morning, as Saul was leaving for his home, Samuel anointed him as King of Israel (I Sam. 9:1-27; 10:1).
- As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed his heart and gave him a new attitude (I Sam. 10:9).
- The choice of Saul as King was confirmed at a national assembly seven days later when Samuel

summoned the people of Israel to the Lord at Miz'pah. Here at Mizpah Samuel instructed the tribe to choose a king by lot, and Saul was chosen. But the bashful young man had hidden himself. When he was brought from his hiding place and stood among the people, he was a head taller than anyone else, towering above the multitude (I Sam. 10:8, 17-23).

- And Samuel said to the people, "See the man the Lord has chosen. There is no one like him among all the people." And the people shouted, "Long live the King!" (I Sam. 10:24)

Victory Over The Am'monites

- At this time, the city of Jab'esh Gil'ead of Israel was besieged by the Ammonites; and when the citizens of Jabesh asked for peace, Nah'ash, the King of the Ammonites, replied, "On this condition I will make a peace treaty with you: I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you as a disgrace upon all Israel (I Sam. 11:3).
- When the bad news reached Saul, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and he became very angry. He summoned the tribes to follow him and Samuel to battle. And the people came as one man; there were three hundred thousand men from Israel plus thirty thousand from the tribe of Judah (I Sam. 11:4-8).
- With this mighty army, Saul soundly defeated the Ammonites and saved the city of Jabesh and its inhabitants. After this, Saul was firmly established as King in the presence of the Lord at Gil'gal. And the whole nation rejoiced greatly (I Sam. 11:9-15).

Saul's First Transgression

- In the second year of his reign, Saul selected 3,000 men as a standing army, 2,000 being with himself and the other 1,000 with his youthful son Jonathan (I Sam. 13:1-2).
- Soon a military crisis with the Philistines arose when the Philistines gathered to fight Israel. They had 3,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen and so many foot soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The Israelites were scared to death and tried to hide themselves in caves and bushes, among the rocks and in pits and wells (I Sam. 13:5-7).
- When Samuel delayed in coming to make offerings before the battle, and Saul saw that the people began to leave him; he lost his patience and assumed the role of a priest by presenting the offerings to God without Samuel. Scarcely was the ceremony over when Samuel arrived and saw what Saul had done, he rebuked the King for transgressing God's law; he told Saul that God would take his kingdom from him and give it to another (I Sam. 13:1-14).
- Note: From the early days God had set apart the family of Aaron within the tribe of Levi to be priests, who alone could present the people's sacrifices or offerings to God. Any outsiders who trespassed the priest's office should be put to death (Ex. 28:1; Num. 3:2-3, 10).
- The rights and duties of the kingship prohibited the king from acting as the religious leader (priest). Saul intruded into the priest's office by presenting the burnt offerings himself which was a very serious and fearful violation of God's command (I Sam. 13:14).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Once God said to the people of Israel in Exodus 19:4-5, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession." Israel was the only nation on earth governed by God (had God as King) till the people demanded a king like the other nations. The real problem with the people was not the system of their government, but they lacked faith and confidence in their God; therefore, God sadly told Samuel that the people had rejected Him to be their King.
2. Saul knew that he should not assume the role of a priest to present the offerings or sacrifices to God, but his impatience led him to disregard God's command and incurred punishment. Let us never run ahead of God and do anything rashly without asking God for guidance.

Memory Bible Verse: Ecclesiastes 7:8, "The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride."

LESSON 36

Saul - Part II

Saul Defeats the Philistines

- After Saul violated God's law by assuming a priest's role to make a sacrifice to God, he remained King over Israel.
- A day or so later, Saul's son Jonathan, an able and courageous young warrior, carried out a daring raid with his arm-bearer into the Philistine camp and threw the enemy into a panic. Saul took advantage of it and reaped a great victory. From now on the Israelites fought constantly with the Philistines throughout Saul's lifetime (I Sam. 14:1-52).

Saul's Disobedience

- One day Samuel, at God's command, told Saul to wage a war against the Amalekites who were descendants of Esau and lifelong enemy of Israel (See Gen. 36:12; Ex.17:8-16; Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17-19; Judg. 7:12 - especially note Ex. 17:16 and Deut. 25:17-19).
- Saul was told to completely destroy the entire A'malek nation, man and beast. Saul undertook the war and won a decisive victory, but he purposely disobeyed God's command by taking alive A'gag, the King of the Amalekites, and sparing the best of the cattle and all that was valuable; he and his men were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed (I Sam. 15:1-9).

Saul Rejected as King

- For this second transgression against God by his disobedience Saul showed that he could not be trusted to carry out God's work; therefore, the Lord said to Samuel, "I am sorry I made Saul King, for he has again to disobey Me." And Samuel was deeply troubled, he cried out to the Lord all that night (I Sam. 15:10-11).
- Next morning when Saul was confronted with Samuel, he excused himself by saying that he spared the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord (I Sam. 15:12-15).
- Samuel replied, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed (to listen to God) is better than the fat of rams (in your offering the fat of male sheep). For rebellion is like the evil of idolatry (refusing to obey is as bad as the sin of worshipping idols.) Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as King" (I Sam. 15:16-23).
- After this, Saul never saw Samuel again (I Sam. 15:24-35). Although he was allowed to remain King for the rest of his life, but the Spirit of the Lord had left him; and he was tormented by an evil spirit. From now on, his rule was only disastrous and confusing as things were going from bad to worse for him (I Sam. 16:14-15).
- In the meantime, Samuel followed God's instruction and went to Bethlehem where he anointed David, a young shepherd boy, to be the next King of Israel (I Sam. 16:1-13).

Saul and David

- When the Spirit of God had left Saul, and instead, the Lord had sent him a tormenting spirit that filled with depression and fear. Saul's servants suggested that the King should find a good musician to play the harp for him, to have the evil spirit charmed away by music; and they recommended David. At this time, David was still living with his father, although he had been anointed king by Samuel (I Sam. 16:14-18).
- So David came to Saul and became his servant as a court musician. "Whenever the tormenting spirit from God to trouble Saul, David would play the harp and Saul would feel better, and the evil spirit would go away (I Sam. 16:19-23).
- Note: I Sam. 16:14, "... and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." It means that Saul's disorder is described here as punishment initiated by God.
- Saul was kind and friendly toward David at first, but soon this was changed. After David killed the Philistine giant Goli'ath the women greeted him as a greater war hero than Saul. The King became jealous and angry and suspicious that David might be the man to replace him (I Sam. 17:-18:9). Saul was afraid of David and jealous because he realized that the Lord had left him and was now with David (I Sam. 18:12).
- Jealousy, selfishness, hatred and fear led Saul to repeatedly plot against David's life. It was a long conflict between Saul and David. Saul tried by every possible means to get rid of David; but David always managed in eluding Saul's murderous attempts on his life, sometimes through the aid of Saul's son Jonathan and his daughter Mi'chal (I Sam. 18:13-20:).
- Year after year Saul sought every opportunity to kill David. He became so desperate and insane that he killed any he thought had helped David (I Sam. 22:17-23), whereas David on two occasions spared Saul's life when he could easily have killed him. Finally Saul acknowledged his fault and said to David, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly" (I Sam. 26:21); "May you be blessed my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph" (I Sam 26:25). After this Saul quit chasing David (Read I Sam. 24:1-22; 26:1-25).

The Closing Years of Saul's Life

- Soon after this, the Philistines again invaded Israel with a large army. Saul became frightened and was filled with terror. He asked the Lord what he should do. But the Lord did not answer him, for the Spirit of the Lord had left him (I Sam. 28:1-6).
- Meanwhile Samuel had died. King Saul had banned all mediums and spiritists from the land (I Sam. 28:3).
- Note: Mediums or spiritists are those who claim to have the power to communicate with the spirits of the dead (Isa. 8:19; 19:3). The Law of Moses commanded to put all mediums and spiritists to death (Leviticus 20:27; Deut. 18:9-13).
- Filled with despair and fear, Saul turned to mediums for help which he himself had forbidden

before. He sought out a woman medium in En-dor, and asked her to bring up the deceased prophet Samuel in order to obtain an interview with him. "I am in deep trouble," Saul told Samuel. "The Philistines are at war with us, and God has left me, so I have called on you to tell me what to do" (I Sam. 28:5-15).

- Then Samuel told Saul that God had torn the kingdom out of his hand and given to David because of his disobedience. Samuel also foretold his defeat by the Philistines; he and his sons should be dead the next day (I Sam. 28:16-19).

Saul's Death

- As it turned out, the next morning Saul's army was crushed by the enemy; three of his sons, including Jonathan, died in the battle. Saul committed suicide by falling on his own sword (I Sam. 31:1-13).
- Saul reigned over Israel for 40 years (Acts 13:21).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. It's sad to read the story of Saul's life. As Israel's first king, he began his reign with great promise, but ended it in disgrace and shame. He could make a success of life, but missed great opportunities which God gave him. He was anointed and filled with the Spirit, but fell from grace. All because he chose to disobey God's commands through his arrogance, pride and selfishness. God help us to be obedient and humble in our walk with Jesus.
2. Saul seemed never to have accepted God unconditionally and trusted Him wholeheartedly. No wonder he turned aside from following God and was soon on the downgrade.

Memory Bible Verse: I Samuel 15:22, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."

LESSON 37

David - Part I

Scripture References

- I Samuel 16: through 31:; II Samuel 1: through 24:; I Kings 1:-2:; I Chronicles 10: through 29:; Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1:31-32.

Family Background

- David means "well beloved." He was born in Bethlehem in the land of Judah, 5 miles SW of Jerusalem, the youngest son of eight brothers. He was the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz. His father Jesse, a descendant of the tribe of Judah, was a much respected citizen of the City. David spent his boyhood as a shepherd. He was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome (I Sam. 16:1, 10-12).

His Early Life

- As the youngest son, he was charged with the care of his father's sheep; he displayed great courage and strength by slaying both a lion and a bear in defense of his father's flock (I Sam. 17:34-36).
- He possessed unusual music gifts as a skilled harp player and singer and songwriter (I Sam 16:14-23).
- When King Saul had been rejected by God because of his disobedience, the prophet Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint David in a private ceremony, in the presence of his family, as the future king of Israel, and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him from that day forward (I Sam. 16:13).
- It was many years before David actually ascended the throne, and during those years God was preparing him for the kingship in the future.

His Service under King Saul

- Saul, rejected by God, was possessed of an evil spirit that brought him insanity and madness. His servants suggested that the king should find some skillful harp player to play sweet music to soothe his demon-possessed mind. One of them said, "Jesse of Bethlehem has a son who is a talented harp player. He is a brave young man and warrior. He is a good speaker and handsome, and the Lord is with him" (I Sam. 16: 14-18).
- So David was summoned to play the harp for King Saul. And David played so well; whenever the evil spirit came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play, and relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him (I Sam. 16:19-23).
- Note: David was a genius in music and poetry which led him later to write many great psalms (sacred songs or poems). At least 37 of 150 psalms in the O.T. were attributed to him. His majestic and immortal poetic psalms have become a constant inspiration to us through the ages. One of the best loved psalms is "The Lord is my Shepherd..." (Psalms 23).

- When Saul felt better and his condition improved, David would return to his hometown to continue caring for his father's sheep (I Sam. 17:15).

David Slays Goliath

- During those days, the Philistines invaded Judah and camped about 15 miles west of Bethlehem. King Saul led his forces to meet the enemy, and three of David's oldest brothers were with the army. One day Jesse sent David to visit his brothers on the battle field to see how the boys were getting along (I Sam. 17:1-18).
- The Philistines had a champion fighter named Goli'ath. He was a giant, measuring over 9 feet tall! He wore heavy armor about 200 pounds. For 40 days and nights, twice a day, morning and evening, Goliath challenged Saul's army to find one man willing to engage in hand-to-hand combat. When Saul and his men saw him, they were scared to death (I Sam. 17:4-11).
- When David arrived at the camp, he saw Goliath the giant step out from Philistines troops and heard him shout his challenge to the army of Israel as usual. As soon as the Israelites saw him, they began to run away in terror (I Sam. 17:20-24).
- Goliath's challenge stirred David's spirit. With Saul's permission, he volunteered to meet Goliath in battle. He took his shepherd's staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream and put them in his shepherd's bag and started across toward the giant (I Sam. 17:25-42).
- When Goliath met David and saw that he was only a red-cheeked and handsome young boy, and he despised him. "Am I a dog," Goliath roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods. "Come over here and I'll give your flesh to the birds and animals," Goliath yelled (I Sam. 17:43-45).
- And David shouted in reply, "You come to me with a sword and a spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel - the very God you have defied. Today the Lord will give you to me; I'll kill you and cut off your head; and then I'll feed the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds and the wild animals. Then all the world will know that there is a God in Israel..." (I Sam. 17:45-47)! Wow! What a daring faith David had in his God!
- As Goliath moved closer to attack him, David ran to meet him. He took out a stone from the bag and hurled it from his sling; it hit the Philistine in the forehead and sank into it. Goliath fell face down on the ground. Since David had no sword, he ran over and pulled Goliath's sword from its holder and cut off his head. Thus David conquered the Philistine giant with a simple shepherd's sling and a stone. When David beheaded the fallen giant, the Philistines fled in panic. Thus the Lord wrought a great victory that day through David, the future King of Israel (I Sam. 17:48-51).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. David was a man of gifts, and he used his gifts for the glory of God. His psalms (sacred songs and poems) have been greatly cherished by all of us through many generations. We all have different gifts. Let us use them to glorify God and we'll be richly blessed.

2. Young David had such strong faith in God that he conquered the Philistine giant with a shepherd's sling and a stone. It is important for our children to learn to trust the Lord early in life that their faith may grow deep and strong as they increase in age.

Memory Bible Verse: I Samuel 17:45, "David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the Lord of the armies of Israel, Whom you have defied.'"

LESSON 38

David - Part II

A Brief Review

- The story of David and Goliath has always thrilled the hearts of both young and old. How fascinating and spectacular it must have been to see a young boy like David slay a giant man some ten feet high with only a pebble from the stream. What was the secret of David's great victory? The answer is found in I Sam. 17:45, David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty..."
- After the victory over the Philistines, Saul gave David a high rank in the army. He kept David with him and would not let him return home. Then David became the king's special assistant, and always carried out his assignment successfully (I Sam. 18:4-5).

The Friendship of David and Jonathan

- At this time David met Jonathan, the king's son, who was inspired by the bravery, modesty and piety of David. They were drawn to each other, since they were about the same age; and they became fast friends for many years until Jonathan's death, in spite of Saul's animosity (hostility) toward David (I Sam. 18:1-4).

The Hatred of Saul toward David

- When the men were returning home after David had killed Goliath and won a great victory over the enemy, the women came out from all towns along the way to meet King Saul and were singing and dancing for joy with tambourines and cymbals. They sang: "Saul has slain (killed) his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (I Sam. 18:6-7).
- The women's song upset Saul and he became very angry. He thought, "The women credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. The only thing left for him to have is the kingdom." Here perhaps Saul realized that Samuel's prediction that the kingdom would be taken from him and given to one better than he (See I Sam. 15:17-29) could be fulfilled in David. Of course this aroused envy and hostility in his heart. From that day on Saul kept a jealous eye on David (I Sam. 18:8-9).

David Marries Saul's Daughter Michal

- Then one day Saul promised to give his second daughter, Mi'chal, to David for a wife, provided David could kill 100 Philistines as the bride-price. Saul's plan was to have David killed by the hands of the Philistines. But David and his men killed 200 Philistines and Saul was compelled to give David his daughter Michal in marriage (I Sam. 18:17-27).
- When Saul saw that the Lord was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David. Saul became even more afraid of David. And he became David's enemy all his life (I Sam. 18:28-29).
- Not long after the marriage, Saul plotted to kill David in David's house, but David escaped through his wife Michal's help (I Sam. 19:11-17).

The Covenant of Jonathan and David

- Jonathan, unlike his father, showed no jealousy of David, even when his father reminded him that David was a threat to his own chances of becoming king. He made a covenant with David (I Sam. 18:1-4) and warned David of Saul's plot against his life (I Sam. 19:1-3).
- When Jonathan saw that Saul had determined to kill David, he helped David escape. While remaining loyal to the king, Jonathan assured David again and again that nothing could change the relationship between them. He knew that one day David would be the next king and he would be content to be the second man (prime minister) under David (I Sam. 20:1-42; 23:15-18).

David as a Fugitive Hero

- The next several years, David spent his life as a fugitive living in a cave in the wilderness of Judah. Day after day Saul openly sought David's destruction; he became so desperate that he slaughtered the priests of Nob and wiped out the whole city because he suspected that they helped David escape (I Sam. 22:6-19).
- In the meantime, David was joined by his family members along with 400 men (later grew to 600) who were in distress or in debt or dissatisfied with Saul's government. From these men, David built himself a strong fighting force (I Sam. 22:1-2; 23:13).
- On at least two occasions, David could have easily killed Saul, but he refused to do so because he feared God; he respected Saul as his king and did not want to do harm to Saul for he was the Lord's anointed (or chosen) king (I Sam. 24:1-7; 26:1-11; cf. I Sam. 10:1).
- Wearied with his wandering life in the wilderness, David finally fled to Philistine Gath and took refuge under his former enemy. Achish, the king of the Philistines gave him Zi'klag, a town south of Palestine, as David's refugee camp. There David and his followers lived among the Philistines for a year and four months (I Sam. 27:1-7).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Jonathan, the king's son, was a truly humble man. He was not jealous of David's success; and he accepted God's will that David should be the next king and he would be content to be second to David. God forgive our jealousy against others, and cleanse our selfishness from our hearts.
2. Jealousy hatred and selfishness poisoned Saul's mind against David. On the contrary, fear of God, humility and a loving heart made David a great man. Which one would you rather be: Saul or David?

Memory Bible Verse: Proverbs 15:33, "The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor."

LESSON 39

David - Part III

David is Made King of Judah

- At the end of David's sojourn in Ziklag, the Philistines came with a large army to attack the nation of Israel. King Saul and his three sons, including Jonathan, all died in the battle at Mount Gilbo'a (I Sam. 31:1-6). It was at Ziklag that David received the news of Saul's death with his three sons. David deeply mourned the tragic fate of King Saul and his beloved friend Jonathan. He wrote a song in memory of Saul and his son Jonathan (II Sam. 1:1-27).
- Shortly thereafter, David and his men and their families moved to Heb'ron, which was in the territory of his own tribe Judah in the south. There the leaders of the tribe of Judah anointed (crowned) David king over the house of Judah. There he reigned seven years and six months over that one tribe (II Sam. 2:1-4,11).
- David was 30 years old when he began to reign in Hebron (II Sam. 5:4).
- Meanwhile the rest of the tribes remained loyal to Saul's family and for five years, after Saul's death, most of Israel lay under Philistine control.
- Then five years later, Saul's general (also Saul's cousin) Ab'ner and all the tribes of Israel set up one of Saul's sons, Ish-bo'sheth as king of Israel in opposition to David. But the people of Judah followed David (II Sam. 2:8-10).
- For the next two years civil war raged between these two rival kingdoms. It ended in the assassination of Ish-bo'sheth by two brothers who were captains in Saul's army (II Sam. 2:12-32;3:1;4:1-12).

David Is Made King of All Israel

- After the death of Ish-bo'sheth, all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own family. In the past Saul was king over us, but you were the one leading us in battle for Israel. The Lord has said that you should be the shepherd and leader of His people, the Israelites." Then David made a covenant with them before the Lord. Then they anointed (crowned) him king over Israel (I Sam. 5:1-3).
- David was 30 years old when he became king and ruled 40 years: he was king over Judah in Hebron for 7 years and 6 months and he was king over all Israel and Judah in Jerusalem for 33 years (II Sam. 5:4-5).
- One of the first things David did after becoming king of the nation of Israel was to seize Jerusalem from the Jeb'usites (one of the local Canaanite tribes), and made it the capital of his kingdom. Later it was also known by the special name of "the City of David" (II Sam. 5:6-10); and was also called "Zion, the City of David" (II Sam. 5:7; I Chron. 11:5).
- Then David moved the Ark of God from the country house where it had been neglected during Saul's reign. He placed the Ark in a special tent and made Jerusalem the religious as well as the political center of the nation (II Sam. 6:1-19; cf I Sam. 7:1-2).

David's Desire to Build God a Permanent Temple

- After King David had settled in his beautiful cedar palace and the Lord had given him rest from all around him, he said one day to the prophet Na'than (David's pastor), "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar while the Ark of God remains in a tent." David was expressing his desire to build a permanent temple, wanting only to bring God glory (II Sam. 7:1-2).
- Nathan assured him that his plan is aligned with God's will. So Nathan replied, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it; for the Lord is with you." But the prophet spoke too soon, putting his words into God's mouth. God's word came to Nathan that same night, "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: You shall not build a house for Me to dwell in...'" (II Sam. 7:3-7; I Chron. 17:3-4).

The Davidic Covenant

- God's refusal wasn't a rejection, but a redirection. God had a better plan for David. Speaking through the Prophet Nathan God said to David, "I took you from the pasture and from following the sheep to be ruler over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great... And I will provide a place for My people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own... The Lord also declares to you that the Lord Himself will establish a house for you" (II Sam. 7:8-11).
- God not only assured David of His plan for David's life, but also promised that the temple of his dream would be built by his own son later: "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you ... and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be My son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But My love will never be taken away from him ..." (II Sam. 7:12-15).
- Then God sealed the covenant with these irrevocable words: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever; your throne will be forever (I Sam. 7:16).
- Note: The passage recorded in II Sam. 7:14-16 is called "the Davidic Covenant" made between God and David in anticipation of the kingly rule of Christ. It was both conditional and unconditional: conditional is the sense that disobedience would result in punishment; unconditional in the sense that even if there were disobedience, the covenant itself would still stand forever. The promise that "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever" (v.16) was to be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ Who was the lineal descendant of the house of David (Read Luke 1:31-33).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. While David enjoyed peace and prosperity, he did not forget that the Ark of God was left in a tent; he wanted to honor God by building a great temple for God's name and bringing Him glory. Oftentimes when we are at ease in Zion (living an easy life and enjoying God's abundant blessings), we tend to forget or neglect God and His Church. Is that true with you?

2. God made a covenant with David that his house and his kingdom would endure forever. This covenant began to be fulfilled one thousand years later in the person of Jesus who was David's lineal descendant. It will be completely and literally fulfilled when Jesus returns to earth to set up His Messiah kingdom and reign for 1,000 years; and then He will continue His reign in New Jerusalem (heaven) forever and ever!

Memory Bible Verse: Psalm 119:89, "Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens."

LESSON 40

David - Part IV

David's Plans for God's Temple

- David had a desire to build a permanent temple for God, but the Lord said, "You are not to build a house for My name, because you are a warrior, have shed much blood" (I Chron. 28:3).
- Although David was not given the privilege to build the temple, he organized beautiful worship services by appointing the Levites to sing joyful psalms (sacred songs), accompanied by musical instruments such as lyres, harps, cymbals and trumpets, etc. (I Chron. 15:16; cf. 25:1-8).
- Note: Most of the sacred songs (psalms) used for worship were written by David himself.
- Meanwhile David started making plans by gathering money and materials for a magnificent temple to be built by his son Solomon (I Chron. 22:1-19).

David's Kingdom Grows

- As the Lord gave David victory wherever he went (II Sam. 8:6,14), Israel's power grew steadily; so that David dominated all the neighboring nations, from the Nile River and the Red Sea in the south to the Euphrates River in the north (II Sam. 8:1-14). Thus his kingdom had extended to the limits as God had promised Abraham and his descendants long ago (Gen. 15:18).
- Now David became very famous, strong and prosperous. He ruled over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all people (II Sam. 8:13-15).

David Falls into Sin

- * Although David was a righteous king, a gifted musician, a valiant warrior and above all, a man after God's own heart (I Sam. 13:14; cf. Acts 13:22) he was subject to sin just like other human beings.
- * It was during the war against the Ammonites, David committed his gross sin with a married woman, Bathshe'ba. While her husband Ur'ah, the Hittite, was away in battle, David committed adultery with her and the woman became pregnant. Then in an effort to cover up his sin, David instructed his army general, Jo'ab, to put Uriah at the front of the hottest part of the battle, so that he might be killed. The king's order was carried out, but a horrible double-crime of adultery and murder was also committed by the King (II Sam. 11:1-17)!
- Note: The name of Uriah means "Jehovah is light." Uriah was a Hittite, one of the native Canaanite people. The fact that he had a Hebrew name and married a Hebrew woman (Bathsheba) plus his loyalty and devotion as a soldier (II Sam. 11:11), all indicate that Uriah had adopted the Hebrew religion; and he was a God-fearing man.
- After a period of mourning, David brought Bathsheba to the palace, and she became his wife and bore him a son (II Sam. 11:26-27).

- Though David was clever at covering up his crime before the nation, he had not covered up his sin in God's eyes: "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord" (II Sam. 11:27b).

David's Confession and Repentance

- For almost one year, David had hidden his sin and remained silent; but inwardly he must have felt very miserable for he had admitted this in psalm 32, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer" (Psalm 32:3-4).
- Finally God sent the prophet Na'than, David's pastor, to confront the king, to tell to his face what terrible things he had done. Nathan courageously rebuked the king and pronounced God's severe judgment upon him (II Sam. 12:1-12).
- Faced with his sin, David repented; he confessed his sin and asked for God's forgiveness. His prayer of forgiveness is recorded in Psalm 51. Listen to the words of a broken and a contrite heart, and you know that the man was truly sorry for his sin: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions; and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight (Ps. 51:1-4)... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit away from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will turn back to You. Save me from blood guilt, O God, the God Who saves me, and my tongue will sing of Your righteousness (vv. 10-14)... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise (v. 17). (also see Ps. 32)
- Surely such a grievous sin had brought the bitterest anguish to his own heart. His confession and repentance was a humble cry mingled with bitter tears before God for forgiveness as he indicated in his penitential Psalms 32 and 51.

The Consequences of David's Sin

- God in His great mercy had forgiven all what David had done (II Sam. 12:13-14), but that did not remove the consequences of his sin. Nathan told him that henceforth the sword (troubles and tragedies) would never depart from his house (II Sam. 12:9-13).
- First, the child born to David and Bathsheba in adultery died (II Sam. 12:14-23).
- Second, his example of adultery and murder was followed in his house. One of the sons, A'mnon, raped and humiliated his half-sister, Tam'ar, only to be murdered by another son A'bsalom, Tamar's brother (II Sam. 13:1-29).
- Nine years later, Absalom rebelled against his father David, trying to kill him and take his kingdom away by force. In the battle that followed, Absalom was killed (II Sam. 13:34-39; 14: through 18:15).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Reading the life story of David, we have seen both the bright side of his strong faith in God and the dark side of his miserable failure as a human being like us. But let us remember what Paul tells us in Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."
2. God is always willing to forgive us when we humbly and sincerely repent of our sins. Remember, however, forgiveness will not remove the suffering and distress and heartache that our sins have brought upon ourselves.

Memory Bible Verses: Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that sinful nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Assignment for Lesson 40

David - Part IV

Scripture Readings: II Samuel 7:1-29; 8:1-15; 11:1-27; 12:1-12; I Chronicles 28:1-7; Psalms 32 and 51

1. David had a strong desire to build a temple (a house of worship) for God's name, but God said "No" to him, why? Who was going to build the temple? How did David help make preparations for the temple? (II Samuel 7:1-29; I Chronicles 28:1-7; I Chronicles 22: 1-16, note especially vv. 14-16)

2. How did David become famous? Was he a good king over Israel? (II Samuel 8:1-15)

3. How did David fall into sin? What terrible things had he done? (II Samuel 11:1-27)

4. What did God tell David through Nathan? Did David confess his sin? Was his repentance genuine? (II Samuel 12:1-13; also read Psalms 32 and 51 which were written by David after he committed his gross sin.)

Memory Bible Verses: Galatians 6:7-8

LESSON 41

David - Part V

David's Final Days

- At the time of his fall into sin, David was around 50 years old and had been Israel's king for two decades. He continued to reign over the nation after his confession and repentance, but for the next twenty years till his death the peace of former times never returned to his throne.
- David became king at the age of 30; he died at the age of 70. And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years over one tribe Judah in Hebron, and thirty-three years over all Israel in Jerusalem. He died in a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth and honor (I Kings 2:10-11; I Chron. 29:26-28).

David as a Musician and a Psalmist

- Early in his life, David was known as a skillful player on the harp. He was invited to play sweet music to soothe King Saul's troubled mind. He distinguished himself as "Israel beloved singer" (II Sam. 23:1). At least seventy-three of the psalms (sacred songs and poems) in the Book of Psalms are attributed to him. His majestic psalms are the masterpiece of spiritual literature.

David as a Religious Leader

- David arranged worship services in the sanctuary with psalms and musical instruments (I Chron. 6:31-32; 15:16). His pattern of worship was followed by succeeding generations (Ezra. 3:10-11; Nehemiah 12:24,45-46). Many of his writings have become the favorite devotional source for hungry souls who seek a closer walk with the Lord.

David as a Warrior

- As a young shepherd boy, David slew the Philistine giant Goliath with a shepherd's sling and a stone in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel (I Sam. 17:45).
- After David became Israel's king, God gave him victory wherever he went. He was a brilliant military leader that he conquered all the neighboring nations, and firmly established a great kingdom during his reign, which God had promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 15:18).

David as King

- As a king, David ruled over all Israel and executed justice and righteousness to all his people (11 Sam. 8:15). His influence was so great that every king after David was compared to the standard which he established (Kings 3:14; 14:7-8; 15:11; II Kings 14:3; 18:3; 22:2).
- Though at times David committed deep-dyed sins, yet he was known as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). He was not perfect, but he was willing to repent of his wrong doings; and he always humbly accepted God's leadership. Generally speaking, David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life - except in the case of Uri'ah the Hittite (I Kings 15:5).

David as Ancestor to Jesus Christ

- God had promised David a kingdom that would never end (II Sam. 7:16). This promise was fulfilled in Jesus, Who came to establish the Kingdom of God. The angel Gabriel said to Mary, "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:31-33).
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the native town of David. The genealogy of Jesus recorded in the Gospels of Matthew 1:1-6 and Luke 3:23-31 traced back through the ancestry of David. Jesus was often referred to as the Son of David in the N.T. In Acts 13:22-23 we read, "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do. From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised."
- In spite of his failures, David was the best king that ever sat on the throne of Israel. In the centuries that followed, when the people of Israel looked for the coming of the Messiah (God's promised Savior-King), the best example by which they could imagine an ideal king was that of David (cf. Isa. 9:7; Lk. 1:32).
- Shortly before his death, David chose his youngest son Solomon to sit on his throne as king of Israel (I Kings 1:30).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. As we studied the story of David's life, we have seen both the bright side of his deep devotion to God as a spiritual giant and the dark side of his miserable failure as a wretched sinner. Let us not shake our fingers at David's shame, but humbly remember the words in I Corinthians 10:12, "So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" Also heed the counsel of I Peter 5:8-9, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..."
2. David was called "a man after God's own heart" not because he was perfect, but he was devoted - his desire to know and obey God was greater than everything else. May our devotion to God grow strong and stronger each day, so that we'll become the kind of man God wants.

Memory Bible Verses: Acts 13:22-23, "After removing Saul, He (God) made David their king. He testified concerning him, 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after My own heart; he will do everything I want him to do. From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as He promised.'"

LESSON 42

Solomon - Part I

Scripture Reference

- I Kings 1: through 11;; II Chronicles 1: through 9:

Name Meaning

- Solomon means "peaceable" or "the peaceful one." He was also named Jed'idi'ah by the prophet Nathan (II Samuel 12:24-25), which means "beloved of the Lord."

Family Background

- When David sinned grievously against God, the prophet Nathan informed him that God would severely punish him. Then after David humbly confessed his sin and deeply repented, Nathan said to him, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not to die" (II Sam. 12:1-13).
- Although God had forgiven David of his wrong doings and let him live, the consequences of his sin continued to plague him the rest of his life. The illegitimate child born to David and Ba'thshe'ba in adultery died shortly afterwards (II Sam. 12:14-20).
- But God graciously gave David another child by Bathsheba, and named him Solomon (II Sam. 12:24-25).
- Before Solomon was born God told David, "You are not to build a house (a temple) for My name, because you have shed too much blood and fought too many wars. But a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of peace. I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon (the peaceful one), and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name (I Chron. 22:8-10).
- When Solomon was born, the Lord loved the child and gave the boy another name, through the prophet Nathan, Je'didi'ah (beloved of the Lord), because the Lord loved the child. The Lord had also chosen Solomon to succeed David to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel (II Sam. 12:24-25; I Chron. 28:5).
- Note: The promise of a son and his both names given by God implied God's forgiveness and David's restoration to God's fellowship.

Solomon's Accession to the Throne

- When David was old and feeble, Adoni'jah, the eldest surviving son of David, after Am'non and Ab'salom were dead, tried to seize the throne for himself before David died, but his plan was thwarted by prophet Nathan. Then David hastily made arrangement for Solomon to sit on his throne to succeed him as king of Israel; and Solomon was proclaimed king before his father died (I Kings 1:1-53).

- Solomon began his reign at his early twenties. He came to the throne at a time of great material and spiritual prosperity left by his father David. We read in II Chronicles 1:1, "Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the Lord was with him and made him exceedingly great."

The Lord Appears to Solomon

- One of the first things Solomon did was to go to Gib'eon with all the leaders of the people to offer sacrifices to God and to worship in the Tabernacle, God's Tent of Meeting (I Kings 3:4; II Chron. 1:1-6).
- Note: God's Tent of Meeting or the Tabernacle was destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant captured by the Philistines during a war just before Eli's death (I Sam. 4:1-18). Later King David brought the Ark (without the Tabernacle) to Jerusalem and placed it in a special tent (II Sam. 6:1-17). It seemed that during this time the Israelites reconstructed the Tabernacle (without the Ark) and set it up at Nob, 2 miles N.E. of Jerusalem, during Saul's reign (see I Sam. 21:1-6), and later moved it to Gibeon, 6 miles N.W. of Jerusalem (I Chron. 16:39; 21:29). After Solomon had built the Temple in Jerusalem, he dismantled the Tabernacle and placed the Ark in the Temple (I Kings 8: 1-11).
- That night at Gibeon God appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him, "Ask Me for anything, and I will give it to you" (II Chron. 1:7).
- In all his humility, the young king answered, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place... But I am only a child and do not know how to carry out my duties... So give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours (I Kings 3:6-9; II Chron. 1:8-10)?"
- The Lord was pleased with Solomon's answer. He granted Solomon's request and also promised him what he didn't ask for - riches and honor! And God also would give Solomon a long life if he would follow the Lord closely and obey His laws (I Kings 3:10-15; II Chron. 1:11-12).
- Soon afterward Solomon showed his profound wisdom in understanding (discerning) human nature. When two women came to him, each claiming the same babe was her own. The king suggested that the child be cut in two and divided between them; and soon he found out who was the real mother (I Kings 3:16-28).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Solomon started so well. He inherited a great kingdom from his father David and established himself firmly; the Lord was with him and made him exceedingly great (II Chron. 1:1). He humbly acknowledge his absolute dependence on God and trusted the Lord completely, for he said to God, "... I am only a child and do not know how to carry out my duties... So give Your servant wisdom and knowledge (a discerning heart) to govern Your people. This is what we all need: a humble heart to trust God completely (I Kings 3:7-9; II Chron. 1:10).
2. Solomon prayed for wisdom and God gave him much, much more besides (II Chron. 1:11-12). If we ask God for the right things, He will also add other blessings to us.

Memory Bible Verse: Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "

LESSON 43

Solomon - Part II

Solomon's Wisdom

- Solomon is known for his great wisdom. In I Kings 4:29-33, we read, "God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore." In other words, God gave Solomon great wisdom and understanding, and a mind with broad interests. His wisdom was greater than all the wise men in the East, including those in Egypt. His broad interests included literature, music, botany (the study of plants) and zoology (the study of animals). He wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs; he was the author of the following books of the Bible: "the Book of Proverbs" (Prov. 1:1) Ecclesiastes (Eccl. 1:1,12), the "Song of Solomon" or the "Song of Songs" (Song 1:1). He also wrote two psalms (see titles of Psalms 72, 127).
- His fame as a man of wisdom spread to surrounding lands, and leaders came from many nations to hear his wisdom (I Kings 4:34).
- When the queen of Sheb'a (who ruled among the tribes of southwestern Arabia) heard how wonderfully the Lord blessed Solomon with wisdom, she decided to test him with some hard questions. She soon found out that Solomon did possess great wisdom and vast knowledge; she was also amazed to see the beautiful palace Solomon built, the food of his table, the great number of servants in splendid uniforms, the burnt offerings he made in the Temple of the Lord (the way how Solomon worshipped the Lord), and all the glories of his empire. So she exclaimed to him, "... Your wisdom and wealth are far greater than anything I have ever heard of!" (I Kings 10:1-9).

Solomon's Kingdom

- Israel and Judah had become a prosperous and a populous nation under the reign of King David. The people were content and happy. King Solomon succeeded his father and ruled the whole area from the Euphrates Rivers to the land of the Philistines, and down to the borders of Egypt. The conquered peoples of these nations paid taxes to King Solomon and served him all the days of his life (I Kings 4:20-21).
- Solomon was a skilled administrator. He employed a large number of officials in the royal court; he had forty thousand chariot horses and a powerful unit of twelve thousand horsemen. He divided the country into 12 districts, and each month one of the district governors provided food for King Solomon and his royal court (I Kings 4:1-19, 26-28).
- During his reign, silver and gold were as plentiful in Jerusalem as rocks on the road. And expensive cedar timber was used like common and cheap sycamore (I Kings 10:27; II Chron. 1:15). As the years passed, Solomon's government reached a level of luxury that had never existed in Israel's history!

Solomon's Temple

- David had prepared plans, finances and accumulated a large quantity of materials for his son Solomon to build God a temple, a house of worship, in Jerusalem (I Chron. 22:2-16; 28:11-19; 29:1-9).
- According to I Kings 6:1, Solomon began to build the Temple in the fourth year of his reign, 480 years after the people of Israel had left Egypt. Solomon received the complete plan of the structure from his father (I Chron. 28:11-19). But he built such a Temple that was much more lavish than anything David had imagined.
- The Temple was a rectangular stone building. It was not large in size - only 90 feet long, 30 feet wide and 45 feet high (I Kings 6:2). It took 30,000 Israelites and 150,000 Canaanites at forced labor, plus 3,000 overseers, and seven years to complete the Temple because of its elegance and splendor (I Kings 5:13-16; 6:37-38). The whole interior was covered with pure gold (I Kings 6:22)! It was indeed the most magnificent and splendid building in Israel's history!
- The Temple is described in I Kings 6:-7: and II Chronicles 3:-4:.
- After the Temple was completed, King Solomon invited all the leaders of the nation to an elaborated dedication ceremony. When the priests brought the Ark of the Covenant into the inner sanctuary - the Most Holy place, a bright cloud filled the Temple. The priests could not continue their work in the sanctuary because the glory of the Lord was filling the entire building (I Kings 8:1-11; II Chron. 5:1-14).
- King Solomon then blessed the congregation, recounted the history of the building of the Temple. Afterwards he offered a fervent and long prayer of dedication (I Kings 8:12-54; II Chron. 6:1-7:3).

The Second Appearance of the Lord to Solomon

- The Lord had appeared to Solomon eleven years ago at Gibeon when he first came to the throne (I Kings 3:4-5; II Chron. 1:1-7).
- Now the Lord appeared to him once again after the dedication of the Temple. The Lord told Solomon that his prayer had been answered concerning the Temple. Then the Lord warned Solomon that His favor and protection would continue only if Solomon and his people would remain faithful to the Lord and keep His commands. Should they turn aside from following the Lord, and serve other gods, Israel would surely be punished and the Temple would be destroyed (I Kings 9:1-9; II Chron. 7:12-22).
- In the midst of these stern warnings, the Lord also made a most gracious promise: "If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (II Chron.7:14).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Solomon's temple was an architectural beauty and wonder. Since it was the sanctuary of God - the place where God dwelt, Solomon only used the best materials and workmanship, and spent long years to build it. His intention was to honor God and bring glory to Him. Figuratively

speaking, we Christians are the Temple of the living God as Paul told us in I Corinthians 6:19-20, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price (Jesus paid the price on the cross). Therefore, honor God with your body."

2. In his early years, Solomon was both humble and noble; above all, he loved the Lord (I Kings 3:3), and the Lord made him exceedingly great (II Chron. 1:1). But something changed after he finished building the Temple; the Lord appeared to him the second time with a note of stern warning, "... if you or your sons turn away from Me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you... then I will cut off Israel from the land... and will reject this Temple..." (I Kings 9:1-9). We do well, if we heed God's warning always.

Memory Bible Verses: I Corinthians 6:19-20, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own; You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

LESSON 44

Solomon - Part III

Solomon's Other Buildings (I Kings 7:1-2,6-10)

- The Temple was only a part of Solomon's large building program. After completing the Temple, he spent 13 more years to build a huge and lavish palace complex (v.1), including five structures - the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon (v.2), the Hall of Pillars with a portico (v.6), a central law-court called the Hall of Justice (v.7), a living quarter for himself, and a separate palace for Pharaoh's daughter, one of his wives (v.8).
- All these buildings were made with huge and expensive stones, and were enclosed in an area known as the "great courtyard" (vv. 9-12).

Solomon's Commercial Enterprises

- King David built a mighty kingdom through military conquest, but Solomon relied upon political and commercial treaties with the neighboring countries to increase his wealth and prestige. He made an alliance with Pharaoh by marrying his daughter (I Kings 3:1). He entered into trade agreements with a number of other nations (I Kings 9:26-28;10:11-12,14-15).
- Soon Solomon became the ruler of a vast commercial empire. The scripture says that Solomon had more riches and wisdom than all the other kings on earth (I Kings 10:23).
- Apparently Solomon was on very friendly terms with many foreign kings and lords; his contact with the outside world led him to marry many foreign women and eventually led him to sin against the Lord!

Solomon's Extravagant Taste

- The people of Israel had been hard pressed during the long years (20 years or more) of Solomon's building program (cf I Kings 12:4). In spite of the hardship of the common people, Solomon spent extravagantly on himself; he made himself a great and lavish ivory throne and overlaid it with fine gold; all of his drinking cups and dishes and all of his household articles in the palace were gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days (I Kings 10:18-21).
- All the time that Solomon was developing his magnificent kingdom, he was also preparing his own downfall. The real tragedy is that after the building of the Temple, he turned his mind on riches and forgot his own spiritual life; and he neglected to promote the religious life of his people. His luxury imposed a heavy burden on the common people and made their lives bitter with hard service. The glory of his kingdom brought his people tears and groans. Thus, he sowed seeds of future rebellion (cf. I Kings 12:1-19).

Solomon's Fatal Mistake

- Solomon's fatal mistake was marrying heathen women. The Scripture says that Solomon loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter (I Kings 11:1). That was a special temptation to ancient kings. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. All these women came from

nations where idols were worshipped. Concerning these nations the Lord had told the people of Israel, "You must not marry people of other nations, if you do, they will cause you to follow their gods." Marriage to a heathen woman was strictly forbidden by God, yet Solomon deliberately disobeyed God's command (I Kings 11:1-3; Ex. 34:15-17; Deut. 7:2-4).

- As a result, his wives persuaded him to follow their gods; He even built places of worship for those gods to satisfy his heathen wives (I Kings 11:4-8).
- The Lord was very angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, Who had appeared to him twice and warned him specifically against worshipping other gods. But Solomon hadn't listened (I Kings 11:9-10).
- So the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and obeyed My laws, I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your servants. Nevertheless, for the sake of your father David, I won't do this while you are alive. But I will take the kingdom away from your son. And even so I will let him be king of one tribe (Judah) for My servant David's sake and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen (I Kings 11:11-13).

The Fall of Solomon's Kingdom

- The Lord said that He would tear ten tribes away from Solomon's kingdom and give it to his servant. That servant was Jerobo'am, a capable young man, whom Solomon placed in charge of a large work force from the northern tribes. He rebelled against Solomon and fled to Egypt (I Kings 11:26-40).
- After Solomon died, Rehobo'am, his son succeeded him as king. The people, led by Jerobo'am, went to the new king and said, "Your father forced us to work very hard. Now, make it easier for us. Don't make us work as hard as your father. Then we will serve you." But the foolish and arrogant young king, raised by a sinning and compromising father, refused to heed the appeal, with the result that Israel rebelled. The kingdom was split into two separate nations - the southern kingdom of Judah under Rehobo'am, and the northern kingdom (with ten tribes) under Jerobo'am. From now on, Israel would never have the same greatness until Christ the "Son of David" returns to reign (I Kings 12:1-20).

Solomon's Death

- When Solomon died, he was about 60 years old. He died a broken man, disillusioned and filled with remorse, after reigning over his father David's united kingdom for forty years (I Kings 11:41-43).
- In his old age he wrote, "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utter meaningless! Everything is meaningless. What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun" (Eccl. 1:1)?
- In his closing years, weary and broken from his unrestrained sexual appetite, Solomon wrote some sound advice in hopes that younger men and women might hear and take heed. These writings were mostly recorded in the Book of Proverbs and the Book of Ecclesiastes.
- This beautiful story has a sad ending - Solomon had a regular income of millions in gold. His court was the most lavish and magnificent and sophisticated in the world. Yet the power, the

riches, and the heathen wives led to decay in his character and into open idolatry and finally to ruin!

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Solomon was loved greatly of God. He made a wonderful start - seeking the wisdom of God and God's blessing. He built a magnificent Temple for God. But, alas, he grew more worldly as he gained more riches; he had unrestrained sexual appetite and married so many heathen women and committed gross sin against the Lord and fell from grace!
2. The story of Solomon has taught us that fame, riches, power, sensual pleasures do not bring happiness. We Christians must know that humility, self-control, godly life and faithful obedience to God are essential to true happiness and contentment.

Memory Bible Verses: I Peter 1:14-16, "As obedient children (of God), do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

Assignment for Lesson 44 Solomon - Part III

1. Was Solomon a rich king? How rich was he?

Note: I Kings 10:14 -17:

About 666 gold talents (\$20,000,000) received each year

- 600 gold bekas large shields (\$ 6,000 each)

- 300 gold minas shields (\$ 1,800 each)

Plus gold vessels, gold walls in his palaces. And more and more gold, silver, ivory, etc., brought in by king's merchant fleet once every three years (1 kings 10:14-22)

Many foreign leaders or kings brought him annual tribute of gold, silver and other presents, etc.
(1 Kings 10:24-25)

2. What was Solomon's serious weakness? How many wives and concubines did he have? (I Kings 11:1-13) (Note: A concubine was a secondary wife who had inferior rank, rights, etc. It was a custom for a man to have concubines besides his wife in most ancient countries.)

3. What did the Lord say to the people of Israel in regard to marriage with idol-worshipping foreigners? (Exodus 34:15-17; Deuteronomy 7:2-4)

4. What would you like to say after reading the story of Solomon?

Memory Bible Verses: I Peter 1:14-16

LESSON 45

Elijah - Part I

Scripture References

- I Kings 17: through 21:; II Kings 1:-2:12; Mal'achi 4:5-6; Matthew 17:1-13; James 5:17-18

Historical Background

- There were three kings who reigned over Israel as a united kingdom: Saul, David and Solomon. Each of them ruled 40 years, a total of 120 years. During their reigns, Israel grew steadily strong with power and splendor, until Solomon's late years when he was swayed by his pagan wives to bow down to their idols. After Solomon's death, his son Rehobo'am ascended the throne, decline in both spiritual and political life of the nation accelerated.
- Rehoboam, an arrogant and selfish king, rejected people's plea to lighten their work load, and brought about a division among the people - Israel (ten tribes) in the north under Jehoab'am, and Judah in the south under Rehobo'am (I Kings 12:1-20).
- Jeroboam became the first of nineteen wicked kings to rule over the Northern Kingdom before Israel was finally destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.
- Note: the Northern Kingdom of Israel lasted 210 years (931-721 B.C.); the Southern Kingdom of Judah lasted 345 years, 135 years longer than Israel, till Jerusalem fell to Babylon (931-586 B.C.)
- Elijah first appeared during the reign of Ah'ab, Israel's 7th king. Let's briefly look at each king from Jeroboam through Ahab in order to better understand and appreciate the unique ministry of this great prophet of God.
 - (1) Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, ruled 22 years. He made two golden calves and led his people to worship these abominable idols. Eventually the Lord struck him and he died (I Kings 12:20, 25-33; 14:20; II Chron. 13:20).
 - (2) Na'dab, son of Jeroboam, reigned 2 years. He, too, did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of his father. He was killed by Ba'asha, who then reigned in his stead (I Kings 15:25-28).
 - (3) Ba'asha reigned 24 years. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord for he continued the calf worship begun by Jeroboam. He died a natural death and was succeeded by his son E'lah (I Kings 15:33-16:6).
 - (4) E'lah's wicked reign lasted only two years when Zim'ri one of his captains, murdered him while he was in a drunken condition (I Kings 16:8-10).
 - (5) Zim'ri took the throne by murdering his master. But the army made their general O'mri king. Zim'ri went into the palace and burned it over himself and he died in flames. His reign lasted only 7 days. He was also an evil king who worshipped idols like Jeroboam (I Kings 16:15-20).

- (6) Om'ri reigned 12 years. After ruling 6 years he moved the capital city from Tir'zah to Sama'ria. He was worse than any of the kings before him; he worshipped Jeroboam's calves and led Israel into deeper sin, provoking the Lord to anger by their idols. When he died, his son Ah'ab succeeded him and became the 7th king of Israel (I Kings 16:21-28).
- (7) Ah'ab reigned 22 years. He married Je'zebel daughter of the king of the Sido'nians who brought into this marriage the worship of Ba'al (a Canaanite nature god, believed to control the weather and have power to increase the fertility of soil, animals and human beings). Under his wife's influence, Ahab built a temple for Baal. He also made a wooden image of the Canaanite goddess Ashe'rah. Ahab did more evil to anger the Lord than any other kings of Israel before him (I Kings 16:29-33). At Jezebel's urging, Ahab opposed the worship of Jehovah, the God of Israel, destroyed His altars, and killed a large number of God's prophets. The queen's evil influence was much greater than that of the king. Her ultimate goal was to make Baal the national god of Israel in place of Jehovah, the Lord of heaven and earth! It was at this darkest hour in Israel's history that the prophet Elijah emerged!

Elijah Appears Before King Ahab

- We know nothing about his family or birth. His name Elijah means 'the Lord is my God (Jehovah is my God).' His name in Greek form is Elias with the same meaning. This is important because his name stands opposed to false gods. In I Kings 17:1, we read that Elijah, the Tish'bite, from Tish'be in Gilead suddenly appeared before the evil King Ahab and said, "As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, Whom I serve, there shall not be dew nor rain for next several years until I say the word." The announcement of drought was a punishment against Ahab for his idolatry (worship of idols).

Elijah Fed by Ravens

- Then God directed Elijah to the brook Che'rith, east of Jordan River, to hide there; and God commanded the ravens to bring meat and bread to Elijah morning and evening till the brook dried up. Again God directed Elijah to Za'rephath (a small town outside Israel in the land of Sidon) where a widow would supply him with lodging and food (I Kings 17:2-9).

The Widow at Zarephath

- The widow of Zar'ephath had only a little food left because of the famine, but she showed great faith in feeding the prophet during a time of such severe drought. Her faith was rewarded, for there were always plenty of flour and oil left in her containers, no matter how much they used (I Kings 17:10-16).
- One day, while Elijah was staying at the widow's home, the woman's son became sick and died. Elijah prayed for the boy and brought him back to life (I Kings 17:17-24).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God raised up Elijah to preserve in Israel the worship of the one true God while Israel was in the midst of widespread idolatry (worship of Idols). God looks for special people in difficult times. Will you be willing to stand up for Jesus in these evil and dark days?

2. Elijah's name means "Jehovah is my God" and that's what he stood for, and that's how he was known in his days. He was truly a believer of God; his name spoke well for him. How are you known among your friends or in your own home when your name is mentioned? Do people think that you are a true believer of Jesus Christ?

Memory Bible Verse: Isaiah 44:6, "This is what the Lord says - Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from Me there is no God."

LESSON 46

Elijah - Part II

A Brief Review

- Ahab was the seventh king of Israel (the northern part of the divided kingdom). He reigned 22 years. He had married Je'zebel, the notoriously wicked daughter of the king of Sidon. Jezebel introduced the worship of Baal (a nature god) into Israel as well as the licentious orgies of the goddess Ash'erah (I Kings 16:29-33).
- Jezebel began a severe persecution against the followers of Jehovah, the God of Israel, and killed all the prophets of God, except the one hundred who were hidden by Obadi'ah, a God-fearing man, who was in charge of the palace affairs (I Kings 18:3-4; cf. 19:14).
- The Ba'al worship promoted by Ahab and Jezebel became a real threat to Israel's existence as God's people. At this critical time in Israel's history, God raised up Elijah, trying to bring the rebellious nation back to Him. And God used Elijah to tell Ahab of a drought as punishment against his idolatry (I Kings 17:1).

The Contest on Mount Carmel

- After the drought had lasted three years and six months (cf Luke 4:25; James 5:17), the Lord instructed Elijah to go to tell Ahab that He would send rain. By this time the famine was severe in the land. When Ahab saw Elijah, he exclaimed, "Is it you - the big trouble-maker in Israel?" "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have refused to obey the Lord, and have worshiped Baal instead. Now tell all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel, with 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Ash'erah who eat at Queen Jezebel's table (who are supported by Jezebel.)" So Ahab called all the people and those prophets to Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:1-20).
- Note: Mount Carmel is a mountain range stretching 13 miles on the Palestine coast with good forests and pasture lands. It was a sacred site for Baal worshippers.
- There on the Mount Carmel, Elijah challenged the 850 prophets to a contest. He proposed that two bulls be cut into pieces, and each laid upon a separate altar, the one for Baal, the other for Jehovah, the God of Israel; the prophets of Baal were allowed first to call on Baal's name to send a fire to consume their sacrifice. Next, Elijah would do the same - the one who should answer by fire would be recognized as the true God (I Kings 18:21-25).
- All day long these false prophets cried to Baal; they danced around the altar, shouting, "O Baal, hear us!" "But there was no reply. About noontime, Elijah began to make fun of them, saying, "Shout louder! Maybe Baal is thinking or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping so you will have to wake him!" So they shouted louder. They cut themselves with knives until their blood gushed out. They acted wildly from morning till evening, but there was no answer, no voice, no fire (I Kings 18:26-29).
- Then Elijah called all the people to gather around him. He rebuilt the altar of God because it had been torn down by Baal's followers. He laid the bull on the altar and dug a ditch about three feet wide around it; and told people to pour water over the meat and the wood till the water ran off

the altar and filled the ditch. Then the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed, "O God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, prove today that You are the God of Israel and that I am Your servant... O Lord, answer me so these people will know that You are bringing them back to You" (I Kings 18:30-37).

- Then, suddenly, fire flashed down from heaven and burnt up the sacrifice (the bull), the wood, the stone altar, the dust and dried up the water in the ditch! When the people saw it, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!" Then, at Elijah's command, the people sieged all the prophets of Baal and Ash'erah and killed them. After this, on that same day, God sent rain to end the drought (I Kings 18:38-45).

Elijah at Mount Horeb (Mount Hor'eb is another name for Mount Sinai)

- When Queen Jezebel was told what Elijah had done and how he slaughtered all the prophets of her gods, she was furious and vowed to kill Elijah. Then Elijah fled for his life and God directed him to Mount Sinai - the place where centuries ago Moses received the Ten Commandments (I Kings 19:1-18; cf. Ex. 19:20-20:1-17).
- There God revealed to Elijah the following things: (A) God would raise up Ha'zael of Syria to be His instrument to punish Israel for Baal worship (I Kings 19:15; cf. II Kings 8:7-15). (B) God would make Jeh'u son of Ni'mshi king of Israel, and that Jehu would kill Jezebel and wipe out Ahab's descendants and terminate all Baal worshipers (I Kings 19:16a; II Kings 9:1-37; 10:1-28). (C) God had chosen Eli'sha, son of Sha'phat,, to be Elijah's successor (I Kings 19:16b-17).
- Soon Elijah found Eli'sha who was plowing a field with a team of oxen. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak (mantle) upon him; and Elisha followed Elijah and became his servant (I Kings 19:19-21).

Ahab and Jezebel Seize Naboth's Vineyard

- For a few years during the war between Ahab and Benha'dad the king of Syria, Elijah did not appear (I Kings 20:); but when the wicked Queen Jezebel seized Na'both's vineyard and had Na'both falsely accused and murdered, Elijah met the king and pronounced judgment of God upon Ahab and Jezebel and their household (I Kings 21:1-29).
- When Ahab died, his wicked son Ahazi'ah became king of Israel. Ahaz'ah continued the worship of Baal and likewise met strong opposition from Elijah. Ahaziah reigned only two years and died of injuries resulted from an accident. His brother Jeho'ram became the new king, for Ahaziah had no son (I Kings 22:40, 51-53; II Kings 1:1-18).

Elijah Taken Up tp Heaven

- In the reign of Jeho'ram, brother of Ahaz'ah, God's faithful servant Elijah's earthly ministry came to a close. One day as he and Elisha walked together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them. And Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Thus Elijah did not die. He was carried bodily to heaven (II Kings 2:1-11).
- There was only another man, E'noch, who was taken directly into God's presence without experiencing death (Gen. 5:24).

- Now Elijah was gone, Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle (cloak), which had fallen to the ground, and succeeded his master as prophet of the kingdom of Israel (II Kings 2:12-15).
- Elijah's ministry left an unforgettable impression on the mind of the nation. In Malachi 4:5-6, God had promised that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah. And Jesus pointed out that this "Elijah", the forerunner of Christ the Messiah was John the Baptist who came in the spirit and power of Elijah before the Lord (Matt. 11:10-14; 17:10-13; Lk. 1:13-17).
- In Matt. 17:1-4, we read that one day Elijah and Moses appeared together, talking with Jesus about His coming death (see also Mk 9:1-4; Lk 9:28-31). The appearance of these two men, the great lawgiver Moses and the great prophet Elijah, symbolized that the One to Whom the law and the prophets pointed had now fulfilled in the person of Jesus (cf. Luke 24:27).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. The fearless prophet Elijah once sternly warned the evil King Ahab that judgment would come upon him and his household, and that God would cut off every male descendant from him, and that dogs would tear apart the body of Jezebel... (I Kings 21:20-24). The reason was told in the following Scripture: "There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord; influenced by his wife Jezebel, he acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites (Canaanites) had done, whom the Lord drove out before Israel" (I Kings 21:25-26). Note: God's prediction made through Elijah was literally fulfilled (I Kings 22:37-38; II Kings 9:30-37; 10:1-11). Let us heed God's warning not to do evil in His eyes lest we should incur His judgment.
2. Elijah was a faithful servant of God. His mission was to preserve the nation's religious system - the worship of the only one true God. He stood alone against the king and the queen and the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel; and God vindicated him by fire from heaven. What a courageous man of God he was! The Lord helps us to be His faithful and courageous witnesses in our today's evil and adulterous generation.

Memory Bible Verse: I Kings 18:21, "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

LESSON 47

Elisha

Scripture References

- I Kings 19:15-21; II Kings 2:-13

The Call of Elisha

- Elisha's name means "God is Savior." The name is almost like Elijah. In I Kings 19:16-19, we read that God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor. Elijah followed God's direction and found Elisha plowing a field with a team of oxen. Elisha must have been a wealthy farmer, because he was plowing with twelve yoke (twelve pair) of oxen; and he was at the end of the line with the last pair. He must have eleven servants besides himself in order to plow with twelve yoke of oxen.
- As Elijah walked past Elisha, he threw his mantle (coat) over Elisha's shoulders. Immediately Elisha realized that God was calling him to succeed Elijah to be a prophet (a preacher). He asked for permission to say goodbye to his parents; he went home and killed a pair of oxen and used his wooden plow for firewood. He roasted the meat and invited his relatives and friends to his farewell dinner party. Then he left everything - his parents, a life of ease, riches and security, and followed Elijah to serve the Lord (I Kings 19:19-21).

Elisha Asks for a Double Portion of Elijah's Power

- Elisha was not seen until shortly before Elijah's departure. When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were traveling together and they came to stand by Jordan River. Then Elijah took his mantle (cloak) and rolled it up and struck the water; and the river divided and they went across on dry ground (II Kings 2:1-8).
- When they arrived on the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, "What can I do for you before I am taken away?" And Elisha replied, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." And Elijah said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours - otherwise not" (II Kings 2:9-10).
- Note: Elisha wanted the kind of power that Elijah had, because Elijah was a model of the Holy Spirit's power. Luke 1:17 says about John the Baptist that "he will go before Him (Christ) in the spirit and power of Elijah..." So Elijah is a model to those who seek the power of the Holy Spirit. Elisha wanted that same kind of power, only a double portion of it.
- As they continued walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire drawn by horse of fire appeared and separated the two of them. And Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out in excitement, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel" (II Kings 2:11-12)!
- As Elijah disappeared from sight, Elisha then tore his own clothes apart and picked up the mantle that had fallen from Elijah and went back to the bank of the Jordan River, and struck the water with it. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" he cried out. And the water parted and Elisha walked across on dry ground. A group of young prophets (students of Jericho Theological

School) were watching; they exclaimed, "the spirit of Elijah has come upon Elisha" (II Kings 2:12-15)!

A Prophet of Miracles

- Now after Elisha took the mantle of Elijah (succeeded Elijah), he became a prophet of miracles. He must have received a double portion of Elijah's spirit (power) because he performed twice as many miracles as did Elijah. The following is a list of what he had done:
 - (a) Using the mantle of Elijah, he parted the water of Jordan and went across on dry ground (II Kings 2:13-14).
 - (b) In Jericho, he was told that the water was bad and the land was barren. He threw a bowl of salt into the stream and made it pure and sweet (II Kings 2:19-22).
 - (c) On his way to Bethel, a group of young rascals (gangsters), instigated by their idolatrous parents, followed and mocked him because of his bald head, "Go up (in a whirlwind like Elijah), you bald head!" And Elisha cursed them in the name of the Lord; and two she bears came out of the woods and killed forty-two of them (II Kings 2:23-24).
 - (d) When King Jeho'ram (Ahab' second son and Ahazi'ah's brother) of Israel and King Jeho'shaphat of Judah, also joined by troops from E'dom, conducted a military campaign against Moab, they were trapped in the wilderness without water. The three kings appealed to Elisha for help. Reluctantly, and only for the godly King Jehoshaphat's sake, Elisha prayed the Lord to send water (without rain) to fill the dry valley. God also gave them victory over their enemies (II Kings 3:1-25).
 - (e) As an act of mercy, Elisha once helped the young widow of a prophet (a preacher) to pay off her debts by miraculously filling available containers with oil. Then the widow sold the oil to pay off her debts, and also there was enough oil left on which she and her two sons could live (II Kings 4:1-7).
 - (f) Elisha became a friend of a wealthy family in Shu'nem. The woman of the house showed special hospitality toward the prophet by providing a guest room for Elisha. And Elisha repaid their kindness by promising the childless couple a son. The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son a year later. The child grew; but one day he died suddenly of a severe headache. Elisha raised the boy from the dead (II Kings 4:8-37).
 - (g) Next we see Elisha meeting with a group of students from the school of prophets. They cooked some vegetable stew but found it unfit to eat; there was poison in it. Elisha miraculously removed the poison. They all ate it, and there was no harm in it (II Kings 4:38-41).
 - (h) Again, at the same place, a man brought Elisha twenty loaves of barley bread and a few ears of corn. Elisha miraculously multiplied these and fed 100 men, with some left (II Kings 4:42-44).
 - (i) Na'aman, the commander of the Syrian army, was affected with leprosy. A little Jewish maid told Mrs. Na'aman that her master should go to see the prophet Elisha for healing.

Elisha then told Naaman to wash himself seven times in the Jordan and he was healed of leprosy! Elisha firmly refused any reward or gift from the general. But Geha'zi, Elisha's servant, secretly accepted silver (\$4,000 in silver) and two expensive robes without the knowledge of his master. Elisha punished him with Na'aman's leprosy (II Kings 5:1-27).

- (j) A young prophet (a student) was chopping wood, and his ax head fell into the river. Elisha made it rise to the surface and it was recovered (II Kings 6:1-7).
- (k) Once the king of A'ram (Syria) was at war with Israel. He tried to set an ambush for the king of Israel. But his plans, however secret, were known to Elisha who warned the king of Israel and saved him more than twice (II Kings 6:8-10).
- (l) The king of Assyria was mad at Elisha, so he sent a great army with many chariots and horses to capture Elisha. They surrounded the city where Elisha stayed. Elisha's servant saw the Syrian army and was scared. Elisha then prayed the Lord to open the young man's eyes and he saw that they were shielded and protected by God's army - horses of fire and chariots of fire. And the Syrian army was struck by blindness and led to Samaria, Israel's capitol, where they were fed and sent back home. After that the Syrians made no more raids on Israel for some time (II Kings 6:11-23).
- (m) Later on, however, King Benha'dad of Syria besieged Samaria. As a result, people were starving to death. In the height of the famine, Elisha predicted relief the next day. That night, four lepers considered themselves hopeless, visited the Syrian camp, found it deserted. The abundant spoil of the Syrians relieved the people of Samaria (II Kings 6:24-7:1-20).

The Last Miracle at Elisha's Tomb

- Elisha's ministry lasted about 50 years in the northern kingdom of Israel, serving God faithfully during the reigns of four kings: Jeho'ram, Je'hu, Jeho'ahaz and Jo'ash. He presented God's Word to both kings and common people through prophecy and miracles. The power of the prophet did not end with his death. Sometime after he was buried, a family was having a funeral in the same cemetery. Seeing a band of Moabite bandits, the family members threw the dead man into the tomb of Elisha and fled in a panic. But the dead man came to life as soon as his body touched the bones of Elisha (II Kings 13:20-21).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Elisha left everything - his love ones, a comfortable home, riches, security - and followed Elijah to become a preacher with a hard life ahead of him. If God calls you to be a preacher, will you be willing to leave everything for Jesus' sake and for the Gospel?
2. After Elijah left, Elisha took Elijah's mantle and tore his own clothes apart and threw them away (II Kings 2:12). He was no longer "Elisha the son of Shaphat"; now he has become the prophet of God, a new creation in the Holy Spirit. Are you a new creation (a new person) in Christ? Have you thrown your old clothes (your old sinful self) away and put on Christ as His true believer?

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 16:24-25, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his

life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it."

LESSON 48

Hezekiah

Scripture References

- II Kings 18:-20:; II Chronicles 29:-32:; Isaiah 36:-39:

Family Background

- He'zeki'ah, the 13th king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, was one of the most godly kings in Judah's history.
- His name Hezekiah means "Jehovah is strength." He was born the son of A'haz by A'bi, daughter of Ze'chariah. His father A'haz was an evil and ungodly king of Judah for 16 years. Ahaz did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord; he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and worshipped the idols of Baal. Ahaz went as far as to follow the abominable heathen practices by burning his own children in the fire as sacrifices to the idols (II Kings 16:1-20; II Chronicles 28:1-4).
- The reign of Ahaz had left Judah in a shambles. The nation of Judah had become economically weak, politically dominated by foreign powers and religiously corrupted through idolatry (idol-worship). In his final days, Ahaz sinned even more. He sacrificed to the gods of the people of Damascus who had defeated him, for he thought that these gods would help him as they helped the Assyrians. He gathered the sacred things from the house of the Lord and slashed them to pieces, and closed the doors of the Temple, so that no one could worship there; then he made altars to the heathen gods in every corner of Jerusalem and in every town of Judah. He made the Lord, the God his ancestors worshipped, very angry. When he died, the nation's leaders refused to give him a burial place among the royal tombs, because of the terrible things he had done. After his death, his son Hezeki'ah became the new king (II Kings 16:1-20; II Chron. 28:1-27).

Hezekiah, A Godly King

- He'zekiah was 25 years old when he ascended the throne, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. He became known as one of Judah's most godly kings. (II Kings 18:1-3; II Chron. 29:1-6; 31:20-21). That a wicked man like Ahaz would have such a God-fearing son was a wonder!
- As soon as Hezekiah came to the throne, he reopened the Temple. He gathered all the priests and Levites and told them that neglect of the Temple and its services was the reason that God's wrath had come upon Judah and Jerusalem. He then commissioned them to cleanse and to rededicate the Temple. The common people responded to the king's reform with great enthusiasm that they brought sacrifices to the Lord in great abundance. Thus the service of the house of the Lord was restored; and King Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced greatly because of what the Lord had accomplished so quickly (II Chron. 29:3-27).
- Hezekiah's reform was so thorough that he got rid of all the idols in the land and demolished their altars (worship places). He even destroyed the bronze serpent that Moses made in the wilderness (cf. Num. 21:5-9), because the people worshipped it (II Kings 18:4).

- After this, Hezekiah invited all the people to celebrate the Passover Feast in Jerusalem. And they were filled with great joy, for Jerusalem hadn't seen a celebration like this one since the days of King Solomon. It was a great religious revival indeed (II Chron. 30:1-27).

Hezekiah and the Assyrians

- Shortly after Hezekiah began to reign, the Northern kingdom of Israel was under the attack of Assyria. Sargon, king of Assyria, finally destroyed Samaria, capital city of Israel, and carried its inhabitants to Assyria in 722 B.C.; then he replaced them with people from other parts of the Assyrian empire, who intermarried with the Israelites left in the land. Thus produced a people with mixed blood, mixed race and mixed religion known as the Samaritans (II Kings 17:1-41). The Jews despised the Samaritans and had nothing to do with them (cf. Jn. 4:9). The captivity of Israel was an inevitable punishment for their idolatry and wickedness.
- At the same time, Judah, too, was under the domination of Assyria. But when Hezekiah grew prosperous and strong, he rebelled against the king of Assyria (II Kings 18:7).
- After King Sargon died, his son Sennacherib made two invasions on Judah. The first one took place during the 14th year of Hezekiah as king, and Sennacherib made Hezekiah to pay heavy tribute (II Kings 18:13-16).
- Later on, Sennacherib sent a large army against Jerusalem. He delivered a blasphemous and insulting letter (a threatening ultimatum) demanding Hezekiah's unconditional surrender. With great distress, Hezekiah went over the Temple and spread the enemy's letter before the Lord and prayed earnestly that God would save and defend the city. And God sent the prophet Isaiah to assure him of God's intervention and deliverance. That very night the Angel of the Lord killed a hundred and eighty-five thousand (185,000) Assyrian soldiers (by a sudden plague). Thus Jerusalem was delivered from its enemy (II Kings 18:17-37; 19:1-36; II Chron. 32:1-23; Isa. 36:-37:).

Hezekiah's Illness

- Toward the end of his reign Hezekiah became critically ill. The prophet Isaiah informed him that would die. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed; he broke down and cried before the Lord. Then the Lord sent Isaiah back to the king, telling him that God had heard his prayer and granted him fifteen additional years of life. God also gave him a sign - the shadow cast by the sun went back the ten steps it had gone down, i.e., the sun's shadow moved backward ten degrees in the sundial (of Ahaz). It was one of the most remarkable miracles in the O.T. (II Kings 20:1-11; II Chron. 32:24-26; Isaiah 38:1-22).
- Note: the sundial or stairway of Ahaz means it was constructed during the reign of King Ahaz.

Hezekiah's Downfall

- Soon afterwards, the king of Babylon sent Hezekiah a letter and a generous gift to congratulate him on his recovery. Hezekiah was quite elated with the attention given him by the Babylonians. In a moment of weakness he became so proud of his own accomplishments; he showed the Babylonian visitors all the treasures in the palace. And Isaiah severely rebuked him and foretold him that the punishment would befall him for his heart was puffed out with what he had

achieved, and forgot his Benefactor (the Lord). But when Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that God' judgment did not come upon him in the days of Hezekiah (II Kings 20:12-19; II Chron. 32:25-26; Isa. 39:1-8).

- When Hezekiah died, his son Manas'seh reigned in his stead. All Judah and the people of Jerusalem honored him when he died (II Kings 20:20-21; II Chron. 32:33).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Hezekiah was one of the best kings of the nation of Judah. He was devout and sincere, though he was not perfect. He is especially to be admired when we remember that his father Ahaz was such a hopeless and evil king. It was only by God's grace that Hezekiah became a noble king who ever sat upon the throne of Judah. You can be a noble follower of Christ also, if only you are willing to humble yourself and let Christ take control of your life.
2. Hezekiah almost lost favor with God because of his pride. It was the Lord Who made him prosperous and strong, because he trusted the Lord and kept His commandments. Now when he became proud because of his wealth and success, he did not honor God any more. It will be well with us to remember that "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

Memory Bible Verse: Proverbs 29:23, "A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor."

LESSON 49

Ezra and Nehemiah - Part I

Scripture References

- Ezra 1: through 10; Nehemiah 1: through 13:

Historical Background

- In the early years of He'zeki'ah's reign, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes, had already fallen to Assy'ria. Their people were carried away to Assyria, and the northern tribes never returned as a nation again. The kingdom of Israel lasted 209 years, from 931-722 B.C.
- The Assyrians also threatened to destroy the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but God miraculously saved them under the godly reign of King Hezekiah (II Kings 19:32-36).
- After Hezekiah's death, seven kings ruled over Judah in succession until Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians. The Southern Kingdom lasted 345 years, from 931-586 B.C.
- The names of the seven kings after Hezekiah are as follows:
 - (1) Manas'seh, son of Hezekiah, reigned 55 years. He was an idolatrous and very wicked king (II Kings 21:1-18; II Chron. 33:1-20).
 - (2) A'mon, son of Manasseh, reigned 2 years. He was an evil king like his father Manasseh (II Kings 21:19-26; II Chron. 33:21-25).
 - (3) Josi'ah, son of A'mon, reigned 31 years. He was the last godly king of Judah. He brought both profound political and religious reforms in the land (II Kings 22:-23:30; II Chron. 34:-35:).
 - (4) Jeho'ahaz, son of Josiah, reigned only 3 months. He was an evil king like other evil kings before him. The king of Egypt captured and jailed him and he died in Egypt (II Kings 23:31-34; II Chron. 36:1-3).
 - (5) Jehoi'akim, another son of Josiah, reigned 11 years. Again he was one of Judah's worst kings. He did all the abominable things in the eyes of the Lord. King Ne'buchadne'zzar (pronounced as ne'bu-kad-ne'zar) came up against him, and took him away in chains to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also took some of the golden vessels from the house of the Lord and placed them in his own god's temple in Babylon (II Kings 23:36-24:6; II Chron. 36:5-8).
 - (6) Jehoi'achin, son of Jehoiakim, reigned 3 months and 10 days. He was an evil king. Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, took all the treasures from God's Temple and the royal palace; and carried away all the people to Babylon; none remained, except the poorest people of the land (II Kings 24:8-16; II Chron. 36:9-10).
 - (7) Zedeki'ah, the third son of Josiah, uncle of Jehoiachin, ruled as the last king of Judah for 11 years. He was evil as his brothers. He refused to listen to the prophet Jeremiah who gave him message from God. All the leaders of the nation, including the high priests, were

extremely evil. They followed the abominable practices of the heathen nations, worshipping idols and provoking the Lord to anger. God had sent His prophets again and again to warn them, for He had compassion on His people and on His Temple. But the people mocked His messengers and despised their words until the anger of the Lord could no longer be restrained, and there was no longer a remedy (II Kings 24:17-20; II Chron. 36:11-16).

The Destruction of Jerusalem and Judah's Captivity

- Finally God brought up the king of Babylon against them. He killed their young men and maidens and had no compassion on old man or aged. He carried to Babylon all their treasures and burned the Temple. He then took captives to Babylon the people who were left alive. And they became slaves to the Babylonians until the kingdom of Persia rose and conquered Babylon (II Kings 25:1-21; II Chron. 36:17-21).
- Note: the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple occurred in 586 B.C. and ended the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Judah's Return from Captivity

- Judah's captivity in Babylon came to an end after Persia's conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C., when the new King Cy'rus of Persia gave permission to the captive Jews to return to their home land (II Chron. 36:22-23).
- Note: the "captivity" or "exile" of the Jews refers to the period of the 70 years, as predicted by Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 25:12; 27:22; 29:10), from the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar to the decrees of Cyrus (606-538 B.C.); or from the destruction of the Temple to its reconstruction (586-515 B.C.).
- In 538 B.C., in the first year of King Cyrus' reign, God stirred up his spirit to issue a decree, allowing the Jews to return to their land and to rebuild their Temple. Nearly fifty thousand returned under the leadership of Zerubb'abel and the high priest Joshua (Ezra 1:-2:). In spite of difficulty and delay, the Temple was completed in 515 B.C. with the encouragement of God's servants, the prophets Hag'gai and Zechari'a (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:15-16).
- Note: The ten tribes of Israel never returned and became lost in history.

Ezra's Return to Jerusalem

- The years went by, Zerubb'abel, Joshua, Hag'gai and Zechari'a all died. Without strong and godly leadership, the returned captives began to drift from God. During this time, in 458 B.C., eighty years after Zerubb'abel, and fifty-seven years after the completion of the Temple, and in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes (artak-sur'ksez) the fifth king of Persian Empire, Ezra obtained permission and finances from the king to carry religious reforms in Jerusalem. With him came 1,754 Jewish descendants (Ezra 7:1-28; 8:1-20).
- Ezra's name means "God is Help." He was born in exile, a descendant of the priestly family of Aaron. Ezra was raised up and educated as a teacher of the Law (a skilled scribe) with extensive training in the Books of the Law which contains Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

- Note: A scribe was a member of a learned class in Bible times who studied the scriptures and served as copyist, editor and teacher of the Law. Ezra was a scribe (see Nehemiah. 8:1; 12:36).
- After his return to Jerusalem, Ezra is believed to have updated the Hebrew Bible of that time, modernizing its language and correcting some irregularities in the text. He was a quite competent Bible scholar, and he referred to himself in his own book as a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, i.e., a skilled scribe (Ezra 7:6).

Ezra's Reform

- Soon after his arrival, Ezra was told that many of the people, including some religious leaders, had mixed with the heathen people who lived in the land. They had married heathen women (non-Jewish women), and followed the detestable practices of the surrounding nations (Ezra 9:1-2).
- When Ezra heard this, he tore his robe and pulled hair from the head and beard and sat down in shock. And many who feared God because of this unfaithfulness of the returned captives, came and sat with Ezra until the time of the evening sacrifice Ezra (9:3-4).
- As Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the Temple, a large crowd, men and women and children gathered around and wept bitterly with him. Three days later, Ezra summoned all the people to assemble in Jerusalem and insisted that they put away their foreign heathen wives, lest the wrath of God should fall upon them. Ezra was afraid that intermarriage with pagans would lead the people into idolatry (worship of idols), the same sin that sent their fathers into captivity. Finally Ezra led those who married foreign wives to repent of their sin and divorce their idolatrous (idol-worshipping) wives (Ezra 10:1-17).
- After the marriage reforms, Ezra was not mentioned in the early accounts of the Book of Nehemiah. Most probably he had gone back to Persia, and then returned later (422/433 B.C.) to aid in Nehemiah's work at the time when the walls of Jerusalem had been reconstructed (cf. Nehemiah 8:1-2).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Israel was a nation chosen by God and had been greatly blessed by God, and yet it ended in disgrace and shame. The cause was sin. Solomon worshipped the idols of his pagan wives, and the people followed him. Soon the nation became divided. The Northern Kingdom perished first, and the Southern Kingdom followed suit. Anyone who sins and refuses to repent will always taste bitter fruits of sin.
2. Ezra must be a distinguished Bible scholar as a learned scribe and a true religious man. But above all, he was deeply devoted to his God and the high standard of holiness and righteousness which the Lord demands of all His people. You, too, can be a highly educated scholar and meanwhile a devoted follower of Christ.

Memory Bible Verse: Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."

people.”

LESSON 50

Ezra and Nehemiah - Part II

Nehemiah's Return to Jerusalem

- Nehemi'ah's name means "God is salvation." He was born and grew up as a Jewish captive in Babylon, and gained a high position as a cupbearer to King Artaxe'rxes (artak-s'urksezes) of Persia (Neh. 1:11; 2:1).
- Note: A cupbearer was one who tasted and served wine to the king. Ancient kings used trusted servants to taste every thing before they consumed it. If the servant lived or did not get sick, the king and queen then ate and drank. Nehemiah held this highly trusted position under Artaxe'rxes, influencing the king politically.
- When King Cy'rus of Persia conquered Babylon and released captive people (538 B.C.), many Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their homes and the Temple of God. The reconstruction of the Temple was completed twenty-three years later in 515 B.C. But the city wall of Jerusalem which was demolished by Ne'buchadne'zzar remained in ruins.
- Nehemiah was a high officer under the king in Persia, but his heart was in Jerusalem. When someone brought words to him about the ruined condition of Jerusalem, Nehemiah was deeply grieved and prayed earnestly for his father's land. It was a very moving prayer he offered in behalf of his own suffering land. And God answered his prayer (Neh. 1:1-11).
- The Lord touched the king's heart and he granted Nehemiah a vacation break; the king expected him to be back after a set time, and the king also appointed him to be governor in the land of Judah (Neh. 2:1-9; 5:14).

The Rebuilding of the City Wall

- Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in the 21st year of King Artaxerxes in the summer of 444 B.C. Shortly after his return, Nehemiah organized the community and began rebuilding the broken-down wall (Neh. 2:11-18). When the enemies of the Jews tried to harass and stop their work, Nehemiah and his men worked with construction tools in one hand and weapons in the other, while they prayed all the time for God's protection. And the wall was completed in 52 days in September 444 B.C. (Neh. 2:10-20; 3:1-4; 5:14; 6:15). What a remarkable achievement for a great task within such a short time!

The Great Revival Under Ezra and Nehemiah

- Now again Ezra appeared on the scene. Shortly after the wall was completed, all the people gathered in Jerusalem and requested Ezra, their religious leader, to read to them the law of God which He gave to Moses. So Ezra, together with some leaders of the Levites, read the Book of the Law and explained its meaning clearly to them (Neh. 8:1-8).
- And the people began to weep as they listened to the Word of God. Then Nehemiah and Ezra said to them, "This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. Go and enjoy good food and sweet drinks... Today is a holy day to the Lord. Don't be sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

- So the people went away to eat a festival meal, and they sent some of their food to those who had nothing. And they celebrated with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them (Neh. 8:9-12).
- After that the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days. Day after day, from the first day to the last during the feast, Ezra read to the people from the Book of the Law of God. And their joy was very great (Neh. 8:13-18).
- Note: The feast of Tabernacle was celebrated on the 15th day of the 7th month (in mid-September according to our calendar) to commemorate the wandering of Israel in the wilderness (Lev. 23:33-34).
- Then Ezra led the people to a fasting and confession; and a penitential prayer was offered. Then the leaders of the people bound themselves with an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses and to obey all the commands of the Lord (Neh. 9:1-38; 10:28-29).
- It was a great spiritual revival since the captives returned to their homeland!

Dedication of the City Wall

- At the dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem, Nehemiah called all the Levites and priests and all the leaders of the people together in Jerusalem. They were divided into two groups, led respectively by Ezra and Nehemiah. These two groups then marched in procession in opposite directions, singing and playing the musical instruments as they went. Then they met together at the Temple on the other side of the City. There they joined in a great service of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord (Neh. 12:27-43).

Nehemiah's Final Reforms

- For twelve years Nehemiah served as the Persian governor of Judah (Neh. 5:14). During these years he carried out many social and political reforms among the people. Nehemiah enjoyed the cooperation of Ezra, who assisted him in interpreting and preaching the Word of God to the people.
- At the end of 12 years service, Nehemiah returned to the king in Persia (Neh. 13:6). During his absence, everything fell into confusion and disorder. Ezra probably had returned to Persia before Nehemiah, for he was no longer mentioned after Nehemiah's departure.
- After some time Nehemiah received permission to come back to Jerusalem to continue his reforms among the people. Here is a list of things he had done during his second tenure of office in Jerusalem:
 - (a) He separated the Jews from idolatrous (idol-worshipping) foreigners (Neh. 13:1-3).
 - (b) He expelled Tobiah the Ammonite, an enemy of Nehemiah, from the Temple, for Eli'ashib the priest who had been appointed as custodian of the Temple storeroom and who was also a good friend of Tobiah, had converted a storage room into a beautiful guest room for this evil man Tobiah (13:4-9).

- (c) He made arrangements for the support of the priesthood - those who served in the Temple service (13:10-14).
 - (d) He enforced the observance of the Sabbath (13:15-22).
 - (e) He enforced the law against intermarriage with other people - the pagans (13:23-31).
- After these things, Nehemiah was heard no more. How long he remained the second time in Jerusalem is unknown.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. When Ezra, together with some other religious leaders, read the Book of the Law of God to the people and explained its meaning to them, the people wept as they listened to the Word of God. Then after Nehemiah and Ezra calmed down the people and told them not to weep, but go and enjoy a good meal, "for the joy of the Lord is your strength." And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to share their food with those in need and to make great rejoicing (Neh. 8:1-12). Why did the people weep and rejoice afterwards? The answer is found in v.12 - "because they had understood the words (from the Book of the Law of God) that had been made known to them." If we diligently and carefully study the Word of God (the Bible), or hear it preached with clarity and power, and when we truly understand its meaning, we would weep with joy also.
2. Nehemiah taught us the importance of prayer. We hear him pray again and again in his book. If Nehemiah, a capable and courageous leader, needed to claim God's strength and guidance, how much more should we pray for God's will to be done through our life.

Memory Bible Verse: Nehemiah 8:10b, "This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

LESSON 51

Esther

Scripture References

- The Book of Esther 1:-10:

Family Background

- Esther is a Persian name which means "a star." Her Hebrew name Hadas'sah means "a myrtle." She was born in captivity in Persia. While she was a little girl, her parents died; her cousin Mor'decai adopted her and brought up her as his own daughter (Esther 2:7).
- Mordecai, a descendant of the Benjamin tribe, was born in Bab'ylon during the years of the captivity of the Jewish people after Neb'uchadne'zar brought the Jews to Babylonia as captives. He lived in Su'sa (or Shu'shan) the capital city of Persia during the reign of King Xerxes (zur'ksez), also known as Ahasue'rus (a-hazu-e'rus) (Est. 2:5-7).

The Removal of Queen Vachhti

- Xerxes, the 4th king of Persia, ruled over the Persian Empire from 486-564 B.C. At that time many Jews had already returned to Jerusalem, and the Temple was rebuilt and completed in 516 B.C. before Xerxes'(zur'ksez) reign. The rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem was completed in 444 B.C. during the reign of Artaxerxes (ar-tak-su'rkesez), Xerxes' successor.
- One time, King Xerxes gave a great banquet for all his nobles and officials and military leaders. The banquet lasted six months. When it was all over, the king threw a special party, lasting seven days, in the palace garden, for all the people in Susa the capital. Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for all the women in the royal palace (Est. 1:1-9).
- On the last day of the party, the drunken king commanded his beautiful queen Vashti to come before him to show her beauty to the people. But she refused to come. The king was very angry and he banished her from his presence forever (Est. 1:10-22).

Esther Made Queen

- After King Xerxes' anger had cooled down, he began brooding over the loss of Vashti, realizing that he would never see her again. In order to find a new queen to replace Vashti, the king ordered all the beautiful young virgins brought to Susa under the care of He'gai, the eunuch in charge of women. The final selection of these women remained with the king himself. Among these young virgins was Esther who was a lovely and beautiful girl (Est. 2:1-8).
- Esther quickly won Hegai's favor; and, after twelve months of beauty treatments, in January of the seventh year of his reign, King Xerxes chose Esther to be the new queen, for he was attracted to her (Est. 2:9-18).

Mordecai Uncovers a Conspiracy Against the King

- When Esther was taken into the royal harem, Mordecai charged her not to reveal her nationality and family background, yet he remained in close contact with her (Est. 2:10-11). Later, Mordecai had probably become a government official, for he was sitting at the king's gate (Est. 2:19).
- In those days, while Mordecai sat at the king's gate, he discovered that two of the king's officers plotted to assassinate the king. Mordecai informed Esther, who in turn reported to the king, giving credit to Mordecai for the information. As a result, the two men were executed, thus Mordecai saved the king's life. All this was duly recorded in the book of the history of King Xerxes' reign (2:21-23).

Haman's Plot Against Mordecai and the Jews

- Some time later Ha'man became King Xerxes' prime minister, the most powerful official in the empire next to the king. And the king ordered all his officials to bow down and do reverence to Haman (as to a god) whenever he passed by. But Mordecai, a devout Jew, showed his loyalty to God by refusing to bow down to Haman and do reverence to him (3:1-4).
- Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman aroused Haman's anger. Knowing that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, scattered throughout the empire; and the king granted Haman full power to do whatever he wanted to do with the Jews (3:5-11).
- Then Haman sent out letters in the name of the king to all the king's provinces on the 13th day of the first month, decreeing that the Jews – men and women and children - must be killed on a single day, the 13th day of the twelfth month (allowing time for the people to get ready to do the slaughter), and their property given to those who would kill them (3:12-15).
- When Mordecai heard the bad news, he tore his clothes and put on sack cloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing and wept loudly and bitterly. And throughout the empire there was great mourning among the Jews with fasting, weeping and wailing; many lay in sack cloth and ashes (4:1-3).
- Mordecai sent word to Esther, urging her to plead for her people before the king; but Esther replied, "All of us know that anyone who goes into the king's inner court without being called will be put to death, unless the king holds out his golden scepter; and I have not been called to see the king for 30 days (4:4-12).
- Mordecai sent back this answer: "Do not think you alone will escape, just because you live in the palace, when all other Jews are killed! For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this" (4:13-14).

Esther's Intervention

- Then Esther told Mordecai, "Go and gather together all the Jews in Susa, and fast (and pray) for me for three days; I also and my maids will do the same. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I die, I die (4:15-17).

- After three days of fasting and prayer, Esther risked her life and entered the inner court where the king was. But the king received her graciously and fondly. When the king asked Queen Esther what she wanted, her request was that the king and Haman would attend a banquet that she had prepared that day. At the banquet the king renewed his promise to grant Esther whatever she wanted. She asked both of them to come to another banquet the next day and promised to make her wishes known then (5:1-8).

Haman's Plot and His Downfall

- Now Haman's was very happy and proud that the queen invited only him and the king to the banquet she prepared. And tomorrow the queen invited him together with the king again. But when he saw Mordecai there at the gate, paying no attention to him, he was furious. That night his wife and friends advised him to make a 75-foot-high gallows, and ask the king in the morning to hang Mordecai on it, then he could go on his merry way with the king to the banquet (5:9-14).
- That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the historical records of his reign to be brought and read to him. And it was found recorded that Mordecai had warned the king about a plot to kill King Xerxes; the king asked what reward had given Mordecai, and was told none at all. Now it was early morning and Haman had come to ask permission to hang Mordecai. But the king asked him first what should be done to a man he wished to honor. Thinking that he was the only person the king would honor, Haman suggested the greatest honor he could think of. And the king immediately ordered Haman to bestow those honors on Mordecai (6:1-14).
- At the second banquet Esther revealed Haman's plot against the Jews and pleaded for her people. The king became very angry and ordered Haman to be hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (7:1-10).

The Final Victory of the Jews

- Mordecai then became King Xerxes' prime minister instead of Haman (10:5). The day that had been set for the slaughter of the Jews now became the day when the Jews took revenge on their enemies. And the Jews established a yearly feast called Pu'rim in memory of their deliverance and victory (8:1-9:32). And through Mordecai the Jews enjoyed increased freedom and prosperity (10:1-3).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. There are only two books out of the 66 books of the Bible named after women. Ruth was a Gentile (a Mo'abite) who married a Jew (Bo'az), and Esther was a Jewess who married a Gentile (King Xerxes of Persia). Both women were of faith and courage; God used both of them to save the nation of Israel. Ruth by birth of a son (and her son became a lineal ancestor of Christ), and Esther by the death of an enemy (Haman). God can even use a little girl (Na'aman's little maid - see II Kings 5:1-3) to accomplish His purpose for His glory.
2. The name of God is not mentioned in this book (Esther), but the hand of God is seen throughout the entire story. This book teaches us that God is in control over circumstances of human history; He is the Lord of all nations. As one of our songs says, "This is my Father's world, O let me never forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet."

Memory Bible Verses: Psalm 22:27-28, "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before Him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nation."

LESSON 52

Isaiah - Part I

Scripture References

- The Book of Isaiah 1:-66:; II Kings 19:1-7;20:1-19: II Chronicles 26:22; 32:32; Luke 4:17-19

Family Background

- Isaiah (pronounced i-za'ya) means "Jehovah (the Lord) is salvation." His name in Greek form is Esaias (eza'ya).
- Little is known about Isaiah's childhood. He was the son of A'moz, not A'mos the prophet (Isa. 1:1; 2:1; 13:1). He was married to a woman who was called a prophetess (Isa. 8:3), probably because she was the wife of a great prophet, not because of any prophetic gift of her own. His wife bore him two sons: (1)) She'ar-Ja'shub, meaning "a remnant shall return" (Isa. 7:3), (2) Ma'her-sha'lal-hash-baz, meaning "speedy doom for Judah's enemies" (Isa. 8:3-4).

Historical Background

- By the time of Isaiah, the nation of Israel (Solomon's United Kingdom) had long been divided into two kingdoms - the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Isaiah preached or prophesied during the reigns of King Uzzi'ah, King Jo'tham, King A'haz and King Hezeki'ah, all four kings of Judah; and his ministry lasted over 50 years (740-687 B.C.). The prophets Hosea (hoze'a) and Mi'cah were among Isaiah's contemporaries.
- It appears that Isaiah spent his early years in writing a history of the reign of Uzziah (II Chron. 26:22), while serving as a chaplain (a clergyman) of the royal court.

Isaiah's Vision

- Isaiah received his official prophetic calling from God in the year of King Uzziah's death, in a stirring vision as he was worshipping in the Temple. He saw God sitting on a throne, and the Temple was filled with God's glory. He saw se'raphs flying about God's throne and singing His praises, as they called special attention to God's glory and holiness and majesty:
"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of His glory."
Their voices shook the foundation of the Temple and the entire building was filled with smoke (Isa. 6:1-4).
- Note: (a) se'raphs or se'raphim (plural of seraph) are angelic beings, similar to che'rubim, who are heavenly guardians in the service of the Lord Almighty. Isa. 6: is the only place that mentions seraphs. (b) Che'rubim (plural of Che'rub) are also winged angelic beings who act as guardians for God and His interests (see Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18-22; I Sam. 4:4; II Kings 19:15; Heb. 9:5).
- When Isaiah saw the vision, immediately he became conscious of his own unworthiness and sinfulness; he cried, "Woe to me! I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty (Isa. 6:5).

- Then one of the seraphs flew over to the altar and picked out a burning coal, and with it he touched Isaiah's lips and said, "See, this burning coal (fire) has touched your lips; yours guilt is taken away and your sins are all forgiven (Isa. 6:6-7).
- Note: the burning coal (the fire), from the altar symbolized God's presence and glory, etc. It was also used as a symbol of God's cleansing and purifying power (cf. Ex. 3:2; 24:17; 40:38; Malachi 3:2; Mtt. 3:11; Acts 2:2-4, etc.).
- After this, Isaiah heard the Lord asking, "Whom shall I send as a messenger to My people? Who will go?" And Isaiah said, "Here am I. Send me" (Isa. 6:8)!

Isaiah's Call to A Sinful Nation

- Now when God called Isaiah to proclaim His message, He also told him that the people would not listen to him because their hearts had become callused, their ears dulled and eyes closed (Isa. 6:9-10).
- King Uzziah ruled over Judah for 52 years (II Chron. 26:1-3). Early in his reign Uzziah ruled well, because he sought the Lord and followed wise counsel of God's faithful priest Zechari'ahh, and God blessed him with success and prosperity (II Chron. 26:4-5). Unfortunately, his prosperity and power led him to pride; in his later years, Judah had developed serious social and religious problems. Greed and injustice multiplied, violence and corruption were rampant on every side. Though the people still kept their religious services, they were perverse and ungodly in their thoughts and behavior (Isa. 1:12-23; 5:1-23) as Isaiah said, "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned (despised) the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on Him" (Isa. 1:4).
- To such a sinful and rebellious nation, Isaiah was called to deliver a message of approaching judgment (Isa. 1:18-31; 5:24-30; 6:11-12). He was also to bring Judah God's gracious promise of hope and comfort through the coming of Messiah (Savior-King, the Branch of the Lord,) in the last days (Isa. 2:2-5; 4:2-6ff).
- Note: "the Branch of the Lord" in Isa. 4:2 is an O.T. name for Christ, the Promised Messiah.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Isaiah saw God in a vision while worshipping in the Temple, immediately he saw himself so sinful and unclean before a holy God. He confessed his sin and received cleansing and forgiveness. Have you ever seen or felt God's holiness when you come to worship in the church, or when you pray and read your Bible?
2. After God cleansed Isaiah's lips (and heart) and took his guilt away, He was ready to respond to God's call to service. And God did not send him to receptive people or give him an easy message to preach, but Isaiah obeyed and accepted the challenge. If Jesus calls you to a difficult task, will you be willing to say, "Here am I. Send me!"

Memory Bible Verse: Isaiah 6:8, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

LESSON 53

Isaiah - Part II

Isaiah's Prophetic Message

- Isaiah's prophecies to the nation of Judah consists two parts in his book: (A) the first part - chapters 1 through 39, in which the prophet warned the rebellious nation of God's approaching judgment; (B) the second part - chapters 40 through 66, in which the prophet preached a message of hope and comfort for the faithful remnant of Judah.

God's Approaching Judgment (Isa. 1:-39:)

- In the first part of Isaiah's message, he denounced the sinful nation's ingratitude and rebellion. "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand'" (Isa. 1:2-3).
- Then Isaiah pled with the people, on behalf of the Lord, to return from their wicked ways in order to escape God's judgment, "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken (Isa. 1:18-20).
- But Judah would not listen; the people had harden their hearts, closed their ears, and shut their eyes (Isa. 6:9-10); they would not repent of their sins, or forsake their wicked ways; so God was angry. His hand of Judgment was stretched out against His people. Isaiah predicted that their cities (including Jerusalem) would finally be destroyed by the Babylonians and the people would be carried away as slaves to Babylon (Isa. 5:25-30; 6:11-12; cf. 39:5-7). These prophecies were literally fulfilled in 587/586 B.C.
- But in the midst of stern condemnation and judgment, Isaiah also brought the condemned nation a ray of hope and comfort in foretelling the coming of Messiah in the future. Although the tree of the house of David would be cut down, there would still be life in the stump (Isa. 6:13). Out of the lineage of David would come a Messiah whose name would be called "Immanuel," meaning "God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23), "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And on the throne of David, He will establish His kingdom forever" (Isa. 9:6-7; Lk. 1:30-33).
- Note: "Messiah" in the O.T. means the One anointed by God and empowered by God's Spirit to deliver His people and establish His kingdom. The Jews has long expected the Messiah promised by God to come as their King to defeat their enemies and bring in a golden era of peace and prosperity. Christians believe that Jesus Christ was God's Promised Messiah Who had come to deliver us from Satanic power and sin and bring us eternal life. Christians also expect that Jesus Christ will establish His Kingdom of Peace on earth for 1,000 years (the Millen'ial Kingdom) at His Second Coming as King of kings and Lord of lords (see Rev. 20:1-6).

Hope and Comfort for the Faithful Remnant (Isa. 40:-66:)

- Isaiah filled the second part of his message with prophecies of hope and comfort in glowing terms for the suffering nation of Judah - a nation in captivity for its sin. "Comfort, comfort My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed that she has received from the Lord's hand double for her sins..." (Isa. 40:1-2). "Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are My servant, O Israel. ... I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you (Isa. 44:21-22).
- Isaiah prophesied many times that after a period of Judah's captivity in Babylon, God would bring the faithful remnant of Israel back to their homeland to carry out His plans for the salvation of mankind through His Servant, the Promised Messiah (See Isa. 49:1-26).
- Isaiah then prophesied that God would raise up Cy'rus, king of Persia, to accomplish His purpose which was to be fulfilled many years later (Isa.44:28; 45:1-4).
- Note: King Cyrus conquered Babylon and founded the Persian Empire in 539 B.C., and in that same year he gave the captive Jews permission to return to their homeland and rebuild their national life and religion, an event which Isaiah had foretold 150 years before (Isa. 44:28; 45:1-4; cf. II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).

The Heart of Isaiah's Prophetic Message

- In his prophetic message, Isaiah saw beyond the near future to the coming of Jesus Christ as the Promised Messiah 700 years later. The heart of his prophecy is recorded in the last part of chapter 52 through 53 (Isa. 52:13 through 53:1-12). This is one of the most sublime passages in the whole Bible. Here Isaiah foretold vividly in picturesque language the Savior's suffering and humiliation, followed by His exaltation and glory.
- Isaiah must have shed rivers of tears when he foresaw the Savior suffer and die for his sin and for the sin of the world, then his heart must have filled with immense joy when he foresaw the triumph of the Savior through His atoning death.
- Let us memorize this whole passage, especially chapter 53.

The Millennial Kingdom, Heaven and Hell

- Isaiah also foretold the glorious kingdom (the Millennial kingdom) that Christ would establish at His Second Coming (Isa. 60:1-18; 61:1-11; 65:20-25).
- In his final message, Isaiah prophesied a New Heaven for the redeemed and a Hell for the unrepentant where "their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched (Isa. 66:22-24; Mk. 9:48; Rev. 21:1-8).

Isaiah, The Prince of O.T. Prophets

- Isaiah's prophetic message is full of precious jewels. He has been rightly called the "Prince of Old Testament Prophets." The Lord Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 in His sermon He preached in the synagogue at His hometown Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news (the Gospel) to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom

for the prisoners (of sin) and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (see Lk. 4:16-19). This was a prophecy fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus; it describes what He came to do and what He is still doing in our lives today.

Note: Syn'agogue was a place where a group of Jews gathered for worship and Bible study and fellowship, somewhat similar to our Christian Church today.

Isaiah's Death

- Isaiah served the Lord over 50 years faithfully to the end, though his preaching did not turn the nation of Judah from its self-destruction. According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah lived to 90 years old till after the beginning of Manasseh's reign; and at this evil King Manasseh's order, Isaiah was placed inside a hollow tree and sawn in two. Thus, Isaiah died a martyr for the Lord. Surely he was a great hero of the faith "of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb. 11:37-38).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Isaiah has been called the "Prince of O.T. Prophets", because his book contains more prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, than any other O.T. books. He foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), and what His life and ministry would be, including His suffering and humiliation, atoning death, His exaltation, His glory and honor, etc. (Isa. 9:6-7; 53:1-12; 61:1-2). All these prophecies, spoken 700 years before Christ, were literally fulfilled in the N.T. We believe that all the other prophecies in the Bible about the Second Coming of Christ and His Millennial kingdom shall also come to pass.
2. Isaiah was such a great and faithful servant of God, but met his death by being sawn in two during the reign of the evil King Manasseh (cf. Heb. 11:37). Are you willing to die for Jesus and His Gospel's sake?

Memory Bible Verse: Isaiah 53:6, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him (the Messiah, the Savior Jesus) the iniquity of us all."

Or, if possible, memorize the entire Isaiah chapter 53.

LESSON 54

Jeremiah

Scripture References

* Jerimi'ah 1:-45:; Lamentations 1:-5:

Family Background

- Jeremiah's name means "Jehovah (the Lord) lifts up." He was born in a priestly family. His father was Hilki'ah (Jer. 1:1), not to be confused with other men who also named Jeremiah
- In the O.T.

- While he was still a youth, about 20 years of age, God called him to be a prophet (God's spokesman) to warn the nation of God's coming judgment because of Judah's sin.

Jeremiah's Personal Call from God

- Jeremiah was shy, self-conscious, and sensitive, yet God chose him for the most difficult of all jobs.

- He was called to the prophetic ministry in the 13th year of King Josiah's reign. God spoke to him in a vision, "Before I made you in your mother's womb, I chose you. Before you were born I set you apart for a special work. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:2-5).

- But Jeremiah was reluctant and intimidated. He felt inadequate to be God's spokesman (God's messenger) as he was so young and inexperienced, so he tried to make excuses (Jer. 1:6).

- God's reply was, "Do not say, 'I am a child'... do not be afraid of them, for I am with you... I have put My words in your mouth. I have set you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant (Jer. 1:7-10).

- Furthermore, the Lord told Jeremiah, "I will pronounce My judgments on My people because of their wickedness in forsaking Me... Do not be terrified by them... I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people... I am with you and will rescue you" (Jer. 1:16-19).

- Thus, Jeremiah's ministry, which lasted 40 years, was divinely ordained. He prophesied during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah's history. In spite of his faithful preaching of God's Word, Jeremiah watched the nation decline until Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians and Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed (586 B.C.).

A Historical Background - the Last Five Kings of Judah

The last five kings of Judah's history to whom Jeremiah ministered were as follows:

- (1) Josi'ah, son of A'mon and grandson of Manas'seh, reigned 31 years. He was the last godly king of Judah. He brought sweeping reforms to the nation as a young king. He removed all the idolatrous and immoral practices that had deeply corrupted the land over the past

generations, especially, during the evil reigns of his father Amon and his grandfather Masasseh, and he restored the true worship of God (II Kings 22:1-23:25).

Jeremiah began his ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. In spite of the great religious revival brought about by the good king, Jeremiah saw that there was little change in the hearts of the people as he sadly said in 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand?" Jeremiah knew that God's judgment was inevitable and the nation was heading for destruction. His early ministry during the reign of Josiah was recorded in chapters 1 through 20 of his book.

- (2) Jeho'ahaz, son of Josiah, had a brief 3-month reign over Judah. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. The king of Egypt jailed him and he died in Egypt (II Kings 23:31-33; II Chron. 36:1-3), an event Jeremiah lamented (Jer. 22:10-12).
- (3) Jehoi'akim, another son of Josiah, reigned 11 years. Again he was one of Judah's worst kings. Jeremiah denounced Jehoiakim for exploiting the people to build himself a luxurious palace with expensive furnishings (Jer. 22:13-23). Unlike his godly father Josiah, Jehoiakim refused to listen to Jeremiah the prophet of God; he ignored justice and righteousness and did evil in the eyes of the Lord (II Kings 23:36-24:6). His 11-year reign was filled with detestable things against God (II Chron. 36:8). He even murdered Uri'ah, a prophet of the Lord, who prophesied the same things against the king and the nation as Jeremiah did (Jer. 26:20-23).

Once Jeremiah wrote at the direction of the Lord the impending judgment against King Jehoiakim and the nation on a scroll; the king defiantly cut the scroll into pieces and threw them into the fire. He then tried unsuccessfully to arrest Jeremiah (Jer. 36:1-26). Jeremiah then rewrote the scroll, and predicted that Jehoiakim would die a violent death and that no one would mourn his death (Jer. 36:27-32).

Seven years later, at the end of Jehoiakim's 11 years reign, Nebuchadnessar came up against him, and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon, but he died before the journey began, and his body was thrown on the garbage dump outside Jerusalem. This wicked king came to his end as was predicted by Jeremiah (II Chron. 36:5-8; Jer. 22:18-19; 36:30).

- (4) Jehoiachin (Jehoi'a-kin), son of Jehoiakim, reigned 3 months and 10 days. He was an evil king, but left little influence on the nation during his short rule. He was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24:8-16; II Chron. 36:9-10).
- (5) Zedeki'ah, the third son of Josiah, uncle of Jehoiachin, was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to replace Jehoiachin. He ruled 11 years as the last king of Judah. He was a weak person and an evil king. He and all the leaders were extremely unfaithful; they followed the abominable practices of the heathen nations, worshipping idols and provoking the Lord to anger. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah who advised him and the people to submit to the Babylonians to avoid the horrors of siege and destruction (II Kings 24:17-20a; II Chron. 36:11-14; Jer. 27:12-22).

But Zedekiah revolted against King Nebuchadnezzar in the ninth year of his reign. And Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem with his entire army. After eighteen months of siege, the Babylonians broke through the walls of the city and captured Zedekiah. Then they slew Zedekiah's sons before him and put out his eyes and took him away in fetters to

Babylon (II Kings 24:20b; 25:1-7). It broke Jeremiah's heart to witness the destruction of the holy city together with God's Temple. He watched his people, young and old, men and women, slaughtered by the Babylonians and carried away as slaves to Babylon. All this happened because they sinned grievously and persistently against God; they despised God's prophets and rejected His Word till the wrath of God rose against His people, till there was no remedy (II Chron. 36:15-21; Jer. 25:3-7).

- The destruction of Jerusalem brought the Southern Kingdom of Israel to an end in 586 B.C. (II Kings 25:8-21). The Northern Kingdom of Israel ended in 722 B.C. when its capital, Samaria, was destroyed by the Assyrians and the people were carried off to the land of Assyria (II Kings 17:1-23).

Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet

- Jeremiah was destined from the very beginning to be a prophet of judgment and doom. He was told not to marry in order to devote himself fully to the preaching of God's Word (Jer. 16:1-2). He knew all along that God was about to judge the sinful nation, bringing a tragic end to the holy city and the Temple, and sending away His Covenant People into exile.
- Jeremiah had a tender heart and God called him to confront evil kings, corrupt leaders, false prophets and idolatrous people. He was bold before men but broken before God. He preached with tears to warn the nation of the impending judgment. Read the following few verses from his writings, then we know why he was called "the weeping prophet":
- "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" (Jer. 9:1).
- "But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's people will be taken captive" (Jer. 13:17).
- "Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for my virgin daughter - my people - has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow" (Jer. 14:17).
- Furthermore, Jeremiah expressed his deep sorrow vividly for the disastrous fate of his beloved country in the book of Lamentations which was also penned by him - Read Lam. 2:11-13.

Jeremiah's Hope in the Lord

- Amidst his deep grief, Jeremiah found hope in the Lord, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassion never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness (Lam. 3:21-23).
- Jeremiah predicted the length of Judah's captivity would be 70 years. After this, God would bring the faithful remnant back to their home land (Jer. 25:11; 27:22; 29:10). For the fulfillment of this prophecy, see Lesson 49 (Ezra and Nehemiah),

His Last Days in Egypt

- Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem after the destruction, but he was later forced to go to Egypt and stayed there. He continued his ministry among the refugees; then he died of old age in Egypt (Jer. 43:-44:).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God declared that He knew Jeremiah before he was formed within his mother's womb, and chose him to be a prophet before he was born (Jer. 1:4-5). That means that God had a plan for Jeremiah's life. God has a plan for each of us also.
2. Jeremiah did not lament or weep because of his own weakness. He cried out because of his deep love for his people and his God. He preached a message of judgment and doom to a sinful nation, but with tears night and day. Let us weep with Jeremiah for the sins of America; let us bring the message of God's love and saving grace to a nation that turned its back on the Lord.

Memory Bible Verses: Lamentations 3:21-23, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassion's never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

LESSON 55

Nebuchadnezzar

Scripture References

- II Kings Chapters 24 and 25; II Chronicles 36:5-21; Daniel 1:-4:

The Meaning of Name

- Nebuchadnezzar or Nebuchadre'zzar means, " O god Ne'bo, protect my son," or "O god Nebo, defend the boundary." Here the word "Nebo" refers to a Babylonian god.

Historical Background

- Nebuchadnezzar was the oldest son of Nabopodas'sar, the founder of Babylonian Empire or Chaldean (kalde'an) Dynasty of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar succeeded his father as king and ruled the great Babylonian Empire for 43 years, from 605-562 B.C. Through his successful military campaigns against Egypt and other countries, Babylon rose steadily to international prominence and became the most powerful nation in the East, the then-known world.
- Note: Chaldeans (kalde'anz) was one of the ancient peoples that formed the dominant population in Babylon. The word "Chaldeans" is used as a name for Babylonians in general (Isa. 13:19; 47:1; 48:14,20; Jer. 25:12; Dan. 5:30; 9:1).

Nebuchadnezzar and the Nation of Judah

- In the first year of his reign (605 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar led a force into Palestine and subdued Judah and made Jehoiakim his vassal (his servant). He then took some of the precious vessels of the Temple to Babylon; he also brought with him some of the finest young men of the Jewish royal blood and nobility, including teenage Daniel and his three friends, to train them for the service in the palace. This happened in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah (Daniel 1:1-8; cf. II Kings 23:36-24:1).
- Jehoiakim made an agreement with Nebuchadnezzar to serve as his vassal king on the throne of Judah, but later, despite the prophet Jeremiah's warning (see Jer. 26:; 27:1,9-11), Jehoiakim revolted against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar then marched on Jerusalem and captured the holy city; and Jehoiakim died a violent death in 598 B.C. (II Chron. 36:5-8; Jer. 22:18-19; 36:30).
- A decade later, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah against the rebel King Zedekiah in Jerusalem; after a long siege, Nebuchadnezzar utterly destroyed the holy city, burnt its Temple and carried the people away to Babylon as slaves. Zedekiah died in disgrace, and the kingdom of Judah was brought to an end in 586 B.C. And Judah was in captivity in the land of Babylon for 70 years (II Kings 24:20-25:7; Jer. 39:1-10; cf. Lesson 49).
- The Lord used Nebuchadnezzar, a heathen king, as His instrument to execute judgment against His sinful and rebellious people. In Jeremiah 25:8-11 God declared, "Because you have not listened to Me, I will gather together all the armies of the north under My servant Nebuchadnezzar, and I will bring them all against this land and its people..., and I will utterly destroy you... This entire land shall become a desolate wasteland; all the world will be shocked

at the disaster that befalls you. Israel and her neighboring lands shall serve the king of Babylon for seventy years." – quote from the Living Bible.

A Great Warrior and Builder

- Nebuchadnezzar was a great military genius. His successful military achievements won him the greatest king of his time in history.
- He was also a great builder. He used slaves for conducting his extensive building projects, including his famous "hanging gardens" which was considered one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World." It was built to cheer his wife, a Me'dian princess, who was homesick for her mountainous homeland.
- Note: the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World" are: (1) the Egyptian pyramids, (2) the hanging gardens of Babylon, (3) the Mausole'um at Hal'icarna'ssus S.W. Asia Minor, (4) the temple of Ar'temis (a Greek virgin goddess) at E'phesus, (5) the Colos'sus of Rhodes (a huge statue, 120 feet high), (6) the statue of Zeus at Oly'mpic (Greek Myth. the chief deity), (7) the Light House at Alexandria.

A Haughty Monarch

- Nebuchadnezzar learned about the Hebrew God through his contact with Daniel and his three friends, and he acknowledged that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, was the greatest of all the gods (Dan. 2:47; 3:29). However, he was a haughty man, he made an arrogant boast about all that he had accomplished. And God punished him at the height of his power; he was driven out of the palace to live with animals in the fields, and to eat grass like the cows for seven years until he finally acknowledged that "the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of men. And the Most High God gives those kingdoms to anyone He wants" (Dan. 4:28-33).
- Nebuchadnezzar recovered later from his insanity and died shortly afterwards, having reigned 43 years. He was succeeded by his son Evil-merodach (e'vil-me'-rodak) according to Jeremiah 52:31.

Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel

- We know more about Nebuchadnezzar's character and culture from the book of Daniel. There is a close connection between them. We shall study these two characters, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, together in our next lesson.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Nebuchadnezzar took Judah into captivity was in direct fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah (II Kings 20:16-18; 24:2,11-13; Jer. 25:8-11). God used Nebuchadnezzar, a heathen king, to bring judgment against His sinful and rebellious people. God sometimes uses non-Christians to deal with us to discipline us and to bring His wayward children back to Him.
2. Judah could avoid its tragic end, had people listen to God's pleading to turn back from their wicked ways through His prophets. Let us listen to God's servants, the pastor and our Bible teachers, that we may always find favor in His sight.

Memory Bible Verse: Ezekiel 33:11, Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"

LESSON 56

Daniel - Part I

Scripture References

- The Book of Daniel

Daniel's Early Life

- Daniel's name means "God is my Judge." Nothing is known of his ancestry or childhood. He was probably born into a family of nobility during the time of King Josiah's great religious revival (621 B.C.). He was about 16 years old when Nebuchadnezzar, in the second year of his reign as king of Babylon, invaded Jerusalem during the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. As a result, Daniel and his three friends, Hanani'ah, Mish'a-el and Azari'ah along with many others were carried captive to Babylon in 605 B.C. (Dan. 1:1-6).

His Training in Babylon

- In Babylon, the king ordered his chief officer, Ash'penaz, to select some of the finest boys of the Jewish royal family and of the nobility from among the captives. The king wanted them to receive training for three years for royal service in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Daniel and his three friends met the requirements. They were chosen from among the boys of the tribe of Judah (Dan. 1:3-6).
- The chief official gave these three Hebrew youths Babylonian names in order to honor Babylonian gods; they were to be taught the language and literature of the Chaldeans (Babylonians). The goal was to brainwash and indoctrinate them, so they would no longer think and act like Jews, but like Babylonians (Dan. 1:3-7).
- But Daniel and his three friends had been brought up by godly parents; they had been deeply rooted in their faith in God and nothing could change them. Daniel even decided that he would not defile himself with the food and wine assigned them by the king which, as a rule, had been offered in sacrifice to Babylonians gods. So Daniel and his three friends requested that only vegetables and water to be served as their daily food and drink. As a result, Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than others who had been eating the rich food supplied by the king (Dan. 1:8-16). God surely takes care of His faithful children!

Entering the Service of the King

- At the end of the three-year training period, the king found Daniel and his three friends in every matter of wisdom and understanding ten times better than all the wisemen in his kingdom. So they entered the royal service as king's advisors or counselors (Dan. 1:17-20).
- Daniel and his friends continued to grow in wisdom and knowledge, gaining favor in the king's court. And Daniel held his appointment as the king's chief counselor until the first year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia (Dan. 1:21).

Nebuchadnezzar's Forgotten Dream

- One night in the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream. His mind was deeply troubled and he could not sleep. And to make matters worse, he couldn't remember his dream! So the king summoned all the wisemen and astrologers, and demanded that they tell him what his dream was along with its meaning (Dan. 2:1-3).
- When they asked the king to tell them first what his dream was, then they would try to interpret it. The king was furious and he ordered all wisemen and astrologers of Babylon to be destroyed. And Daniel and his three friends were rounded up with the others to be killed. But Daniel asked the king to give him a little time, then he would tell the king his dream and its meaning (Dan. 2:4-16).
- That night, after much prayer with his three friends, the "God in heaven Who reveals mysteries" (Dan. 2:28) showed him the dream and its interpretation (Dan. 2:16-23).
- The large statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream prophetically portrayed the course of the world's history in brief; it represented the four world empires as follows: 1) Babylon - the statue's head of gold, 2) Persia - it's chest and arms of silver, 3) Greece - it's belly and thighs of bronze, 4) Rome - it's leg of iron. Then the feet (the ten toes) partly of iron and partly of clay would be the "ten-nation confederation" that was to appear at the end of the age. Finally, the Rock, Jesus Christ, would come to establish His Messianic kingdom on earth by striking the statue (the kingdoms of this world) on its feet (the ten-nation confederation) and smashing them all; and then Christ would reign over the whole world as King of kings and Lord of lords for 1,000 years (Dan. 2:31-45; Rev. 20:4-6).

Daniel and His Three Friends Promoted

- Then the king made Daniel a great man; he gave him many costly gifts and appointed him to be in charge of all the affairs of the province of Babylon with his three friends as his assistants (Dan. 2:48-49).

The Golden Image and the Fiery Furnace

- Daniel and his companions met more severe trials and tests, but their steadfast faith in God always won them victories over pagan kings. One time Daniel's three friends were cast into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. But God miraculously protected them in the fire and brought them out unharmed (Dan. 3:1-30).

God's Judgment on a Haughty King

- Toward the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Daniel interpreted another dream for the king. It was about a great tree. The beasts had shelter under it and the birds of their air dwelt in its branches; from its fruit every creature was fed. And the king heard a voice saying, "Cut down the tree and trim off its branches and scatter its fruit..." Daniel's interpretation was that the tree signified the proud king; he earnestly pled with the king to repent of his sins, and forsake his wicked ways by doing what was right and being kind to the oppressed, and then he might continue to be prosperous and successful (Dan. 4:3-27).

- But the haughty king did not heed Daniel's warning. A year later, the king spoke with a self-glorifying arrogance in defiance of God, when he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Sure enough, the long-delayed punishment fell in the wake of the king's boastful speech, as a voice called down from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, this message is for you: You are no longer ruler of this kingdom. You will be driven away from the palace to live with the animals in the fields, and to eat grass like the cows for seven years until you acknowledge that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of men and gives those kingdoms to anyone He wishes." Immediately the dream became true, and was fulfilled. For seven long years, the once proud king lived on a level of a beast, in a state of virtual madness (Dan. 4:28-33).
- At the end of the seven years, God mercifully allowed Nebuchadnezzar to recover from his insanity. The king now praised and honored the Most High God. And he glorified God Who was eternal and reigned forever, something he could not again attribute to his Babylonian gods. He acknowledged that God did what He pleased and no one could hold back His hand" (Read Dan 4:34-37).
- Nebuchadnezzar probably died shortly after this life-changing experience. He probably have died a converted sinner, a believer in God, all by God's pure grace and mercy. And there is no doubt that Nebuchadnezzar had been greatly influenced and deeply touched by Daniel's godly life; and then Daniel's daily prayers for the king and his preaching were all used to bring about the king's conversion.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:) remains a pattern of what will happen to all proud and arrogant world leaders, both ancient and modern. One day, all Gentile and godless powers will be brought into submission to Christ's reign during His Messianic Kingdom when "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).
2. There is no doubt that the godly influence of Daniel's life, his no-respecter-of-persons preaching and his daily prayers for the king were used to bring about the haughty King Nebuchadnezzar's conversion. What is your impact of your life on those around you, both your loved ones and friends?

Memory Bible Verses: Philippians 2:10-11, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

LESSON 57

Daniel - Part II

The Handwriting on the Palace Wall

- Nebuchadnezzar died after a 42-year reign (604-563 B.C.) and was succeeded by his son Evil-Me'rodach (Jer. 52:31; II Kings 25:27) who reigned only two years. Later, after a brief period of internal strife, Belshaz'zar became Babylon's new king. He is referred to (Dan. 5:11,13) as the son of Nebuchadnezzar. A reasonable interpretation of this statement is that his mother was the daughter of that king, and in Dan. 5:10 the "queen" is the "queen mother."
- Belshazzar reigned fourteen years (553-539 B.C.) as the last king of Babylon. He was an evil man and led a loose, licentious life. One night, in the last year of his reign, he gave a drunken banquet for a thousand of his nobles; and they drank out of the sacred golden cups that had been taken from the Temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. And they praised their own gods of gold and silver, iron and wood (Dan. 5:1-4).
- Suddenly in the midst of the revelry, the fingers of a hand appeared and began to write these words on the wall: MENE, MENE, TE'KEL, PA'RSIN: Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:25). The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so scared that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. At the advice of the queen mother, the elderly Hebrew prophet Daniel (he must be well over eighties by now) was summoned to interpret the handwriting on the palace wall (Dan. 5:5-17).

The Fall of Babylon and the Rise of Persia

- First, Daniel sternly reproved the king's haughtiness and pride in ignoring the hard lesson God taught his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar; then he condemned the king's profaneness in his sacrilegious use of the sacred vessels and his irreverence for the God Who gave him the breath of life and controlled his destiny. Finally, Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall: MENE, MENE: God has numbered the days of your kingdom, and brought it to an ended; TE'KEL: You have been weighted in God's balances and failed the test; PE'RES (the singular of PARSAN):Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:17-29).
- That very night, the army of Dari'us the Medede captured Babylon and killed Belshazzar. And thus Babylon fell to Persia in 539 B.C. (Dan. 5:30).
- Note: "Dari'us" is a common title for Persian rulers, just as "Pharaoh" a common title for Egyptian king, and "Caesar" for Roman emperors.
- Note: Darius the Mede may be another name for King Cyrus the Persian. Accordingly, the translation of Daniel 6:28 should read: "Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian (See NIV margin.)"
- In Daniel 2:21, we read that Daniel praised God, saying, "He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and removes them..." Then Daniel showed us how God would do this with a succession of kings and kingdoms - Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, as he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the large statue (Dan. 2:31-43). Now the prophet himself witnessed the fulfillment of

the first part of that dream with the fall of Babylon and the rise of Persia as recorded in Daniel 5:.

Daniel in the Lion's Den

- After Darius conquered Babylon, he reorganized the government and made Daniel one of the three top administrators (or governors) over his vast domain. Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other governors and princes that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. His popularity caused the other governors and princes to become jealous of him, so they conspired to destroy him. But they could not find him doing anything wrong. He was faithful and honest, and made no mistakes. So they concluded, "Our only chance is his religion" (Dan. 6:1-5)!
- So they made the king sign a decree, irrevocable under any circumstance, that for next 30 days no one should pray to any god or man except to the king, and offenders would be thrown to the lion's den. The king signed the law without thinking about Daniel (Dan. 6:6-9).
- When Daniel learned of the new law, he quietly, but openly, continued his habit of praying to his God three times daily. And his enemies compelled the king to cast Daniel into the lion's den, for no decree or law signed by the king could be canceled or changed. That night, the king went to bed without dinner. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn't sleep at all. His heart was broken and sore (Dan. 6:10-18).
- So Daniel went to the lion's den; but God sent His angel to shut the mouths of those fierce and hungry beasts, not one of them could hurt him. And he remained in the lion's den unharmed that night. Very early the next morning the king hurried out to the lion's den, and called out in anguish, "O Daniel, servant of the Living God! Has your God, Whom you always worship, been able to save you from the lions?" Then the king was thrilled and overjoyed to hear Daniel's voice, telling him that he was safe and sound under the protection of his God. The king then ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den; and then he commanded to bring the men who accused Daniel, and throw them into the den along with their family members. The lions grabbed them before they hit the floor of the den and devoured them (Dan. 6:19-24).
- What a beautiful story we have in this chapter! And Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian - or, during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian - see NIV margin (Dan. 6:28).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. The story of "Daniel in the Lion's Den" is familiar to many. In this story we see that everything about Daniel is exemplary. He lived a consistent godly and holy life as no one could find him doing anything wrong; he demonstrated his faith in God through his discipline and devotion as he prayed three times a day; he showed his loyalty to God as he chose to defy the king's decree instead of betraying his God. He preferred to be thrown into the lion's den rather than deny his God! We have so much to learn from this great man of God!
2. Daniel was used of God to interpret kings' visions and dreams, and to bring them God's message. God can use us to bring His message to the world, too, if we live godly lives as did Daniel.

Memory Bible Verses: Daniel 6:21-22, Daniel answered, "O King, live forever! My God sent His angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in His sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O King."

LESSON 58

Daniel - Part III

- Note: It would take a whole book to deal with Daniel's visions and prophecies in detail. In our study of Daniel, we can only briefly explain what his visions and prophecies meant.

The Vision of the Four Beasts (Daniel 7:)

- In chapter 7, Daniel saw in his vision four great beasts and he was told that these great beasts were four kingdoms (v.17). They apparently symbolized the same four world kingdoms as told in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the large statue in Daniel chapter 2. These four kingdoms were represented by the four beasts as follows:

(1) The first was like a lion (v.4) - that was the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar. (2) The second was like a bear (v.5) - that was Medo-Persian Empire. (3) The third was like a leopard with four wings and four heads (v.6) - that represented the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great. The four wings symbolized the fast speed with which Alexander conquered the then-known world. The four heads of the beast historically symbolized Alexander's four generals who, after Alexander's death, divided his vast empire into four kingdoms, and reigned separately. (4) The fourth beast was very terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left (v.7). This beast would logically and historically be identified with the mighty Roman Empire; its iron legions of cruel and fierce soldiers conquered the world of its day.

- Note: Media was an ancient country conquered by the Persian King Cyrus, and later these two countries formed the Medo-Persian Empire. King Darius of the Persian Empire mentioned in Dan. 5:30 was a Mede; and the two names, Medes and Persians, were often used interchangeably (Dan. 6:8).
- Daniel also saw that this fourth beast had ten horns (v.7). He further noticed that another horn, a little one, came up among the ten horns; it had eyes and a bragging mouth and it pulled out three of the other horns (v.8). It looked more imposing than the others; and it spoke boastfully and warred against the saints and defeated them, until the Ancient of Days (God) came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom (vv. 9-22).
- Here Daniel was predicting things that are yet to be realized in the end times. Conservative Bible students believe that in the latter days the Roman Empire will reappear with ten kings reigning contemporaneously (vv. 23-24a). Later, another ruler, the little horn, that is, the Antichrist, will emerge from among them. He will defy the Most High God, and wear down the saints with persecution, and try to change all laws, morals, and customs. God's people will suffer intensely in his hands for a time, times and half a time (or, a year, two years and a half year). There is the Great Tribulation period yet to be fulfilled in the end time (vv. 24-25).
- At the end of the three and a half years of the evil reign of the Antichrist, the Ancient of Days will come to establish His everlasting kingdom, that is, Christ will return to establish His Messianic kingdom on earth, and His saints will reign with Him. The wicked ruler (the Antichrist) will then be destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire (vv. 9-14, 26-27).

- Note: the Ancient of Days is a name for God used by Daniel (7:9,13,22).
- Note: The word 'horns' generally symbolizes power and might. The horn in Daniel's visions symbolized kingdoms and kings.

The Vision of the Ram and the Goat (Daniel 8:)

- In chapter 8, Daniel saw a ram with two horns (v.3) that represented the kings of Media and Persia (v.20). Then he saw a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes (v.5). The goat became very great, but at its height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven (v.8). Daniel was told that the goat represented the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes represented its first king (Alexander the Great); and the four horns that replaced the large one represented four kingdoms, ruled over by Alexander's four generals after their young ruler, Alexander, died untimely at the age of 33 (vv. 21-22; cf. Dan. 7:6 "the vision of the leopard").
- Then Daniel saw another small horn coming out of one of the four horns (one of Alexander's four generals) which grew very strong and attacked the south and east, and warred against the Beautiful Land - the land of Israel. He even challenged the Prince of the host (God) by stopping the daily sacrifice offered to Him, and by defiling His Temple. As a result, truth and righteousness perished, and wickedness triumphed and prospered (vv. 9-12).
- Now this small horn was historically identified by Bible students with Antiochus Epiphanes (antio-kus epi'fanez), a descendant of one of Alexander's four generals, who reigned in Syria from 175-164 B.C., and who in 169 B.C. invaded Jerusalem and sought to stamp out the Jewish religion altogether. As a result, 40,000 Jews were massacred and 10,000 more were carried away as slave. It seemed that Antiochus Epiphanes, the enemy of the Jews during this period, overshadowed the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation period in the end-time, or in other words, Antiochus was a type of the final world dictator, the Antichrist (the beast of Rev. 13:1-10) who is yet to come.
- In verse 14, Daniel was told that the persecutions and sufferings would last for 2,300 days, then the sanctuary would be re-consecrated. According to Jewish history, Antiochus began to persecute and oppress the Jews on September 6, 171 B.C. till December 25, 165 B.C. (precisely 2,300 days), when the Jews finally freed themselves from Antiochus' bondage and reconsecrated the sanctuary.
- Note: Do not confuse the "small horn" of this chapter with the "little horn" of Dan. 7:8; they are not the same, for the "little horn" (anti-Christ) of Dan. 7:8 arises out of the revived, or new Roman Empire in the end times, whereas the "small horn" (Antiochus Epiphanes) of Dan. 8:9 sprang out of the four kingdoms from the Grecian Empire, over 150 years prior to the birth of Christ.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Daniel's visions teach us that God has a master plan for the entire world. Human history will not continue indefinitely on its present course. God controls man's destiny; things are in God's hands, not man's, "though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet."

2. Studying prophecy will deepen our faith in God, and make us more mature Christians. Let us trust God and love Him with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind, and then we can claim God's promise in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Memory Bible Verse: Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

LESSON 59

Daniel - Part IV

The Vision of the Seventy 'Sevens', or Seventy 'Weeks' (Daniel 9:)

- In chapters 2 and 7, God revealed to Daniel an outline of the prophetic program of the Gentile nations. Then in Chapter 8, Daniel was told how Israel would be fared under the second and third kingdoms, Medo-Persia and Greece. Now in Chapter 9, Daniel was given God's prophetic program for Israel (a preview of Jewish history) in answer to his prayer on behalf of his people. It happened in the first year of Darius' reign in 538 B.C. (vv.1-21). And it was in that same year as the seventy years of Judah's captivity in Babylon drew to a close (v.2; Jer. 25:11) that the angel Gabriel was sent to Daniel, the man "highly esteemed" of God (v.23), with the revelation of the seventy 'sevens' (or seventy 'weeks' - see NIV margin), as recorded in vv. 24-27.
- Note: The "sevens" (or "weeks") are seven years, not seven days. In v.24, Gabriel was telling Daniel that seventy 'sevens', that is, 490 years were needed to complete God's prophetic program for Israel.
- The prophecy of the seventy "sevens" (or seventy 'weeks'), a total of 490 years, are divided into three periods: (1) seven 'sevens', that is, 49 years (v.25a), (2) and sixty-two 'sevens,' that is, 434 years (v.25b); (3) following the seven 'sevens' (49 years), and after the sixty-two 'sevens' (434 years), a total of 483 years, comes the remaining "one seven" (or one "week"), that is, 7 years (vv. 26-27). Add up the above three periods and the total is seventy 'sevens', or seventy 'weeks,' or 490 years.
- The prophecy of the seventy 'sevens,' or 490 years, covers the history of Israel from the time when the walls, not the Temple, were rebuilt in 444 B.C., by the decree of the Persian King Artaxerxes (ar-tak-su'rk-sez), under Nehemiah's leadership (Neh. 2:1-8; see Lesson 50, Ezra/Nehemiah - Part II, page 1), to the Second Coming of Christ the Messiah.
- Note: The Temple was rebuilt or repaired, by the decree of King Cyrus of Persia, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, and was completed in 515 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-2; 5:1-2; 6:15-16; see Lesson 49, Ezra/Nehemiah - Part I, page 2).
- (1) During the first period of 49 years (seven 'sevens'), according to Daniel's prophecy, the returned exiles would rebuild the city of Jerusalem (v.25) which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Although the walls were rebuilt in 52 days (Neh. 6:15) in 444 B.C., the rest of the work for rebuilding the streets and the houses etc., took much longer time. That's why a period of 49 years was needed to complete the work, and it was done in difficult times (v.25).
- (2) During the second period of 434 years (sixty-two 'sevens'), the Anointed One (the Messiah) would appear and publicly present Himself to the nation as Daniel was told in v.25, "know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One (the Messiah), the Ruler, (the King), comes, there will be 'sevens' (49 years) and sixty-two 'sevens' (434 years). It will be rebuilt in times of trouble." This prophecy was literally fulfilled when Christ rode into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday (the last Sunday of His life), and people proclaimed Him King in A.D. 33. It took precisely 483 years (the first seven 'sevens' plus the second sixty-two 'sevens,' making a total of sixty-nine 'sevens,' or 483 years), using the Jewish calendar of 360 days a year, from Artaxerxes' decree to rebuilt Jerusalem in 444 B.C. to

that first Palm Sunday in A.D. 33 when Christ publicly presented Himself to the nation as the Messiah King.

- Now after the 69th 'seven,' there is a gap between the 69th 'seven' and the 70th 'seven.' Daniel was told in v.26, "After the sixty-two 'sevens' (the second period), the Anointed One (the Messiah) will be cut off (crucified). The people of the ruler (the Roman legions) will come to destroy the city and the sanctuary (the Romans completely destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70.)" All these historical events happened after the 69th 'seven,' according to Daniel's prophecy; and we are still living in between the 69th 'seven' and 70th 'seven,' so called the "Church Age."
- (3) The third period is the last "one seven," that is, the last "seven years," which will be fulfilled in the end times. We are told the day is coming when the Antichrist (the World's dictator) will emerge, and "he will confirm a covenant for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering, and set up an abomination in sanctuary that causes desolation until the end that is decreed is poured out on him" (v.27). Here this verse means that this evil ruler Antichrist, will make a covenant with the Jews for seven years as their protector; but after three and a half years, he will break the covenant and usher in a terrible time of "Great Tribulation" until Christ returns to earth; then this evil ruler Antichrist and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire (cf. Rev. 6:18; 19:11,20-21). At last, the nation of Israel will be delivered and God's purpose for His people (for both Jews and Christians) will be realized.

A Summary Account of Daniel's Final Visions (Chapters 10, 11, and 12)

- In Chapter 10:1-9, Daniel had a vision of the glory of the Son of God, the pre-incarnate Christ (cf. Rev. 1:12-18). Then the angel (Gabriel) came to explain to him what would happen to the Jews in latter days (vv. 10-14; cf. Dan. 8:16ff; 9:21ff). In v.13, we read that Gabriel was hindered and delayed by the prince of the Persian Kingdom. Then Michael, another archangel, came to help him. In v.20 he said he would return to fight against the prince of Persia and also the prince of Greece. The two princes mentioned here are evil angels. Here we are told that Gabriel and Michael were engaged in warfare with the evil angels, and that there is an unseen struggle between good and evil angels, each seeking to influence the fate of God's people, the Jews.
- Note: Gabriel and Michael are two archangels of God. Gabriel is God's messenger (see Dan. 8:16ff; 9:21ff; 10:10ff; Lk. 1:19-20,26-38), and Michael is the guardian angel or protector of the Jewish people (Dan. 12:1; Jude 9).
- In Chapter 11, Daniel was given a vision of Israel's future in detail. Vv.1-35 describes the fate of Israel in the first 69 'weeks' ('sevens'); in vv.36-45 revealed Israel's great sufferings under Antichrist in the 70th 'week' (the final 7 years).
- The prophetic history of Israel among the nations was predicted in chapter 11 as follows: (1) Verses 1-2 are prophecies concerning Persia. (2) Verses 3-4 are prophecies concerning Greece. (3) Verses 5-35 are prophecies concerning Egypt and Syria. (4) Verses 36-45 are prophecies concerning Antichrist (cf. Dan. 7:8, the "little horn"). During this time Egypt and Syria had been ruled by two of Alexander's generals, and out of Syria came the evil ruler, Anti'ochus Epi'phanes, the enemy of the Jews, who overshadowed Anti-Christ, the "man of lawlessness" (II Thess. 2:1-4) of the evil times, who is yet to come.

- In the last chapter (12), Daniel was give again a vision of the end times. Verse 1 tells us that there will be a time of great distress for the Jews which is described in Rev. 6: through 19:, and also in Matthew 24:3-29. Note these words of Jesus, "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect (the Jews) those days will be shortened" (Matt. 24:21-22). In vv. 1b-3 promise was given that living believers of God will be delivered, and the ones who die (as martyrs for God) will rise up to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. In vv. 4-12, Daniel was charged to preserve the angel's words until the time of the end, when travel and knowledge will be greatly increased.
- Finally Daniel was told to go his way and to rest (die) in peace; and then rise to receive his rewards (v.13).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. There is so much to learn from Daniel's visions and prophecies. His book reveals so much about God's plans for the nations of the world, but it also brings us the comforting message that believers of God, both Jews and Christians, will be delivered from the "Great Tribulation" that is to come in the latter days, and will be resurrected to everlasting life.
2. The angels Gabriel and Michael engaged in warfare with the evil spirits, Satan and his demons. So do we today. Not only do Satan and his demons oppose God's purpose in the world, but they are also trying hard to interrupt God's purpose in the lives of God's children. Let us remember Paul's words, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:11-12).

Memory Bible Verses: Ephesians 6:11-12, "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

LESSON 60

Jonah

Scripture References

- The Book of Jonah; II Kings 14:23-27; Matthew 12:38-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32

Historical Background

- Jonah's name means "a dove." He was the son of Ami'ttai from Gath-He'pher (II Kings 14:25), a small town near Nazareth in Galilee. He was the first Hebrew missionary sent by God to preach repentance to Ni'veveh the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, a gentile nation. Assyria was a mighty world power that dominated the ancient biblical world from the ninth to the seventh century B.C. In 722 B.C., King Sa'rgon of Assyria invaded Samaria, capital of Israel, killed hundreds of its people, and carried most of the survivors captive to Assyria. The Assyrians then resettled people from other parts of their empire into Samaria, and thus brought an end to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (II Kings 17:1-41).
- Please note that the events told in the story of Jonah occurred decades before the Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed.
- Jonah was a prophet of Israel (the northern part of the divided kingdom) during the early part of the 40-year reign of King Jeroboam II (790-750 B.C.). The nation had enjoyed a period of prosperity and peace under Jeroboam's rule (II Kings 14:25-27). The only threat to Israel's security was the rising power of Assyria to the north. The Assyrians were a cruel people who showed no mercy to their enemies; and they were one of the most brutal oppressors of the people of Israel in recorded history.

The Reluctant and Disobedient Prophet-Missionary

- One day the Lord said to Jonah, "Arise, go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, for its wickedness has come up before Me, and I am going to destroy the city" (Jonah 1:1-2). Here Jonah was told to urge the people of Nineveh to repent their wickedness, so that they might escape God's wrath and avoid destruction.
- Now Jonah was a narrow-minded preacher and a zealous patriot. He was reluctant to go to preach to a wicked city, for fear that Nineveh would heed his message and repent, and that God in His mercy would spare the city. By all means, Jonah wanted Nineveh to perish (Jon. 3:10-4:1), for it was a powerful foe of Israel and if it was not destroyed, his own nation would be doomed. So instead of obeying God's command to go to Nineveh, he found a ship at Jop'pa (a sea port city about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem) traveling in the opposite direction toward Tar'shish (a city in S.W. Spain). Jonah tried to flee from the presence of the Lord. Once he was aboard the ship, Jonah went down into the lowest part of the ship to hide there from the Lord (Jon. 1:3).

Jonah and the Great Fish

- As the ship was sailing along, suddenly the Lord caused a violent storm to arise over the sea that threatened to send the ship to the bottom. Fearing their lives, the heathen sailors desperately

called on their gods to save them. And all this time Jonah was sound asleep below the deck. The captain went down to rouse Jonah from sleep and said, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, and call on your God and see if your God will have mercy on us and save us (Jon. 1:4-6).

- When the storm did not abate, the sailors cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused this terrible storm; and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then Jonah told them that he was a Hebrew and a worshiper of the Lord God Who made the sea and the land; and he confessed that he was running away from the Lord, and that he was the one who caused this great storm to come upon them. Finally, he suggested that if they would throw him overboard, the sea would become calm. Reluctantly the sailors picked him up and threw him into the sea, and immediately the sea became calm. The men stood there in awe before the Lord; they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made a vow to serve him (Jon. 1:7-16).
- After Jonah had disappeared in the depths of the sea, the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up him, and he remained in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (Jon. 1:17).

The Penitent Prophet and His Prayer

- Surprised to find himself alive in the belly of the fish, the penitent prophet in his distress offered a humble prayer. He gave grateful thanks to the Lord for saving him from death and confidently expressed his hope that he would finally be delivered (Jon. 2:1-9).
- Heeding the prophet's anguished prayer, the Lord commanded the fish to spit Jonah out of its belly onto the beach, and it did (Jon. 2:10).

The Repentance of Nineveh

- Again the Lord ordered the prophet to preach in Nineveh. This time he obeyed; he went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was a very large city and it would take three days to walk across it. The first day when Jonah entered the city he shouted to the crowds, "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" And when the people heard Jonah's message, they all turned to God and believed Him, from the greatest to the least, from the king to the pauper. The king sent a message throughout the city: "No person or animal should eat anything, nor drink any water. Everyone must turn away from his evil ways and stop doing violence. Maybe God will change His mind and hold back His fierce anger from destroying us" (Jon. 3:1-9).
- When God saw what the people did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed His mind and did not destroy them (Jon. 3:10).

Jonah's Anger at God's Compassion

- Jonah was not prepared to see the effect of his message and he really did not want Nineveh to be spared. He was angry and he was grouchy. He complained loudly to the Lord and said that he would rather die than live. He went out and sat sulking on the east side of the city, and waited there to see if anything would happen to the city (Jon. 4:1-5).
- In order to teach Jonah a lesson, God provided a leafy vine to shade Jonah from the hot sun, then allowed a worm to destroy the plant. When the plant withered, Jonah was left in the scorching

sun. This made Jonah angry, and he asked to die (Jon. 4:6-8).

The Lord Deals with Jonah Patiently

- Then the Lord patiently taught Jonah that he felt sorry for the plant that withered and died, leaving him without a shelter, then why shouldn't the Lord feel sorry or concerned for a great city like Nineveh with its more than a hundred and twenty thousand (120,000) persons who were not (yet old enough to) know their right hand from their left, and many animals as well (Jon. 4:10-11)?
- Note: These 120,000 persons mentioned in 4:11 must be young children only; there were many more persons in Nineveh besides children.

Jonah and Christ

- On three occasions, the Lord Jesus referred to Jonah (Matt. 12:34-41; 16:4; Lk. 11:29-32), saying that as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so would He be in the tomb for three days and three nights, and that the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, while the people of His own nation rejected His message.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. God's message to Nineveh through Jonah was conditional - if Nineveh repented, it would be spared; if it refused, it was to be destroyed. Under Jonah's preaching (about 770 B.C.) Nineveh was spared because it repented. But almost 150 years later, Nineveh was destroyed because of its wickedness, according to the prophecies of God's prophets Na'hum and Zephani'ah (Nah. 2:13: and Zeph. 2:13-15). In 621 B.C., the Babylonians invaded Nineveh, plundered and smashed the great city, leaving it a heap of ruins. It was never restored. Jesus warns us in Lk. 13:3, "...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
2. The purpose of Jonah's story is primarily to teach that God's salvation is not limited to the Jews, but includes the Gentile world. Jesus told us in Matt. 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Let us obey the Lord's command and take the Gospel to the world.

Memory Bible Verse: Acts 17:30, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent."

LESSON 61

Zechariah - Part I

Scripture References

- The Book of Zechariah; Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14-15

Historical Background

- Zechariah's name means "the Lord remembers." There are about 30 people in the Bible who had the name Zechariah. Many of them were priests, prophets, or rulers. The most important one was the prophet who wrote the Book of Zechariah, which is listed next to the last book (Malachi) of the Old Testament.
- Zechariah was the son of Berchi'ah, the grandson of I'do (Zech. 1:1,7). Iddo was one of the heads of the priestly families (Neh. 12:1-4). This means that Zechariah was of priestly descent; therefore, he was a priest as well as a prophet.
- In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia (538 B.C.), a decree was issued to allow the Jewish captives to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple. Nearly 50,000 Jews returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and the high priest Joshua (Ezra 1:-2:). Young Zechariah also returned with his grandfather Iddo with the first wave of captives who reached Jerusalem about 537 B.C. (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:16).
- Note: In Ezra 5:1; 6:14, Zechariah was said to be the son of Iddo. The reason was probably that his father died before the family returned to Jerusalem. Young Zechariah was brought back by Iddo, and followed him in priestly office. Later, after his grandfather's death, Zechariah became the head of Iddo's priestly family (cf. Neh. 12:12, 16).
- After the captives had returned to their native land and settled in their towns, they gathered in Jerusalem and set about rebuilding the Temple (536 B.C.) within a short time they built the altar of God of Israel; a few months later they laid the foundation of the Temple (Ezra 3:1-13). Then troubles started. Some of the local people, the Samaritans, who were enemies of the Jews began to harass and threaten them. Finally they were forced to stop building, and the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until sixteen years in the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia in 520 B.C. (Ezra 4:1-24).

Haggai and Zechariah

- In the second year of Darius (520 B.C.), God raised up two prophets Haggai and Zechariah, to stir up the people to get them back on the job of rebuilding again (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14-15; Zech. 1:1). Haggai rebuked the people for their selfishness in not building God's house. "Is it a time for you yourself to be living in your paneled houses, while this house (the Temple) remains a ruin?" Haggai asked (Hag. 1:4). His preaching brought quick response, and within a month the people started working on the Temple again. Then Haggai assured them that their work was part of the restoration of the Jewish nation from which the Messiah would come (Hag. 2:1-9).
- Note: Haggai 2:7, "the desired of all nations will come" (NIV) means "Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, will come."

- Haggai's final word was a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. God's servant Zerubbabel, who had led the returned captives in Jerusalem was compared to a signet ring, which was an emblem of royal authority (Gen. 41:42). Governor Zerubbabel was a type of Christ; he served as a sign or promise of the glorious days when Christ will return to lead and govern His people in the Millennial Kingdom (Hag. 2:20-23).
- Haggai appeared in August 520 B.C. (on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius - see Hag. 1:1), and completed his recorded prophecies the same year (Hag. 2:10).
- Zechariah began his ministry as a young man (Zech. 2:4). He uttered his first prophecies in early November 520 B.C. (Zech. 1:1), about two months after Haggai's appearance. His messages, as recorded in his book, are divided into two major sections: (1) Chapters 1 to 8 were delivered within two years from the eighth month of the second year of Darius in 520 B.C. (Zech. 1:1) to the fourth year of King Darius in 518 B.C. (Zech. 7:1). (2) Chapters 9 to 14 were delivered after the building of the Temple, at a much later period.

Zechariah's Messages During the Building of the Temple (Chapters 1:-8:)

- In his first messages, the prophet encouraged the people to finish the task of rebuilding the Temple. Zechariah first called the people to repentance: "Return to Me," declares the Almighty, "and I will return to you" (1:1-6). Then the prophet recounted a series of eight symbolic night visions (1:7-6:8):
- Vision 1 - "The rider on the red horse, behind him were red, brown and white horses" (1:8). These represented the Lord's angels watching over the land of Judah. The angels found the whole world at rest and in peace, but Jerusalem was still groaning under much suffering. God was a little angry with His people, but the enemies of Judah made them suffer beyond God's intentions. Now God would return to Jerusalem with mercy, and would cause the towns of Judah to overflow with prosperity (1:9-17). This vision showed God's special care for and interest in His people.
- Vision 2 - "The four horns and the four craftsmen" (1:18-21). The four horns represented the four world empires, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 2:36-43; 7:3-17) which had conquered Jerusalem and scattered Judah (carried the people away captive). The four craftsmen terrifying and throwing down those horns of nations symbolized that the enemies of Judah would be destroyed.
- Vision 3 - "The measuring line" (2:1-13). This shows that Jerusalem will become extremely prosperous, full of people; it will expand till it outgrows its walls; till it is impossible to measure its size, yet it will be safe for the Lord Himself will be a wall of fire protecting Jerusalem.
- Vision 4 - "Joshua, the high priest, was dressed in filthy clothes, and then re-clothed in clean linen" (3:1-10). This vision indicates that the sins of Judah will be cleansed; Judah will finally be for God a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6; cf. I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 20:6). Joshua was a type of the Messiah (the Branch) to come, Who will take away all iniquity.
- Note: the word "Branch" is used as a title applied to the Messiah as the offspring of David (Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12).

- Vision 5 - "The golden lampstand and the two olive trees" (4:1-14). "The golden lampstand holding seven lights, and at the top there is a bowl for the olive oil that feeds the lamp" (v.2). This was a message to Zerubbabel that success in rebuilding came from the Holy Spirit, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (v.6). Oil is symbolic of God's Holy Spirit and He alone can give us power to do God's work. The seven lights on the lampstand represent the eyes of the Lord that see everywhere around the earth. The two olive trees represented the two anointed ones, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judah, who were God's two faithful witnesses in that day (cf. Rev. 11:4-6).
- Vision 6 - "The flying scroll" (5:1-4). The scroll symbolizes the Word of God. The two sins (stealing and swearing), cursed by God's Word, are the two deadly sins that transgress God's law, the Ten Commandments. To steal is to encroach upon the right of our neighbor; to swear is to disregard God's claim to reverence.
- Vision 7 - "The woman in a basket" (5:5-11). This vision deals with iniquity in the land of Israel. The woman represented all evil and the basket was filled with wickedness prevailing everywhere throughout the land. Here we are told that in the end-time God not only will cleanse the sins of His people, but carry them away to a home for demons, namely, Babylon which is a symbol of all evil forces of this world (Rev. 18:1-24).
- Vision 8 - "The four chariots" (6:1-8). These represent four heavenly beings (angels). They stand for God's power in judgment upon the Gentile nations in the day of the Lord when Christ returns (Rev. 19:11-21).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Zechariah ministered with Haggai as they urged the people to finish the task of rebuilding the Temple. Although we know that God is the Creator of all things, and He cannot be contained in one place, the Temple (or a church) is a symbol of God's presence. It symbolized that He dwells among His people; and His people may go there to worship Him. Let us worship our God in His church as often as possible.
2. In Zech. 3:3-5, Joshua the high priest, who represented his people before God, was dressed in dirty clothes, and then re-clothed in clean garments. God also removes our dirty clothes (our sins) and clothes us anew when we accept Jesus as our Savior.

Memory Bible Verse: Zechariah 4:6, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty."

LESSON 62

Zechariah - Part II

Joshua Crowned as a Type of the Branch, the Messiah (Zechariah 6:9-15)

- Following the eight night visions described before, Joshua, the high priest, was crowned as a priest-king. No Jewish priest had ever reigned as King, and no Jewish king was permitted to serve as a priest (Num. 16:39-40; II Chron. 26:16-21). All of this was symbolic of the "Branch", the coming Messiah, "Who would one day reign from His glorious Millennial kingdom as the King-Priest (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:1-3).

Justice and Mercy, Not Fasting (Zech. 7)

- Zechariah's messages recorded in chapters 7 and 8 were spoken two years later (compare 1:1 with 7:1). In chapter 7, a group of men came to Zechariah with the question of fasting. Zechariah's answer was that God demanded justice and mercy, not fasting. Their unfaithfulness and disobedience had brought God's wrath and judgment upon themselves, and that was why they were scattered with a whirlwind among the nations (they were carried away captive to foreign lands) and their pleasant land made desolate (7:1-14).

God's Promise to Bless Jerusalem (Zechariah 8)

- In chapter 8:1-8, Zechariah told the people that God would return to Zion (v.3) and dwell in Jerusalem. Here the prophet was looking beyond his own day to the day when Messiah would come to establish His Millennial Kingdom and make Jerusalem a city of peace and prosperity. Men and women of ripe age would sit in the streets and live in peace and security. And the city would be full of boys and girls playing in its streets without fear.
- Note: Zion is one of the hills on which Jerusalem stood. This word is often used for the whole of Jerusalem (II Kings 19:21; Ps. 48:, etc.)
- In vv. 9-17 of the same chapter, Zechariah urged the people to get on with the job and finish building the Temple. He said that their fathers had not been faithful to God, so God had withheld His blessing (cf Hag. 1-1:11), but now God said, "I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Get on with building the Temple; in the meantime, do justice and love mercy. Do not plot evil against your neighbor and do not swear falsely, for I hate all this.
- Finally in 8:18:-23, Zechariah prophesied that God would turn their fast days into feast days when Jerusalem would be made the center of earth's worship (in the Millennial Age) and people around the world would travel to Jerusalem as pilgrims to worship God. "Many people and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty...' And many peoples and powerful nations will come to seek the Lord Almighty..." "In those days (in the Millennial Age) ten men from all languages and nations will take hold of the robe of a Jew and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'"

Zechariah's Messages After the Building of the Temple

- Zechariah's messages recorded in the second section, chapters 9-14, were delivered after the building of the Temple, at a much later time. The people in Jerusalem had settled in their homeland with a walled city and their beloved Temple. The people had probably expected that Zerubbabel, the governor, might be the Messiah promised by God. The aged prophet Zechariah then gave them a new word concerning God's future for them. In this second part of his prophetic messages he portrayed a vivid picture of Israel's glorious future and both the first and second coming of Christ, the Messiah.
- Note: After the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., the name 'Israel' began to be applied to the whole surviving Jews.

Prophecy of Messiah's First Coming

- Zechariah's prophecy recorded in chapters 9-11 deals primarily with Christ's first coming. The prophet first predicted that the surrounding nations, enemies of Israel, would be punished (9:1-8). Then he gave a remarkable picture of the Promised Messiah-King's triumphal entry into the holy city Jerusalem, "Rejoice, O daughter of Zion (O people of Jerusalem)! Shout for joy! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey's colt" (Zech.9:9). This prophecy was fulfilled about 500 years later when Christ rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday (Matt. 21:1-11; Mk. 11:1-11; Lk. 19:28-40; Jn. 12:12-19).
- Zechariah's message in chapter 10 portrays Israel as God's flock and their leader as shepherds. But the flock was in trouble, because no shepherd cared for them. God's wrath was against those false shepherds, and He promised He would return to rescue His sheep and care for them (years later, Jesus did come as the Good Shepherd - see Jn. 10:10-14).
- Next, in chapter 11:1-14, Zechariah bemoaned the fate of his people because their leaders were not true to God, and brought the nation to ruin (vv. 1-3), and the people were destined to be slaughtered (the Roman conquest in A.D. 70 resulted in total destruction of Jerusalem). Further suffering of Israel was also predicted in connection with the foolish shepherd or worthless shepherd (vv. 15-17). The foolish or worthless shepherd symbolizes the last world dictator Antichrist, whom Israel will accept as their friend. He will agree to protect Israel but later will break his promise and severely persecute the Jews. In the end, this Antichrist will be destroyed (please review Lesson 59, Daniel Part IV). This prophecy will be fulfilled during the last seven years immediately before Christ's return to earth.

Prophecy of Messiah's Second Coming

- Zechariah's prophetic messages recorded in chapters 12-14 foretold the Second Coming of Christ and the establishing of His Millennial Kingdom on earth. The phrase "on that day" used by the prophet (12:3-4,6,8-9,11; 13:1-2,4; 14:1,4,6,8-9, 13,20) refers to the end-time climax with the return of Christ to the earth; He will then destroy His enemies, Antichrist and his followers, and deliver His people Israel, and usher in His kingdom; and He will be King over all the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords; and then Jerusalem will become the world's center of worship.

A Summary of Zechariah's Prophecies Concerning the End-Time

- (1) On that day all the hostile nations will come together against Judah, but the Lord will fight

for His people and destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem (12:3-9; 14:2-5, 12-15). This will be the Battle of Armaged'don described in Rev. 14:17-20; 16:15-21; 19:17-21).

- (2) On that day the Lord will come, and all the holy ones (His saints and angels) with Him. He shall establish His glorious Millennial Kingdom and be the King of kings and Lord of lords over all the earth (14:4-9).
- Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will be converted; they will go up year after year to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts (14:16).

The Response of Israel to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord

- Zechariah 12:10-14 portrays the most touching scene that will take place on that day when the Lord Jesus returns. First, the Lord will pour out the Spirit of grace and prayer on all the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And when they see Jesus, they will understand the true meaning of His death on the cross at His first coming, "they will look on Me Whom they have pierced (crucified);" then they will weep bitterly in repentance and finally accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- Note: 12:11 means, "... like the weeping for the godly King Josi'ah, who was killed in Had'ad Rim'mon, in the valley of Megid'do (II Chron. 35:20-27).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Zechariah foretold both the first and second coming of Messiah, Jesus Christ, with some special details. Since Christ's first coming had been fulfilled according to Zechariah's prophecies, we are sure that the second coming of Christ will come to pass sooner or later.

Though Zechariah, Isaiah, Daniel, and many other O.T. prophets all saw both the first and second coming of Christ long before Jesus was born, they did not see the age between these two comings, which is the Church Age in which we are living.

2. Zechariah portrayed the great war that we call the battle of Armageddon when hostile nations of the world will gather against Jerusalem. Armageddon is the name chosen by the apostle John to describe the final battle at the end of age (specifically at the end of the Great Tribulation period) when the forces of good and evil clash. Evil will be defeated and destroyed. God will triumph and Christ will set up His Millennial Kingdom to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords together with His saints (Rev. 20:1-6).

Memory Bible Verse: Zechariah 12:10, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son."

LESSON 63

Matthew - Part I

Scripture References

- The Gospel according to Matthew; Mark 2:-3;; Luke 5:-6;; Acts 1:

Matthew, the Tax Collector

- Matthew (meaning “gift of God”) was the son of Alphae’us. His original name was Le’vi. He lived and worked in Caper’naum on the seashore of Galilee as a tax collector (Mk. 2:1, 13-14) under the authority of the Roman government. Israel was a nation subject to the powerful Roman Empire which controlled most of the known world during New Testament times. Hundreds of various nationalities and ethnic groups were under the heavy hand of Rome. From these diverse peoples, it was necessary to exact taxes. The Roman government adopted a taxation system that worked so well. Rather than use Romans to collect the taxes, they used citizens of the conquered lands. These tax collectors became quite wealthy doing Rome's dirty work.
- Levi (Matthew) was a tax collector for the Roman government. Jews hated both the Romans who ruled them and those who collected taxes for Rome, particularly if those collectors were Jews.
- As a tax collector, Levi could have been one of the local inhabitants who bid for the office, agreeing to pay the government a certain sum in advance; any money collected over that amount went into his own pocket. All tax collectors were bitterly hated, not only because they served the oppressors of the Jews, the Romans, but also because they made a big profit by collecting more than the government required. They were corrupt and rapacious. They were treated by their own countrymen as thieves and traitors. They were ranked with prostitutes (Matt. 21:31-32), pagans (Matt. 18:17), and most often, sinners (Matt. 9:10-11; 11:18-19).
- Levi belonged to this despised group. His original name Levi connected him with the tribe of Levi, the priestly house set aside for God's service. But he had brought shame to this holy name; he had, in effect, turned his back upon his own people and betrayed his God.

The Call to Follow Christ

- Levi was good at his job. He had a comfortable income and a house big enough to entertain a large number of people (Lk. 5:29). He was rich and lived well. And yet he must have had his doubts. He must have felt the weight of his sin and shame far more than even his closest friends realized. He must have felt very miserable and lonely. He had properly heard of this Jesus Who welcomed tax collectors and sinners; and he wondered if Jesus would come to save him also. Despised and hated by his countrymen, Levi was reaching after the love of God, longing to be set free from his sinful life. Surely such desire does not go unnoticed by God.
- Jesus saw possibilities in men that no one else could see. Levi, to the Jews, was a sinner and an outcast; they looked down upon him because he worked for foreign government, collecting exorbitant taxes for them. But Jesus saw something else. He saw a man with a hungry heart and a precious soul worth saving.

- One day as Jesus was passing by, He saw Levi sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And immediately he left everything and got up and followed Jesus. He did not give any excuse; he did not postpone the matter. He just surrendered his all and followed Christ (Matt. 9:9; Mk. 2:13-14; Lk. 5:27-28).

A Dinner Party Turned into an Evangelistic Meeting

- Levi's response to the call of Jesus changed his attitude to life completely. Shortly after his conversion, he held a big dinner party in honor of Jesus in his own house. He also invited a large number of his old friends to the dinner to meet Jesus, his new Master (Matt. 9:10; Mk. 2:15; Lk. 5:29).
- It was a dinner party to say farewell to his old life in sin, and to celebrate his new-found faith in God; Levi now had become a new creation in Christ (cf. II Cor. 5:17).
- It was also a dinner party to bear witness to the saving grace of God; he wanted his friends and the world to know how God could save a wretched sinner as he was. And he was telling his old friends in sin that Jesus could save them also. As a result, many tax collectors and sinners joined Levi and became followers of Jesus (Mk. 2:15). Levi turned a dinner party into an evangelistic meeting for winning souls to Christ!
- When the teachers of the law who were Phar'isees saw Jesus eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they frowned and complained. Jesus' answer was: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:11-13; Mk. 2:16-17; Lk. 5:30-32).
- Note: The Pharisees was one of the religious and political parties at Jesus' time, the others being Sad'ducees and E'ssences. These three sects may be described respectively as the "Formalists," the "Free thinkers" or "the Liberals," and the "Puritans." The Pharisees were by far the most influential. They were known for insisting that the law of God be observed as the scribes (the teachers of the law) interpreted it, and for their strict commitment to keeping the laws of tithing and the religious ritual in every detail.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Caper'nam, Levi's native town, was located on a great commercial highway. It had a large group of tax collectors, who, as the victims of a common hatred, formed their own social group. Levi (Matthew) was one of them. He must have heard the Lord Jesus preach quite a few times, and found his heart moved to a deep yearning for a better life. Such desire did not go unnoticed by God. When he was given an opportunity to respond to the call of Jesus, he left everything and followed Him.

Do you yearn for a better life? Jesus is calling you. Follow Him as Levi did.

2. When the self-righteous Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, the Lord made the famous reply: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick... For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Are you sick spiritually? Do you know that you are a sinner? Come to Jesus Who alone can heal and save you.

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 9:12-13, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

LESSON 64

Matthew - Part II

Matthew the Apostle

- Matthew was one of the early disciples called by Jesus directly from his place of work. Undoubtedly he changed his original name Levi to Matthew (meaning "gift of God") when he became a disciple of Christ. His new name magnified the transforming power of Christ and indicated that he was saved only by the grace of God as a gift, not by his own works, as Paul stated in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."
- Some time later, Matthew was appointed one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. An apostle was a messenger or an ambassador designated for a special task. Jesus gave this title to His chosen twelve disciples at an early period of His public ministry in Galilee. With this title, Jesus also gave them authority and sent them out to expand His own ministry of preaching and healing (Matt. 10:1-15; Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16).

Matthew the Gospel Writer

- When Matthew heard the call of Jesus, he left all and followed Christ, counting no cost. But he carried over into his new life some of the qualities which he had exercised in the corrupt business of the tax office. As a tax collector, he was skilled at writing and in keeping records, therefore, Matthew became not only an apostle but also the author of one of the most important books in history - the Gospel according to Matthew.
- The book of Matthew has probably been read more widely than any other book in the Bible. This is true because it occupies the first place in the N.T. It is true also because the book tells the great story ever told, the story of Christ. It tells about His birth, His life, His teachings, His death, His resurrection, and His Second Coming.

About the Four Gospels

- The word "gospel" means "good news." The Gospel, as presented by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is the good news of God's gift of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ which the church has been commissioned to proclaim (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-20; Acts 1:8). The central message of their Gospel is, using Paul's words, that "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (II Cor. 5:19); apart from Jesus Christ there can be no good news for lost sinners (Acts 4:12).
- Matthew's Gospel is the opening book of the N.T. Matthew wrote primarily for the Jews and presented Jesus as the King and the Promised Messiah Who had fulfilled the O.T. prophecies. Mark directed his short book to the Romans and portrayed Jesus as the Servant of the Lord. Luke wrote his book for the Greeks, particularly for a Roman high official named Theop'hlus, and presented Jesus as the perfect and compassionate Son of Man. John's Gospel was last written. John had the whole world in mind and presented Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

- The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are called the Synopti Gospels, (The word "synoptic" means "seeing from the same point of view") because they contain so much material in common, and yet each is unique.
- All four Gospels reveal the one unique Person, Jesus Christ. All four are needed to provide a well-rounded view of the life, teachings, and works of Jesus Christ.

Characteristics of Matthew's Gospel

- The theme of Matthew's Gospel is "the King and His Kingdom." In his book the word "kingdom" appears more than fifty times, and the expression "the kingdom of God" or "the kingdom of heaven" appears about thirty times. Matthew showed that Jesus was the King to Whom God had given power and authority to redeem sinners and to judge mankind (Matt. 1:21; 2:2; 21:1-11; 25:31-46; 27:11, 37; 28:18).
- Note: The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are different names for the same thing. The Bible uses these expressions interchangeably (Matt. 19:23-24).
- Matthew wrote his book for his countrymen, the Jews, to show them that Jesus was the Promised Messiah, the Son of King David, the fulfillment of God's purposes in carrying out His plan of salvation (Matt. 1:1,17; 2:6; 15:22; 16:16; 21:9; 26:63-64). He repeated the expressions, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet" (Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17-23; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:35).
- Matthew and Luke both tell of the virgin birth of Jesus. Matthew gives the story from Joseph's side (Matt. 1:18-25), whereas Luke gives the story from Mary's side (Lk. 1:26-34). Both Matthew and Luke stated clearly that Jesus was miraculously and supernaturally born of a young woman Mary who was a virgin, and who had not known any man sexually when she conceived Jesus in her womb. It was a miracle done through the Holy Spirit. And Matthew added, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet (Isaiah): 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him □□□□□□□□ which means, 'God with us'" (Matt. 1:22-23; Isa. 7:14).
- Matthew alone recorded the words of Jesus about the future church (Matt. 16:18) and problems of church discipline (Matt. 18:17). Moreover, he saw the emergence of a universal church (including both Jews and Gentiles or non-Jews) as a result of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. He recorded the story of wise men (astrologers or magi) from the east who came to worship the Christ-Child (Matt. 2:1-11). These wise men were the first Gentiles who believed in Jesus as their Savior-King. Then he concluded his book with Christ's marching orders (the great commission) to evangelize the world, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).
- Matthew also showed his special interest in Christ's teachings on the end of age and the Second Coming, particularly in the parables (Matt. 13:) and Christ's discourse on Mount Olives (Chapters 24 and 25).
- As we read Matthew's Gospel, we are greatly impressed with the authority and power of Jesus

over diseases, demons, circumstances, and death, as Christ Himself declared, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." Surely, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16)!

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Matthew obeyed the call of Jesus and gave up his all, including a profitable business and a comfortable living, to follow Jesus. He became an apostle of Jesus and wrote a book that has blessed millions and millions of souls. Surely his reward was great before God, as Jesus promised, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or fathers or mothers or children or friends for My sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:27-29; Mk. 10:28-30; Lk. 18:28-30).
2. One of the featured stories told by Matthew was the virgin birth of Jesus. This doctrine of virgin birth is absolutely essential to the truth of the Gospel. It shows that Jesus, Who had existed eternally as the Son of God, became a man without the function of an earthly father. Jesus was God Who became a man that He might die for our sins and save us from eternal damnation. In Jesus God became a man that He might bring God to us and us to God. God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, in other word, God was in Christ restoring the world to Himself (II Cor. 5:19). What a wonderful Savior we have!

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 28:18-20, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

LESSON 65

Mark

Scripture References

- The Gospel of Mark; Acts 12: and 13:; 15:36-41; Colossians 4:10-11; II Timothy 4:9-11; Philemon 23-24; I Peter 5:13

Family Background

- Mark was born a Jew. His Jewish name was John (meaning “the Lord is gracious”) and Mark (meaning “a large hammer”) was his Roman name. It was common for a Jew in the Roman Empire to have both Jewish and Roman names. In Acts 13:5,13, Mark was twice referred to as John. In Acts 15:39 he was simply referred to as Mark; then in Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37 he was mentioned three times as "John, also called Mark." Elsewhere in the letters of the N.T. he was simply called Mark.
- Mark was a son of Mary, who was a godly woman and owned a large house with servants in Jerusalem. Her house was a favorite meeting place for the disciples of Jesus (Acts 12:12-13). Mary must have been an influential Christian leader in the early days of the church in Jerusalem. It was to her house that Peter went after he was rescued by the angel of the Lord, and released from the prison (Acts 12:1-12). Mark's father seemed to have died earlier.
- Note: There are six women bearing the same name Mary in the N.T.
- Mark was a cousin of Ba'nabas (Col. 4:10), who was one of the great Christian leaders in the early Christian Church. Most probably Mark was the young man who fled naked on the night of Jesus' arrest (Mk. 14:51-52).

Mark with Barnabas and Saul (Paul)

- About A.D. 46, Barnabas and Paul were sent by the church at Antioch to Jerusalem with an offering (a famine-relief fund) to help Christians in need in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). When they finished their mission, they returned to Antioch, taking with them John, also called Mark (Acts 12:25).
- Note: Saul and Paul are two different names in the Book of Acts for the same person. Saul was his Jewish name and Paul his Roman name.
- Shortly thereafter, young Mark was given an opportunity to accompany Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey as their helper (Acts 13:1-5). But when the group reached Perga on the south coast of what is now Turkey, Mark left them and returned to his mother's home in Jerusalem, probably due to a mixture of homesickness and fear of peril ahead (Acts 13:13).
- Mark's leaving the group greatly displeased Paul, for when Barnabas suggested that Mark accompany them on a second missionary journey (about A.D. 49), Paul flatly refused. This led to Paul's break with Barnabas after a heated quarrel between them over Mark. As a result, they went separate ways; Barnabas took Mark and returned to his homeland of Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and went to Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-40; cf. Acts 4:36).

Mark with Paul

- Mark was not heard from again until some ten years later. About A.D. 60, Mark was found with Paul again in Rome during Paul's imprisonment. He must have long since been restored to favor with Paul, for Paul recommended him to the Colossian Church and asked them to welcome him (Col. 4:10). Paul also mentioned Mark in his letter to Philemon as one of his fellow workers (Philem. 1, 23-34).
- Shortly before his martyrdom, Paul wrote Timothy in Ep'hesus to bring Mark with him to Rome as quick as possible, "for he (Mark) is helpful to me in my ministry" (II Tim. 4:9-11).
- Thus, it seems that Mark, in his later years, became one of Paul's most intimate and much trusted co-workers.

Mark with Peter

- Mark was also closely associated with Peter, who in his first letter affectionately referred to Mark as "my son Mark" (I Pet. 5:13). This proves that Peter was a very dear and intimate friend of Mark's family, since Mark's house was a meeting place for Peter and other Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12-13).
- According to early church tradition, Mark accompanied Peter, in the later years of the apostle's life, on his missionary journeys to help evangelize the province of Asia where Paul was not allowed to preach (I Pet. 1:1; cf. Acts 16:6).
- Later on, Peter and Mark visited the church in Rome and taught Christians there. It was in Rome that Mark wrote his Gospel from Peter's remembrances, a book that strongly carries the flavor of Peter.

Mark the Gospel Writer

- From the early days of the Christian Church, Mark's Gospel has been thought to reflect Peter's view of Christ; they believe that it is a record of Peter's reports of the ministry of Christ.
- Mark himself was not one of the Twelve Apostles, but some Bible scholars believe that his Gospel was the first one to be written as over against the tradition of Matthew's priority. Though Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four Gospel, it has all the earmarks of a firsthand witness who was, from all early accounts, none other than Simon Peter, from whom Mark obtained his information.
- Written principally for the Roman world, Mark's Gospel presents Christ as the Servant of the Lord, Who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45).
- Mark's Gospel gives a vivid, vigorous, straightforward account of the public ministry of Jesus Christ, culminating in His passion, death, and resurrection. The emphasis of this book is on the mighty acts of the Son of God, vividly described in detail.

- Mark's Gospel records more action than the other Gospels, but less of Jesus' teaching; nevertheless, the book has a basic purpose to show that Jesus is the Son of God (Mk. 1:1).
- After the death of the two great apostles, Paul and Peter, tradition affirmed that Mark went to Egypt, founded the church of Alexandria, and died by martyrdom.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Mark was brought up by a godly mother in a Christian home. His mother's house was noted as one of the meeting places for Christians. She must have a positive influence in leading her son to Christ.

Happy the home where Jesus' name is sweet to every ear; where parents love the Lord and their children; where children learn to love the Lord and honor their parents.

2. Mark used his God-given talent in assisting the apostles to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His book has been a great blessing to all of us. We, too, can use our talent, our time, and our money to bring the Gospel to lost souls in the world.

Memory Bible Verse: Mark 10:45, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- ? Note: "Son of Man," a title used by Jesus in the Gospels, has two-fold meaning: (1) It points to His deity (He was the holy Son of God; John 3:13; 6:62), and (2) to His humanity (He became a man, a member of the human race (Matthew 8:20).

LESSON 66

Luke

Scripture References

- The Gospel of Luke; Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18 ;27:1-28:16; Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:6-11; Philemon 23-24

Family Background

- Luke means "light." Less is known of Luke than any other N.T. writers. According to early church tradition, he was born in Antioch, a Gentile, probably a Greek, converted to Christianity under Paul's influence.
- Luke was a man of learning and knowledge. By profession, he was a doctor. The apostle Paul spoke of him as "Our beloved friend Luke, the doctor" (Col. 4:14). He was a skilled writer and reliable historian. He was the only Gentile writer of the two books in the N.T. The Gospel bearing his name has been called "The most beautiful book that has ever been written;" his second book, the Book of Acts, is the history book of the early Christian Church, from its birth in Jerusalem to the arrival of its great missionary Paul in Rome.

Paul's Fellow Worker

- In Phile'mon, Luke was called one of Paul's "fellow workers." He accompanied Paul on certain parts of his missionary journeys. In Acts 16:9-11, we learn that Luke was with Paul from Tro'as to Phil'ippi during the early part of Paul's Second Missionary Journey, as he wrote, "During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedo'nia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them. From Troas we put out to sea and... we traveled to Philippi, a Roman Colony, and the leading city of that district of Macedonia."
- Luke went with Paul to Philippi and remained there when Paul and his party moved on. From here, Luke indicated that he was not with Paul by the use of "they" not "we" in Acts 17:1. It seems that Luke stayed in Philippi about six years as the leader of the Philip'pian Church. After this, Luke rejoined Paul when Paul passed through Philippi on his way to Jerusalem at the close of Paul's Third Missionary Journey. This is indicated by the use of "us" and "we" in Acts 20:5-21:18. From this time on, Luke was with Paul to the end (Acts 27:1-28:16).

A Humble Man and Faithful Friend

- Luke was a very humble man, with no desire to blow his own trumpet. He never mentioned himself by name in his two books, but he was faithful and dependable. When the aged Paul was imprisoned in a lonely and cold cell in Rome awaiting his execution, Luke alone stayed with him in those dark days (II Tim. 4:9-11).

Luke the Gospel Writer

- Luke was the only non-Jewish author of two N.T. books, the Gospel bearing his name and the

Book of Acts. Both of his books were dedicated to Theo'philus who was a Roman official of high rank, as indicated by the title "most excellent" (Lk. 1:3-4; Acts 1:1). Theophilus' name means a "friend of God." He was a convert to Christ.

- Luke's Gospel presents Christ as the Perfect Son of Man and the compassionate Savior. The key verse of the book is 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke traces Jesus' genealogy to Adam (Lk 3:23-38), and gives an account of Jesus' birth and infancy from the point of view of the virgin mother (Lk. 1:26-38; 2:1-40), whereas Matthew gives the story from Joseph's side (Matt. 1:18-25). Luke also tells of Jesus' boyhood (Lk. 2:41-52).
- The parables found in the fifteenth chapter of Luke show Christ's deep concern for lost sinners: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son (the Prodigal Son). The whole Gospel story shows that God's salvation is available to all in need: the Widow of Nain (7:11-17), the sinful woman (7:36-50), the ten lepers (17:11-19), the repentant tax collector (18:9-14) Zacchae'us the tax collector of Je'richo (19:1-10), etc.; "for the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost."
- Luke writes with perfect skill and grace such parables as that of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37), the Prodigal Son (15:11-32), and the Rich Man and La'zarus (16:19-31). The loveliest part of all is the story of the appearance of the Risen Lord on the Road to Emma'us (24:13-35).
- The literary quality of Luke's Gospel is the highest of all four Gospels; it is also the longest and most orderly of the Gospels.
- Luke's Gospel carries a strong note of joy - the Song of Mary (1:46-55), the Song of Zechariah (1:67-69), the Song of Simeon (2:28-32), the Angels' Song (2:10,14), the joy over finding the Lost Sheep, recovery of the Lost Coin, and return of the Prodigal Son (15:3-32), etc. His Gospel is truly "good news of great joy!" And it is indeed the most interesting and beautiful "Story of Jesus" that has ever been written.

Luke the Church Historian

- The Book of Acts, written by Luke, is a continuation of his first book, the Gospel of Luke. His two-volume work accounts more than a quarter of the N.T. He wrote more of the N.T. than any other individual. The great apostle Paul referred to him as his "beloved friend Luke, the doctor" (Col. 4:14) and "fellow worker" (Philem. 24). Luke accompanied Paul in the early part of his Second Missionary Journey from Tro'as to Phili'ppi (Acts 16-18); and about six years later he rejoined Paul at Philippi at the close of Paul's Third Missionary Journey to Jerusalem. He was with Paul through his imprisonment in Caesarea; from there he went with Paul to Rome and stayed with the aged apostle in his imprisonment in Rome to the end (Acts 23:33; 24:27; 27:1-44; 28:1-30; cf. II Tim. 4:9-11).
- The Book of Acts continues the story of the Christian movement from the Ascension of Christ (about A.D. 30) to Paul's imprisonment in Rome (about A.D. 62), covering a time-span about 32 years. It tells how the disciples of Christ obeyed the command of the Lord to take the Gospel to the whole world, and what Jesus continues to do through His disciples after His return to heaven.
- Luke was an eyewitness of the development of the early Christian Church after Christ's Ascension. His book offers invaluable information about the history of early Christianity. The

Book of Acts was probably written shortly after A.D. 62, because it ends abruptly with Paul's imprisonment in Rome. We know nothing about Luke's age; the time and manner of his death is unknown.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Luke was a medical doctor, well-educated intellectual; but he was a very humble man. He never mentioned himself by name in his own two books. His only purpose was to exalt the name of Jesus Christ. He clearly understood what he wrote, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk. 14:11; 18:14).
2. As we read Luke's Gospel, we learn to know Jesus as a compassionate Savior Who came to seek and to save what was lost, and Who cares for those in need; his second book, the Book of Acts, should encourage us to take the Gospel to the world, to those who know not Christ.

Memory Bible Verse: Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

LESSON 67

John the Apostle - Part I

Scripture References

- The Gospel of John; Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11

Family Connections

- John means "Jehovah (the Lord) is gracious." He was the son of Zeb'edee and the younger brother of James (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11). The family lived on the shore of Lake Galilee; they were fishermen and partners with another pair of brothers, Peter and Andrew (Lk. 5:4-10).
- John's mother seems to have been Salo'me (cf. the unnamed mother in Matt. 27:56), who appears to have been the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (cf. the unnamed sister in Jn. 19:25). This would make James and John cousins of Jesus.
- Salome, the wife of Zeb'edee, and mother of James and John, was one of the women who followed Jesus and cared for His needs (Matt. 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41). She was present at the crucifixion of Jesus, and was among those who at Easter morning brought spices to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:55-56; Mk. 16:1; Lk. 23:55-56; 24:1).

John and John the Baptist

- If John was a cousin of Jesus, then he was also a relative of John the Baptist (cf. Lk. 1:34-38). He must have heard the preaching of John the Baptist. In his Gospel he indicated that he was one of John the Baptist's disciples (cf. the unnamed disciple in Jn. 1:35,40). Most likely his brother James and their partners, Peter and Andrew, all had responded to John the Baptist's preaching and became his disciples.
- John the Baptist appeared on the scene in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tibe'rius Cae'sar (about A.D. 29), shortly before Jesus began His public ministry (Lk. 3:1-6). At the height of his popularity, the Jewish leaders sent priests from Jerusalem to ask him whether he claimed to be the Messiah. He confessed publicly, "I am not the Christ... I am the voice of the one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'" (Jn. 1:19-23; cf. Isa. 40:3-5). When John the Baptist pointed out the Lamb of God in the person of Jesus, John (and the other disciple Andrew) soon left the Baptist and followed Jesus (Jn. 1:29,35-40).
- Note: The lamb killed and eaten on the Passover pointed forward to Jesus as the Passover Lamb, Whom God provided to remove our sin by taking it on Himself and thus delivering us from sin and death. Here the Baptist indicated that Jesus was the Promised Messiah Who would die for the sin of the world.
- It seems that after spending a few hours with Jesus, John (and his brother James), Peter and his brother Andrew, all went back to their fishing business (Lk. 5:4-10), for Jesus had not yet begun His ministry.

The Call of John

- Before long Jesus began His public ministry after His baptism and temptation in the desert (Matt. 3:13-17; 4:1-17; Mk. 1:9-15; Lk. 3:21-22; 4:1-15).
- John was one of the first four disciples called by Jesus, the other three being his brother James, Peter and Andrew. They immediately left their fishing business and became His disciples, or rather, 'fishers of men' (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:4-11), and later all four were included in the group of twelve apostles of Jesus (Matt. 10:1-15; Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 9:1-6).
- Jesus nicknamed James and John "Sons of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17), evidently because of their natural violent temperament which had not yet been chastened by grace. This quick temper was shown when John rebuked a man cast out demons in Christ's name, but did not follow Christ in the company of the disciples (Mk. 9:38; Lk. 9:49); and when Jesus was rejected in a Samaritan village, they wished to call down fire from heaven to destroy the villagers (Lk. 9:51-56). They showed selfishness once in asking for the places of honor in Jesus' future kingdom (Matt. 20:20-28; Mk. 10:35-45).

The Three Most Intimate Disciples of Jesus

- As the ministry of Jesus progressed, John, together with James and Peter, formed an inner circle of disciples who were closest to Jesus. They became the three most intimate disciples of Jesus.
- They were the only ones permitted to be with Jesus when He raised Ja'irus daughter from the dead (Mk. 5:35-42; Lk. 8:49-56). They were the only ones with Jesus to witness His transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36). They stayed nearest to Jesus during His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Mk. 14:32-42; Lk. 22:39-46).

The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

- Gradually, by God's grace, John developed into a man of deep spiritual insight and loving disposition. All four Gospels indicated that John was one of the most prominent of the apostles. Five times in his Gospel he made clear that he was the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20).
- At the Last Supper, on the night before Jesus was betrayed, John occupied the place next to the Master at the table (Jn. 13:23). He followed Jesus from Gethsemane into the high priest's courtyard when Jesus was tried (Jn. 18:15-16), and to the place of the Skull (Golgotha) where Jesus was nailed to the cross; and on the cross the dying Lord commended His dear mother Mary to John's loving care (Jn. 19:16-27).

John and Peter

- By the time Jesus' ministry had come to an end, Peter and John were clearly the two leaders of the Twelve. They were often mentioned together. Along with Peter, John was entrusted by Jesus with preparations for the Passover Supper (Lk. 22:8). On the morning of the resurrection, when John and Peter were told by Mary Ma'gdalene about the empty tomb of the Lord, together they ran to the sepulcher to investigate, and John was convinced by what he saw that Christ had risen (Jn. 20:1-10).

- The same close relationship remained between John and Peter, and continued during the years that followed the ascension of the Lord. After the ascension, Peter and John became two prominent leaders among the disciples in the early church (Acts 1:13).
- After the Pentecost, John worked closely together with Peter. In the Book of Acts, we read that John and Peter went together to the Temple one afternoon to take part in a prayer meeting. There at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple they healed a man who had been born lame from his birth; and while explaining the miracle to the astonished crowd gathered around them, they were arrested and imprisoned. They were released the next day after being warned by the religious leaders not to preach about Jesus anymore. But many of the people who had seen the miracle and heard their message believed in Jesus, and the number of believers reached a new high of about 5,000 men (Acts 3:1-26; 4:1-22).
- Late, after Phi'lip (one of the seven deacons of Acts 6:5) preached to the people of Samaria and won many people to Christ, John and Peter were sent by their fellow apostles in Jerusalem to Samaria. There they prayed and laid their hands upon the new believers, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:5-17). After testifying and preaching in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, stopping at several Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Gospel to them too (Acts 8:25). Remember how John used to hate the Samaritans and wished to call down fire from heaven to destroy them (Lk. 9:51-56). That he went on his mission to preach to the Samaritans suggests that John was a changed man!

Pillar of the Church

- John remained in Jerusalem during the persecutions that soon assailed the infant church. Fifteen years later he was still there, when Paul visited Jerusalem after his First-Missionary Journey. Paul mentioned in Galatians 2:9 that he met and consulted with James (the Lord's brother), Peter, and John who were Pillars of the church (cf. Acts 15:1-4).
- According to well-established tradition, John's later years were spent at E'phesus where he lived to a very old age, and wrote the Gospel (A.D. 85-90), and the Epistles of I, II, III John (A.D. 90-95). It was most likely that the seven churches of Asia were under his pastoral care (Rev. 1:11). When he penned the Book of Revelation (A.D. 95), he was banished to Pat'mos, an island off the coast from Ephesus, for Jesus' sake (Rev. 1:9). He returned later to Ephesus, and died in A.D. 98.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. There is no doubt that John was one of the greatest of the apostles. He was the disciple "whom Jesus loved," because of his understanding of and love for his Lord. When he first became a disciple of Jesus, he was a quick-temper and intolerant person; but he was brought under control in the course of time by the grace of God, until he became especially known for his gentleness and kindly love. We all can be changed by God's grace, and grow to be more like Jesus with the increase of our age.
2. John was particularly called "the disciple whom Jesus loved," that is, he was the most intimate earthly friend of Jesus. Let us so live our Christian life that we may become His close friends too.

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 4:19-20, "'Come, follow Me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed Him."

LESSON 68

John the Apostle - Part II

A Brief Review

- John was born in Galilee, the son of Zeb'bede and Salo'me. He had a brother named James. His family was engaged in the fishing business on the Sea of Galilee. They had hired servants (Mk. 1:19-20), and Salome was one of the women who helped support Jesus and His disciples out of their own means (Lk. 8:3; Mk. 15:40-41). Salome was also one of the women who bought spices and came to anoint the body of Jesus on Easter morning (Mk. 16:1).
- John first became a disciple of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:35,40). Later he and his brother James, together with another pair of brothers, Peter and Andrew, were called by Jesus to be 'fishers of men' instead of 'fishers of fish' (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:4-11).
- John followed Jesus faithfully throughout the years of his ministry. Along with Peter and James, John became one of the inner circle. This little group was at the side of Jesus in the most important events of His life. John was especially close to the heart of his Master; he was called the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). He was near Jesus during His trial. He stood by the Cross in the hour of His death; and he accepted the responsibility to take care of Jesus' mother Mary (Jn. 19:16-27). After the Pentecost, John served the Lord as one of the prominent leaders in the early church history. He and James (the Lord's brother) and Peter were called "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9).
- During his later years, John settled in Ep'hesus where he wrote the Gospel, and the Epistles of I, II, III John. In the last years of his life, he was banished to the isle of Patmos for preaching the Gospel. There God pinned back the curtain of eternity and allowed him to write the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Later he was permitted to return to Ephesus and died shortly in A.D. 98.

The Gospel of John

- The Gospel of John was written about A.D. 90, long after the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John's brother James died a martyr by the hands of King Herod, about A.D. 44, as told in Acts 12:1-2.
- The emphasis in the Gospel of John is on the deity of Christ. Matthew wrote about Jesus as the King and the Promised Messiah Who had fulfilled the O.T. prophecies; Mark wrote about Him as the Servant of the Lord; Luke wrote about Him as the Son of Man. John wrote about Jesus as the Son of God. He stated his purpose of writing the Gospel in Jn. 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."
- Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jews, Mark for the Romans, and Luke for the Greeks. However, John had the whole world in mind and presented Jesus as the Savior of the world.
- John's Gospel answers the question: "Who is Jesus?" (1) Jesus is the "Word of God" (1:14); (2) the "Lamb of God" (1:29,36); (3) the "Messiah" (1:41); (4) the "Son of God" (1:49); (5) the "King of Israel" (1:49); (6) the "Savior of the world" (4:42). Then Thomas summed up all the

above answers in one simple, ringing confession, "My Lord and my God" (20:26-28).

- Note: In the N.T., Jesus is sometimes called the Word (I Jn. 1:1-3). Jesus is the Word Who became man. He is the Living Word, the living expression of God. His words and deeds are the words and deeds of God (Jn. 1:1-4,14; cf. Gen. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 19:13,16).

The Epistles of I, II, III John (Dates of writing: A.D. 90-95)

- Note: An epistle is a letter written by an apostle of Jesus in the N.T.
- * The Apostle John wrote I John toward the end of his life, shortly after the writing of his Gospel. In this letter he warned his readers (whom he called his "little children") about false teachers; he wanted his readers to find assurance of personal salvation in the Son of God (5:13), to have fellowship with God and God's people (1:3), to have victory over sin (2:1-2; 4:4), and to love one another (4:7-12).
- He wrote II John to some friends to warn them against similar false teachers mentioned in I John.
- In III John, the apostle complimented his friend Gaius (pronounced ga'yus) for his hospitality he had shown to traveling evangelists sent out by John. And he encouraged him to keep helping the true preachers of the Gospel (vv. 1-8). Gaius was a convert of Paul in the Corinthian Church (I Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23). He was a greatly beloved church leader. The apostle John loved him and four times called him, "Beloved friend" ("Dear friend" in NIV - vv. 1,2,5,11). In the meantime, the apostle rebuked Diot'rephes, another church leader, who had refused to "welcome the brothers" (receive traveling evangelists to the local church, vv. 9-11).

The Book of Revelation (Date of writing: A.D. 96)

- The word "revelation" means a revealing, or disclosing of something that had been hidden. This word "revelation" used in the Bible contains two meanings: General revelation and special revelation. General revelation is available to all men, and is communicated through nature, conscience, and history (Rom. 1:18-20; 2:1-16). Special revelation is given to particular people at particular times, chiefly through God's chosen servants or prophets, the Bible, and Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2; II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:20-21).
- The Apostle John was a Roman prisoner on the Isle of Pat'mos, when God revealed to him the things contained in the Book of Revelation (1:9-11).
- In 1:19, we read that John was told to "write the things what you have seen (Chapter 1), what they are (Chapters 2 to 3), and what will take place later (Chapters 4 through 22). Accordingly, the Book of Revelation is divided into two parts: Chapters 1-3, things were in John's day - the seven letters to the Seven Churches; Chapters 4-22, things will take place later (cf. 4:1), covering the time from John's day on to the very end. This is the only book of the N.T. that is exclusively prophetic in nature; it is called a prophecy (1:3).
- The Book of Revelation is the climax of the Bible, the fulfillment of what God began in Genesis; what He begins, He finishes; "I am the Al'pha and the Ome'ga (the Beginning and the Ending of all things), "says the Lord God, "Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, the Almighty" (1:8).

- God promises a blessing to those who read and study Revelation, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (1:3).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. John, a hot-tempered man, was made mellow and lovable by his years of walking with the Lord. In his old age he was called "the Apostle of love." Tradition says that during his last days, when he was too old to walk, he was carried to the church and simply said with a feeble voice, "little children, love one another" (cf. I John 4:7).
2. The Apostle wrote the marvelous Gospel of John and four other books of the N.T. The last book, Revelation, unfolds the great events in God's program, beginning with the time when John wrote it till the end time, including the Second Coming of Christ.

Let's take time to read these sacred books that we may grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Memory Bible Verses: Revelation 1:8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 22:13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

- ? Note: Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. By calling Jesus Christ the Alpha and the Omega, John acknowledged that He is both Creator and the Redeemer and the Final Judge of all things.

LESSON 69

John the Baptist

Scripture References

- Luke 1: and 3:1-20; Matthew 3:; Mark 1:1-15; John 1:; Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6

Family Background

- John's father Za'chari'ah was a priest belonging to the division of Abi'jah (a descendant of Aaron); his mother Elizabeth also came from the family of Aaron. They were both righteous before God, observing all the Lord's commandments and laws blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth could not have a baby; and they were both old (Lk. 1:5-7).
- One day it was Zachariah's turn to burn incense in the inner sanctuary while a great crowd stood outside in the Temple court praying. Suddenly an angel appeared to Zechariah and said, "Your prayer has been heard by God. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You will name him John (meaning 'whom the Lord loves')... He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, preparing the people for the coming of the Lord Messiah (Lk. 1:6-17).
- At first Zachariah was frightened, and could not believe what he saw and heard, so he said to the angel, "But this is impossible! I am an old man, and my wife is also well along in years." Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel; God sent me to bring you this good news. Now, listen! You will not be able to talk until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words" (Lk. 1:18-20).
- Accordingly Zachariah lost his speech; and when his time of service completed, he went home in the hill country of Judea (Lk. 1:21-23; 39).

The Birth of John the Baptist

- Soon afterwards Elizabeth, the barren one, became pregnant in her old age (Lk. 1:24). When the child was born, all the relatives and friends assumed that the baby's name would be Zachariah after his father. But, to everyone's surprise, Zachariah wrote on a piece of paper, "His name is John!" Immediately, Zachariah could speak again, and he began praising God (Lk. 1:57-79).
- Luke indicated that John's mother, Elizabeth, was a relative (may be a cousin) of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Six months after Elizabeth became pregnant, the angel Gabriel revealed to the virgin Mary the miraculous conception of her cousin as an assurance of the supernatural birth of the Messiah by herself (Lk. 1:26-38). Mary, then, went to the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth; and they exchanged congratulations and praised God together. Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home (Lk. 1:39-56). John was born six months before the birth of our Lord Jesus (cf. Lk. 1:26ff).
- Nothing is known of John's boyhood, except that we are told in Lk. 1:80, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert (near his home) until he appeared publicly to Israel."

The Ministry of John the Baptist

- John knew from the beginning that he was to be the Elijah in prophecy, and that he was to go on before the Lord (the Messiah) in the spirit and power of Elijah; therefore, he copied the style of Elijah's dress, wearing a garment of camel's hair with a girdle of leather around his waist. His simple food was edible locusts and wild honey and wheat, such as the desert afforded (Matt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6; cf. II Kings 1:3-8; Ps. 81:16).
- Note: Locusts had been used as food from earliest times. Edible locusts were roasted or sundried and eaten like parched grain.
- The nation of Israel had been groaning under the heavy hand of the Romans; and the people were in expectation that the Messiah would come to set them free from Roman bondage. It was also the popular belief of the time, according to Mal'achi 4:5-6, that Elijah would return from heaven to prepare the way for the Messiah.
- When John was 30 years old, the word of God came to him in the wilderness; and he went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance (Lk. 3:1-6). John reminded the people of Elijah because of his dress; and he preached after the manner of the O.T. prophet, calling the nation to repentance. The people flocked to him; they confessed their sins and were baptized by him (Lk. 3:7-14).
- Note: the baptism of John was a baptism "of repentance," symbolizing moral reform, and preparing the people of Israel to meet the Messiah. His ministry was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'prepare the way for the Lord (the Messiah), make straight paths for Him'" (Matt. 3:1-3; Mk. 1:2-4; Lk. 3:1-6; Isa. 40:3-5).

John's Meeting with Jesus

- John was quite aware of One Who was coming after him was mightier than he, whose sandals he was not worthy to carry; and Who would come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:7-8; Lk. 3:16).
- Shortly after John began his ministry, Jesus came to present Himself for baptism at John's hands (Matt. 3:13). John and Jesus were about the same age and were related (cf. Lk. 1:36). He knew Jesus from the teaching of his parents. When Jesus came to him for baptism, he knew that Jesus had no sin of which to repent, and would have refused, had Jesus not insisted, saying that it was necessary for Him to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:14-15).
- Jesus received baptism from John, though he had no sin to repent of. His baptism was intended to identify Himself with God's people who, by their baptism, declared themselves on the side of God and His righteousness (Matt. 3:15). His baptism also served as a declaration to launch His public ministry as the Promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. This was confirmed by God when Jesus went up from the water after He was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit came upon Him like a dove; and a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, Whom I loved; with Whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22).
- With the baptism of Jesus, John's mission had come to an end. He had aroused the nation, and presented Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. His work was done. We learn that John continued to preach and baptize (Jn. 3:23), and to be a witness to Jesus. One day John said to

two of his disciples as they saw Jesus pass by, "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!" and they left John and followed Jesus (Jn. 1:29-40).

- When John was told that all people went to follow Jesus instead of coming to him, he humbly acknowledged his subordinate role and temporary nature of his own mission, saying, "He must become greater; I must become less" (Jn. 3:25-30).

Death of John the Baptist

- About a year after he had baptized Jesus, John was arrested and imprisoned, because he boldly spoke out against King Herod's immoral marriage to Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip (Matt. 14:1-5; Mk. 6:14-20).
- While in prison, perplexed and perhaps feeling deserted, John sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire whether He really was the Messiah. In reply, Jesus pointed to His works which He had been doing to prove His Messiahship (Matt. 11:2-9; Lk. 7:18-23).
- John was eventually beheaded by King Herod who allowed himself to be swayed by a wicked wife, and a loose step-daughter (Matt. 14:6-12; Mk. 6:21-29; Lk. 9:7-9).
- John was the greatest of the prophets in that he was privileged to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, and to point out the Savior to the world.
- The Lord Jesus said of John in Matt. 11:11, "I tell you the truth: among those born of women there was not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (see also Lk. 7:28). This statement means that while John was the last and greatest prophet of the era before Christ, nevertheless he did not live to see the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. Like Moses, he stood on the threshold of the Promised Land and died before he could enjoy the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, and consequently, "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (John the Baptist)." The humblest believer of the N.T. era is more blessed than the greatest believer of the old.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. John's public ministry was short, but his popular success was immense. His message summed up in Matt. 3:1-2, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." The whole land was stirred, and great multitudes came to be baptized by him. But all this he did was to point people to Jesus, he humbly declared that he was but a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord.

We need to learn from John the Baptist and to point people to Christ in all we do and say.

2. John said, "He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less," or, "He must increase, and I must decrease." This ought to be our soul's desire also.

Memory Bible Verse: Luke 7:28, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

LESSON 70

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Scripture References

- Matthew 1:-2;; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 1:-2;; Jn. 19:25-27; Acts 1:12-14
- Note: Mary is the name of six women in the N.T.: (1) Mary Mag'dalene, the woman from whom Christ cast out seven demons (Matt. 27:56,61; 28:1; Mk. 15:40,47; 16:1-9; Lk. 8:2; 24:10; Jn. 19:25; 20:1-18); (2) Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus (Lk. 10:38-41; Jn. 11:1-44; 12:1-8); (3) Mary, the mother of James and Joseph (Matt. 27:55-61); (4) Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); (5) Mary of Rome, to whom Paul sent greetings as to one "who works hard among you" (Rom. 16:6); (6) Mary, the Mother of our Lord Jesus to whom our lesson is devoted at this time.

Family Connections

- Mary (meaning unknown) was a humble peasant girl from Nazareth, a small town of Galilee. In the genealogy given by Matthew from Joseph's side, Joseph is said to be the son of Jacob (Matt. 1:16), but in the genealogy given by Luke from Mary's side, Joseph is said to be the son of Heli (Lk. 3:23). In the opinion of many Bible scholars, Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli, the father of Mary. Heli was a descendant of David; accordingly Mary was from the tribe of Judah of the lineage of David (cf. Lk. 3:23-33; KJV margin).
- According to Lk. 1:36, Mary was a relative (a cousin) of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist.

The Annunciation - The Angel Gabriel's Announcement to Mary

- Mary was engaged to marry Joseph, a righteous man and descendant of King David. He was a well-known carpenter in Nazareth (Matt. 1:18-19, 13:55; Lk. 1:27).
- One day, while Mary was still a virgin, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Then Gabriel proceeded to tell Mary that she was to be the mother of the long-expected Messiah, "You will give birth to a son, and you will name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David; His kingdom will never end." When Mary asked how this could be, since she was a virgin. The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of Most High will overshadow you, so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:26:35).
- With humble piety, Mary accepted the honor that God was graciously and mysteriously to bestow upon her; she said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Lk. 1:38).
- Then the angel Gabriel informed Mary that her kinswoman Elizabeth, the barren one, was to become a mother in her old age. A few days later, Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth, and stayed with her for three months (Lk. 1:39-56).

The Birth of Jesus

- When Mary returned to Nazareth pregnant, Joseph was deeply troubled and considered to break the engagement. Then Gabriel appeared to him in a dream, "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You will name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." Joseph reverently obeyed and took Mary home as his wife; but she remained a virgin until her son was born, and Joseph named Him Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25).
- By this marriage, Mary was very well protected, and her mysterious secret was very well guarded till the Holy Child was born. Thus the Child born of Mary would be the legal son of Joseph, and therefore through him heir of King David.
- The birth, however, took place in Bethlehem. For some months later, a decree was issued by Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, "that a census should be taken of the entire Rome Empire... And every one went to his own town to register (Lk. 2:1-3).
- So Joseph left Nazareth and went Bethlehem of Judea, the ancient home of King David, because he was from the family of David. He took Mary with him, who was pregnant and expecting a child (Lk. 2:4-5).
- Finding no vacancy in the inn in the little town of Bethlehem, they were compelled to stay in a stable (Perhaps the stable was not being occupied by cattle at the time). There the Lord Jesus was born, and His mother "wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger" (Lk. 2:7). There lies the Promised Messiah - the Incarnate Son of God, and the Savior of the world!

The Angels and Shepherds

- On the night of Jesus' birth, Mary witnessed the shepherds who came to worship the newborn Messiah, after they had seen the vision of the angels and heard the angelic song heralding the Savior's birth. And Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them often in her heart (Lk. 2:8-20).

The Visit of the Wise Men

- About a year later or so, Mary received the Wise Men from the East. They had seen the natal Star and came to Jerusalem to seek the newborn King. When Herod sent them to Bethlehem, the Star reappeared and led them to the house where the child was. Entering the house where the Child and Mary His mother were, they fell down and worship Him. Then they opened their presents and gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matt. 2:1-12).
- Note: These Wise Men were priests in the Persian Empire who studied astrology, and who were also familiar with the prophecies about the coming of Messiah through frequent contact with the Jewish exiles.
- Shortly after the Wise Men's visit, the holy family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's murder of all male children under two years old in that region. Later on they returned to Nazareth where Mary devoted herself to the rearing of the Child (Matt. 2:13-23). "And the Child grew and became strong; He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him" (Lk. 2:40).

- The holy family was not heard of again until Jesus was 12 years old, when He went to Jerusalem with His parents to celebrate the Feast of Passover (Lk. 2:41-52).

Mary at Cana of Galilee

- Mary was present at Jesus' first miracle, the turning of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Here, Mary seemed to believe that Jesus possessed more than natural powers (Jn. 2:1-11).

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

- On another occasion, while Jesus was teaching the people, some one told Him that His mother and brothers wanted to see Him. But Jesus declared, "... For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Matt.12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21).

Mary at the Cross

- While Jesus was engaged in public ministry, Mary and her other children seemed to have still lived in Nazareth. It is assumed that Joseph had died early since he was not mentioned again. Mary was seldom mentioned until she was seen at the foot of the cross with other women. With a mother's love and sorrow, she watched her Son bleeding and dying on a cruel Roman cross. From the cross Jesus in His dying hour remembered His mother; He entrusted Mary to the loving care of His beloved disciple John (Jn. 19:25-27).

Mary in the Upper Room

- After the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, we found Mary among the apostles and other disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). After this, she was seen no more; we do not know when or how she died.

Mary's Other Children

- The Scriptures asserted that Mary was a virgin until she gave birth to her first-born Son Jesus (Matt. 1:25). There were other children born after Jesus, namely, James, Joseph, Simon, Judas, and at least two unnamed daughters (Matt. 13:55-56; Mk. 6:3). At the first, the brothers did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah (Jn. 7:5), but Jesus' resurrection changed them. They were seen with Mary and others in the Upper Room who met for fellowship and prayers (Acts 1:14).
- One of Jesus' brothers, James, became a pillar of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:12 ff.; I Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9); and he was the writer of the Epistle of James (Jas. 1:1). Another brother, Judas, was the author of the letter of Jude. The name Jude is a shortened form of Judas. Both James and Jude were among the founding members of the Jerusalem Church.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Mary was a quiet, meditative, God-fearing woman, highly favored, queen of mothers, sharing her love and cares common to all mothers. We love her and adore her because she was the mother of our Savior.

2. But we must not worship her. The Bible says that "all generations will call her blessed," but nowhere does it say that she was born immaculate (pure, without sin) and remained sinless. The elevation and worship of Mary as Mother of God by the Roman Catholic Church is most unscriptural and idolatrous. The Bible teaches that Mary was ranked with the disciples of Christ, needing as much as others the salvation the Savior came to bring.

Memory Bible Verses: Luke 1:46-48, "And Mary said, 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed.'"

LESSON 71

Joseph, the Legal Father of Jesus

Scripture References

- Matthew 1:-2; 13:53-58; Mark 6:3; Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-52; 3:23; 4:22; John 1:45; 6:42

Family Background

- Joseph was a lineal descendant of King David (in the direct line of descent from David) according to the genealogy given by Matthew (Matt. 1:1-16). He was the son of Jacob (Matt. 1:16), and son-in-law of He'li (Lk. 3:23), and the supposed father of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Lk. 3:23; 4:22; Jn. 1:45; 6:42). He was a carpenter (Matt. 13:55) living in Nazareth of Galilee (Lk. 2:4).
- Joseph was a godly and righteous man. He and Mary were engaged, but before they came together she became pregnant. Joseph was bitterly disappointed and deeply grieved that Mary had betrayed him. Being a kind man and unwilling to put her to shame, so he patiently and prayerfully waited upon the Lord and, in the meantime, made plans to divorce her secretly, in order to avoid a public scandal (Matt. 1:18-19).
- Note; For the Jews in Jesus' days an engagement was a lasting agreement. It could only be broken by a divorce. If a bride-to-be was unfaithful, it was considered adultery, and she could be put to death. Joseph thought at first that Mary committed adultery, but soon he understood.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

- While Joseph was considering this, an angel of Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son (descendant) of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will give birth to a Son, and you will call His name Jesus - because He will save His people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "The virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a Son, and they shall call His name "Imman'uel" - which means, "God with us" (Matt. 1:20-23; Isa. 7:14).
- Note: Immanuel was a symbolic name from Isaiah's prophecy given at first to King A'haz of Judah (735-716 B.C.). The birth and naming of the child was a sign of assurance to the king and his people that God would be with them and deliver them from their enemies (Isa. 7:10-16). Although Ahaz's rejection of the sign of hope finally led to Judah's downfall, the promise of Immanuel remained with the remnant of Israel (Isa. 7:17-25; 8:1 ff.). The apostle Matthew recognized that with the coming of the virgin-born Jesus, the prophecy of Isaiah had reached its ultimate fulfillment. In Jesus Christ, God actually came and lived as a man among us, as the apostle John says, "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us...." (Jn. 1:1,14).
- After the angel had spoken to Joseph, he did exactly as the Lord commanded him; he took Mary home and made her his wife, but he had no (sexual) union with her until her Son was born. And since Mary was Joseph's legal wife, Jesus became Joseph's legal Son (Matt. 1:24-25; 13:55; Lk. 3:23; 4:22; Jn. 1:45; 6:42).

- Now when a baby is born, one of the first things is to name the child. Joseph knew that he must call the name of Mary's Child Jesus, which means, "Savior," a name was given by the angel of the Lord before the Baby was born. Joseph believed without doubt that Jesus was the Promised Messiah, the Savior of the world, Who would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:25b).
- We can imagine how Joseph, with awe and wonder, looked into the lovely face of Mary's Child. At last God's promises had been fulfilled, the long-expected Messiah had come, through Whom God's redemptive plans would be realized.

A Man of Great Restraint and Moral Strength

- Joseph must have been a man of great restraint and moral strength, since he had no (sexual) union with Mary as her husband until she gave birth to her son. Though Mary lived in his home and was legally his wife, and both were young, he allowed her to remain virgin until Jesus was born.
- The Scripture definitely indicates that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived, and a virgin when Jesus was born. This is so important and so essential that we have a virgin-born, sinless Savior, uncontaminated by human lust; so He could die for the sins of the world, not for His own sin because He was sinless, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin mother. We must make quite clear that Joseph had nothing to do with the birth of Jesus; he was called the father of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Lk. 3:23; 4:22; Jn. 1:45; 6:42), because legally he was. He was not responsible for Mary's pregnancy; Mary was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus was called the Son of God (Matt. 1:18-25; Lk. 1:26-35).

A Dutiful Husband and Father

- When Caesar Augusta, the Roman Emperor, decreed that all the people in the Roman Empire should be registered in their ancestral homes, Joseph took Mary with him and went to his native town, Bethlehem, the ancient home of King David, and there Jesus was born (Lk. 2:1-7).
- When the shepherds came to pay homage to the Newborn Messiah, Joseph was with Mary and her Baby (Lk. 2:8-20). 40 days later, he and Mary went to the Temple in Jerusalem to present the Baby Jesus to the Lord (Lk. 2:22-24).
- Shortly after the visit of the Wise Men, Joseph, warned by an angel of the Lord, took Mary and her Child and fled to Egypt to avoid King Herod's plot to kill the Newborn King (Matt. 2:13-19). After the death of Herod, they returned to Nazareth (Matt. 2:19-23).
- Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem to attend the Passover Feast each year; and when Jesus was twelve years old, He went too with them (Lk. 2:41-52).

Other Children of Joseph and Mary

- After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had the normal relations of husband and wife, and Mary bore him several other children. In Matthew 13:55-56 we read, "Isn't this the carpenter's Son? Isn't His mother's name Mary, and aren't His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all His sisters with us?..." (see also Mk. 6:3). So we know that Jesus had four brothers

and at least two sisters who were born of Joseph and Mary after Him.

- Apparently Joseph was no longer alive after Jesus began His public ministry. He was not mentioned in connection with the crucifixion; and that was why Jesus in His dying hour commended His mother to the loving care of the apostle John (Jn. 19:25-27).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Joseph is almost a forgotten man in the Bible. At Christmas time we sing dozens of Christmas carols almost without a single reference to Joseph, and few sermons are preached on him. One of the reasons why he is neglected or forgotten is that his silence contributes to his downgrading. We don't find a single word of Joseph in the Gospel story, and he is found only in the first two chapters of two Gospels, namely, Matthew and Luke. Then he vanished from the scene. Another reason is that the great emphases given Mary by the Roman Catholic Church to deify her as the Mother of God dwarfs or belittles him.

But we should not so easily neglect Joseph, for he had a great influence in the life of our Lord; and he was the legal father of Jesus during early days of Jesus' earthly life.

2. Joseph must have been a good and exemplary man to have been chosen of God to be the guardian (the legal father) of God's own Son. We admire his moral strength as he took Mary home as his wife, and allowed her to remain a virgin until she had borne her firstborn Son. The Scripture indicates that he was a righteous and kindly man. He humbly obeyed and conscientiously followed God's command. He took good care of Mary and her supernaturally born Son. He was both a model husband and father.

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 1:20-21, "... an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

LESSON 72

Martha and Mary of Bethany

Scripture References

- Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-57; 12:1-11; Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9

Family Connections

- Be'thany was a little village, less than two miles outside Jerusalem. There lived three people whom Jesus loved dearly – Martha, Mary and their brother La'zarus (Jn. 11:1). Jesus often visited their sweet home, after a hard day's work, to rest and enjoy fellowship with these dear friends (Matt. 21:17; Mk. 11:11).
- Luke 10:38-40 indicate that Martha was the elder sister, as she was seen in charge of the affairs of the house; and the house where Jesus was received was called her home. The Lord Jesus also placed Martha's name first, then Mary, then Lazarus (Jn. 11:5).

Jesus' Visit to Martha and Mary

- One day Jesus and His twelve disciples, on their way to Jerusalem, dropped in unexpectedly (Lk. 10:38). Martha was very happy that the Master, Who had no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20), would come to her house to seek rest and fellowship. She was hospitable, and lovingly opened her home to welcome the Master. But she was a little excited at this time, because she didn't have much time to get dinner ready for her favorite guests.
- While Martha busied herself with much preparation in the kitchen, Mary sat at the Master's feet and was totally absorbed in listening to every word from Jesus' lips. Martha became irritated because her sister did not come to help her serve. So she went in and said, "Lord, don't You care that my sister left me alone to do all the work? Tell her to come to help me" (Lk. 10:40).
- All of us would sympathize with Martha. Her complaint was natural and reasonable. But, to her surprise, the Master said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are getting worried and upset about too many things. Only one thing is important. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Lk. 10:41-42). Jesus recognized Martha's good intention, but He was afraid that her outward activities would cause her to neglect her spiritual needs. We are sure that both Martha and Mary loved Jesus deeply; but they expressed their love for Him in different ways.

The Death of Lazarus

- While Jesus was away on a preaching tour, Lazarus became seriously ill. He had two wonderful sisters, yet they could not prevent his illness. Without delay the sisters sent a simple message to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick" (Jn. 11:1-3). Now John 11:5 tells us that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. They expected Him to come right away. But Jesus stayed where He was two more days, on purpose, and Lazarus died. Martha and Mary were convinced that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. When Jesus finally arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days (Jn. 11:4-17).

- When Martha was told that Jesus was coming, she went out in a hurry to meet Him, but Mary, overcome with sorrow, stayed at home. Martha repeated mournfully what she and Mary had said so often, "Lord if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Then she added, "But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask" (Jn. 11:18-22). Martha never lost her faith in her Lord. All was not lost!
- Jesus' reply to Martha was, "Your brother will rise again." But Martha could not quite comprehend the words of Jesus. She believed that her brother would rise on the Resurrection Day (at the Second Coming of Jesus). Then Jesus said to Martha one of the most marvelous things ever spoken by anyone, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live (again), even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die (never perish). Do you believe this?" Martha's answer was a remarkable confession of faith, even though she could not imagine the implication of her testimony, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, Who was to come into the World" (Jn. 11:23-27).
- What happened next is most moving. Martha had called Mary. She quickly came to meet Jesus and fell down at His feet, sobbing out, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus saw that Mary was crying and that the Jews who came with her were crying, He felt deeply sad and troubled. Then we read the shortest and most touching verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept" (Jn. 11:35). The Son of God was not ashamed to shed tears; He wept in sympathy for His friends. Surely His heart is always touched with our grief. What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear!"
- The sisters and all who had come to mourn saw Jesus weeping, so the Jews said, "See how much He loved him." But some of them said, "If He opened the eyes of the blind man, why couldn't He keep Lazarus from dying" (Jn. 11:36-37)?

The Raising of Lazarus

- Now Jesus went out to the cemetery where Lazarus' tomb was. The tomb was a cave with a large stone covering the entrance. Jesus said, "Move the stone away." But Martha protested, "But, Lord, it has been four days since he died. There will be a bad smell." And Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God" (Jn. 11:38-40)?
- So the people rolled the stone aside. And Jesus looked up and prayed. Then He shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" Immediately death released its prey! The dead man came out and stood before them alive (Jn. 11:40-44)! Some one has said that if Jesus had not used the name of Lazarus, every dead body in that cemetery would have come forth; so great was the power of Jesus, the Son of God, even death was powerless to resist!

The Supper and the Anointing (Read Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Jn. 12:1-11)

- A few days later (six days before Jesus' death), Jesus and His disciples returned to Bethany where Martha prepared a banquet in honor of the Master, in the house of Simon, formerly a leper, but was healed by Jesus and converted. Lazarus and his two sisters were there. Again it was Martha who served. She always wanted to serve the Lord with her best. She was a beautiful woman of hospitality. Her devotion and love for the Lord had grown deeper and stronger toward the end of Jesus' earthly life.

- While Jesus and others were sitting at the table, Mary, who loved the Lord above all, according to Matthew 26:7, took an A'labas'tar jar (a jar or vase made of onyx marble) of very expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' head; according to John 12:3, Mary took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, and poured it on Jesus' feet. So we know that Mary not only followed the custom in those days to anoint with oil the head of an honored guest, but lavishly poured the precious perfume on the feet of the Lord. And then, in deepest humility, she knelt down and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair.
- The perfume was very costly. The amount in Mary's alabaster jar represented the wages of an ordinary workman for a whole year. It was too costly for her own use, but it was not costly for her Lord. She took the most precious thing a woman possessed, and poured it all on Jesus as a testimony of her deep affection for her Lord. Then we read that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
- But one of Jesus' disciple, Judas Iscar'iot who was to betray Him, complained, "That perfume was worth a fortune. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Jesus replied, Matt. 26:10-13, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to Me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have Me... She did it to prepare Me for burial. I tell you... wherever this Gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."
- Note: Don't confuse the woman mentioned in Luke 7:36-39 with Mary of Bethany. Though both anointed Jesus, they were two different individuals.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Martha showed her love by the work of her hands. She was an active and outgoing person. Mary was more meditative and quiet by nature. Both loved the Lord deeply, and both offered their best to Him. The two would make a good combination to complete the Christian character. The Lord needs both types of followers, serving and listening to Him, with true love and undivided devotion.
2. The Lord Jesus said about Mary (Matt. 26:10-13; Mk. 14:3-9), "...What she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Why does Mary deserve such high praise? Mary was the only one, with her fine intuitive of love, sensed that her Master's time on earth was drawing to an end. "I will beat death to Him," she vowed unconsciously, "I will anoint Him before death arrives." And so she did. She broke the alabaster jar of perfume and poured it on Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair, as a symbol of her total devotion to the One she loved with all her heart and life. The ointment or perfume was costly, but she spent it all on Jesus. Love is not love if it nicely calculates the cost. Love gives its all; and love's only regret is that it has not still more to give. In those last days of Jesus' earthly life, there was so much hatred, so much bitterness, so much treachery and tragedy, but Mary's act of love must undoubtedly have brought great comfort to the bleeding heart of the Lord. Oh, how she loved Jesus! What a beautiful thing she had done for her dearly beloved Lord, the Son of God, her Savior!

I wonder how much do we really love the Lord?

Memory Bible Verse: Matthew 26:13, "I tell you the truth, wherever this Gospel is preached throughout the world, what she (Mary) has done will also be told, in memory of her."

LESSON 73

Lazarus of Bethany

Scripture References

- John 11:1-57; 12:1-19
- Note: Do not confuse Lazarus, the beggar, mentioned in Luke 16:19-31 with Lazarus of Bethany. They were two different persons.

A Beloved Friend of Jesus

- Lazarus was the youngest member of the family of Bethany, and the brother of Martha and Mary. He was a beloved friend of Jesus, for we read that the Lord loved him dearly (Jn. 11:3, 5, 11, 36). And he was greatly loved by his two sisters, Martha and Mary (cf. Jn. 11:21,32) - this speaks well for his character.
- Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem. Scripture indicates that Jesus often stayed in this home while in the Jerusalem area. Matthew 21:17 says, "And Jesus left and went out of the city (Jerusalem) to Bethany, where He spent the night." In the early morning, He and His disciples walk into the city of Jerusalem where He would teach during the day and then return at night to Bethany. John 11:5 tells us that the Lord Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. He must have spent many hours of sweet fellowship with His dear friends and felt quite at home in their house (cf. Lk. 10:38-42).

The Sickness and Death of Lazarus

- One day Jesus was away from Jerusalem, Lazarus fell critically ill. The sisters sent a message to Jesus, saying, "Lord, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard about it, He said, "This sickness will not end in death. It is for the glory of God. This has happened to bring glory to the Son of God" (Jn. 11:1-4). Here Jesus made it clear that the sickness came upon Lazarus for the specific purpose of glorifying God, that is, that He might be glorified as He planned to bring Lazarus back to life and health.
- It seems that the Lord deliberately lingered two days after the messenger left Him. Jesus was over beyond the Jordan River then (See Jn. 10:40). The messenger would need a day or more to reach Him, and Jesus would take one or two days in arriving at Bethany after He had waited two days. In other words, Jesus waited until Lazarus had died for four days (Jn. 11:6,17).
- Before Jesus started going back to Bethany, He confided the news to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." The disciple thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply resting and would awake. So Jesus said plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sake that I was not there so that you may believe. But let us go to him now" (Jn. 11:11-15). Here Jesus called death of a child of God "sleep." When a child of God dies, his body sleeps a little while, and his spirit goes immediately to be with the Lord. Then at His Second Coming, He will raise him up (with all other dead believers) and give him a glorious new body to live with Him forever (cf. Dan. 12:2; Jn. 5:25; I Cor. 15:51-57; I Thess. 4:13-18).
- Lazarus was not dead, but asleep. The Lord Jesus purposely allowed His friend Lazarus to die;

then He would raise him from the dead, so that His disciples (and the world) might witness His mighty power as the Son of God and believe in Him.

The Raising of Lazarus

- When Jesus arrived at the outskirts of Bethany, after Lazarus had been dead and in the tomb for four days, He was met by Martha. In His brief conversation with her, the Lord consoled the broken-hearted sister that her brother would rise and live again. Then He declared, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will have life even if he dies. And he who lives and believes in Me will never die (never perish)" (Jn. 11:17-26).
- Next we see a tearful Mary coming to meet Jesus. When Jesus saw that the two sisters were weeping and that their friends were weeping, He wept with them (Jn. 11:33-35). His tender heart was deeply touched with their griefs.
- Then Jesus went with them to the cemetery where Lazarus' tomb was. First, He told the people to move the stone away from the entrance, then He offered a prayer, then He cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came hobbling out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave clothes, and a cloth around his face. "Untie him," Jesus told the bystanders, "and let him go" (Jn. 11:38-44). Dwight L. Moody, the great American evangelist of late 19th century, remarked that if Jesus had not called Lazarus by name, all the dead in that cemetery would have come forth. The Lord spoke His word with absolute authority, even death yielded to His command!
- Note: The people of Israel usually buried their dead in either natural or man-made caves which were cut in walls of rock. The body of the dead person was usually washed (Acts 9:37), then anointed with oil or spices and wrapped in linen, and then placed on a stone slab (a stone bed) inside the tomb. The entrance to the tomb was sealed with a large rolling stone (Gen. 23:9; Matt. 27:58-60; Mk. 15:43-46; Lk. 23:52-53; Jn. 11:38-44; 19:38-42). Many large tombs were made to accommodate two or more bodies.

The Effect of the Raising of Lazarus

- The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was the greatest and most startling miracle of the Gospel story. It demonstrated Christ's supernatural power over death. The effect of this miracle was profound. On the one hand many Jews who witnessed what Jesus did believed in Him (Jn. 11:45), on the other hand it brought the religious leaders, the chief priests and Pharisees, to a final decision to destroy Jesus, for they saw that Jesus' popularity was a threat to them (Jn. 11:46-53).
- A few days later, a banquet was given in Jesus' honor in the house of Simon the leper (a leper who was healed by Jesus) in Bethany. Lazarus was one of those at the table with Him. A large crowd came to see Him and also to see Lazarus - the man who had come back to life again. Then the chief priests decided to put Lazarus also to death, because on account of Lazarus many Jews believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:1-2, 9-11).
- The plot to kill Lazarus was apparently not carried out. This is the last mention of Lazarus in the Scripture. According to an old tradition, Lazarus was thirty years old when Jesus raised him from the dead, and lived thirty years longer after.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. In John 11:35, we read that Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. Why did Jesus weep? He knew that in a few minutes He would call Lazarus out of the grave. He was not weeping in personal sorrow over the death of Lazarus, for He Himself planned it for the glory of God. Oh, but He was weeping over the sorrow of Martha and Mary and their friends. The Lord Jesus weeps with all his broken-hearted children. He takes our suffering on Him and feels our pains for us; He is always touched with our griefs. What a compassionate Savior we have!
2. Though the religious leaders of the Jews witnessed the great miracle of Lazarus coming from death back to life, still they resisted to believe in Jesus. Rather than accept the evidence and humbly submit to God, they tried to destroy the evidence by killing Lazarus besides their plans to put Jesus to death. Miracles have little effect on those who have made up their mind to choose not to believe God.

Memory Bible Verses:

John 11:23-27, Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, Who was to come into the world."

LESSON 74

Judas Iscariot

Scripture References

- Matthew 10:1-4; 26:14-25, 47-55; 27:3-10; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; John 6:66-71; 12:1-8; 13:1-30; Acts 1:15-26

Judas Called to Be an Apostle

- Ju'das Isca'rot, the son of Si'mon Iscariot, was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, who betrayed his Master. We know nothing of Judas previous to his call, and yet his name appears in three of the lists of the twelve apostles, although his name is always mentioned last (Matt. 10:1-4; Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16).
- All four Gospels refer to him as Judas Iscariot to distinguish him from another of the twelve apostles who was also named Judas (Lk. 6:16; Jn. 14:22). The term Iscariot in Hebrew means "man of Ke'rioth," a small town in the tribe of Judah, located in the south of Jerusalem (Josh. 15:25). Thus, Judas was a Judean, the only one of the Twelve who came from Judea, while the other eleven were all from Galilee.
- Judas may have joined the group from mixed motives; he probably expected that Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom, that he would have a high place in that kingdom. On the other hand, Jesus must have seen promise and potentialities in Judas, or He would not have called him to be a disciple.
- At first, Judas responded to the Master's call to follow Him in all sincerity; for he had been deeply impressed by Jesus' teaching, and especially the miracles He performed. It must have seem to Judas that this Jesus was the Man for him and for his people; and the time had come to free them from Rome's rule, and restore Israel as an independent nation.

Judas Chosen as Treasurer

- As the twelve apostles traveled with Jesus from place to place, they received generous financial support, besides large offerings to distribute to the poor; it became necessary that one of them should be in charge of the funds of the group. Judas, because of his cleverness, was chosen as their treasurer (Lk. 8:1-3; Jn. 12:4-6; 13:29). And Judas suddenly found himself entrusted with larger sums of money than before.
- Shortly afterwards, Judas' dream of gaining a prominent position in his own imagined concept of the coming kingdom was shattered, as Jesus insisted on foretelling His death and suffering instead of receiving His Kingdom (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mk. 8:31-32; 9:30-32; Lk. 17:25; 18:31-34). Disillusioned and disappointed, he began to steal money entrusted to him for his personal use; he became a thief (Jn. 12:4-6).

Judas, a Thief and Devil

- In the course of time, Judas had become an embittered man. When Mary of Bethany in her affection for Jesus broke the alabaster jar of precious perfume or anointment and anointed Him,

Judas bitterly disapproved her action, "Why, wasn't this perfume sold, and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages" (Jn. 12:4-5). He was so blind that he saw no beauty in Mary's loving heart, no meaning in her sacrifice, and no pathos in the knowledge it expressed. He saw only that which he had fitted himself to see. The next verse, John 12:6, tells us that Judas had no concern for the poor but that he was the treasurer of the group and a thief. He wanted to get his hands on the money.

- The Lord Jesus had earlier detected the evil in Judas' heart. In John 6:66-71, we read that at one time many of His followers turned away and deserted Him; then Jesus said sadly to the Twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Having received assurance of faithfulness from them through Peter, Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" He was talking about Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, but later he was to betray Him.

Judas' Betrayal of Jesus

- When Judas protested Mary's use of the costly perfume to anoint Jesus, he was reproved by the Lord; but the rebuke brought resentment and bitterness to his heart, and he went to the chief priests and offered to betray his Master to them for a price. And they gave him thirty silver coins, a price for a slave. From that time on, he watched for an opportunity to betray Jesus to them (Ex. 21:32; Matt. 26:14-16; Mk. 14:10-11; Lk. 22:3-6; Jn. 12:1-6).
- Judas seemed to have well concealed his hypocrisy and treachery, for we found him with Jesus and the other apostles at the Passover Supper. During the meal Jesus solemnly announced that one of them would betray Him and that He knew who His betrayer was; and that it would be better for that person if he had not been born. But the other disciples still did not suspect Judas to be the culprit. Then Jesus said to Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly." And Judas left immediately. The other disciples thought that Judas was their treasurer, Jesus was telling him to go and pay for the food or to give some money to the poor" (Matt. 26:20-24; Mk. 14:17-21; Jn. 13:21-30).
- In the middle of the night, after the Passover Supper, and under the cover of the darkness, Judas led a large group of soldiers and officers from the chief priests and the elders to the Garden of Gethsemane. There they found Jesus kneeling among a row of trees and praying. And Judas went forward and identified the One to be arrested by a kiss (Matt. 26:47-56; Mk. 14:43-50; Lk. 22:50; Jn. 18:2-11). But Jesus replied that kiss with a stern reproach, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss" (Lk. 22:47-48)? Then the mob seized Jesus and bound Him and brought Him to the chief priests to be tried (Matt. 26:57; Mk. 14:53; Jn. 18:12).

Judas' Remorse and Death

- That very night Jesus was condemned by the Jewish religious court. Realizing that he had sold his Master and betrayed innocent blood, Judas awoke to the enormity of his guilt. In deep remorse he tried to return the money to the priests, but they only jeered and laughed at him. Then he cast down the silver coins in the Temple and went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:3-5); and he fell headlong, his body burst open, spilling out his bowels (Acts 1:18). His death has become a horrible reminder to all who would trample God's grace and reject His love.
- Judas Iscariot requited love with betrayal and went to the place (hell) where he belonged. His

place among the Twelve was replaced by Matthe'as (Acts 1:20-26).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. It is difficult to understand why Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus. Here was a man who walk with Jesus every day for three and one-half years. He heard all of His great sermons. He saw Him perform mighty miracles. He witnessed a perfect, pure and holy life in Jesus. He knew His compassion for sinners. He saw Him forgive harlots, receive the outcasts, give hope to the hopeless, and preach the Gospel to the poor. He knew when Jesus wept and prayed for the lost. He knew the compassionate heart of Jesus. He had once been enlightened. He had tasted the goodness of the Lord and felt the mighty power of God. Yet, he remained a hypocrite and hardened sinner until the end of the way. He had never experienced a real change on the inside through the Holy Spirit. So today a man can be brought up in a Christian home, he can go to church and hear the Gospel; he can associate with Christian people, and take part in the services. He can teach and preach and yet lands in hell. There is only one necessity for every man - Jesus said, "You must be born again" (Jn. 3:3,5).
2. When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned to die, he was conscience stricken. He deeply regretted what he had done. He tried to ease his guilty conscience by confessing his wrong to the high priests and throwing the money into the Temple; then he went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:1-5). Judas confessed to the wrong party, to those who could not grant forgiveness. He did not humble himself before God and confess his sins, instead he turned away farther from God and committed another sin, suicide.

Peter denied the Lord three times, and he wept bitterly in deep remorse (Matt. 26:69-75). He proved his repentance to be sincere and true by serving the Lord faithfully ever after. Judas proved his repentance to be false by immediately committing suicide.

Memory Bible Verses: Hebrews 10:26-27, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a dreadful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

LESSON 75

Simon Peter - Part I

Scripture References

- John 1:35-42; Matthew 4:18-22; 10:1-16; 16:13-23; 17:1-8; 26:30-35, 69-75; Mark 16:6-7; Luke 24:33-35; John 20:1-9; 21:1-19; Acts 1: through 12:

Family Background

- Simon was his original name; Peter was his new name given to him by Jesus. He was the son of John (Jn. 1:42; 21:15,16). His father was also called Jonah (Matt. 16:17). Peter was from the town of Bethsa'ida (Jn. 1:44); he also had a home in Caper'naum, which became a base for Jesus during His ministry in Galilee (Matt. 8:5, 14; Mk. 1:21,29; 2:1).
- Peter was a married man, because we read in the Gospels that Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14-17; Mk. 1:29-31; Lk. 4:38-39); and the apostle Paul said in I Cor. 9:5 that Peter's wife accompanied him on his missionary trips. He and his brother Andrew were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:18; Mk. 1:16) and partners with another pair of brothers, James and John (Lk. 5:1-7). Evidently these four were all vigorous, industrious, and successful fishermen with ships and equipment, making a good living.

Peter's Call

- At first Peter, Andrew, James, and John were disciples of John the Baptist. They temporarily attached themselves to the Baptist. They were just waiting for the coming of Messiah Whom John talked about (Matt. 3:11-12; Mk. 1:6-8; Lk. 3:15-17; Jn. 1:19-34).
- When John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to Andrew as the Lamb of God, he went to find his brother Peter and told him with excitement, "We have found the Messiah (which means Christ)" And he brought Peter to Jesus. And Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Ce'phas - which means Peter the rock (Jn. 1:35-42).
- Note: The old name of Simon means "hearing," indicating something vacillating and unstable. The new name of Cephias (in Arama'ic which is closely related to Hebrew) or Peter (in Greek) means a rock or stone, something solid and stable.
- Shortly afterwards, Jesus called Peter and Andrew to follow Him to become "fishers of men." They were soon joined by James and John (Matt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:4-11). When Jesus later selected twelve men from among His followers and set them apart as twelve apostles, Peter was the first to be named apostle. In fact, his name appears at the head of every list of the Twelve in the New Testament (Matt. 10:2-4; Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-16; Acts 1:12-13).

Leader and Spokesman

- From the beginning Peter was a dominant personality among the apostles. He was energetic, self-confident, aggressive and decisive. He often acted as the spokesman for the Twelve (Matt. 16:13-16; Mk. 10:28; Lk. 12:41; Jn. 6:66-69; Acts 1:15-22, etc.). Sometimes when he spoke rashly or acted on impulse, he was rebuked by the Lord (Matt. 16:21-23; Jn. 13:6-8; 18:10-11),

but he never lost heart. He remained steadfastly a loyal and faithful follower of Jesus.

- On one occasion, the disciples were in a boat in the midst of the sea tossed with waves. Then they saw Jesus walking on the water toward them; Peter wanted to do it too. With Jesus' permission he left the boat and walked on the water to the Master; but when he saw the wind and the waves, he lost his confidence and began to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" Quickly Jesus reached out His hand and caught him, He chided him, saying, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind became calm. Then Peter, together with those who were in the boat, worshipped Jesus and said, "Truly You are the Son of God" (Matt. 14:22-33).
- Later, as the ministry of Jesus progressed, Peter, James and John formed an inner circle among the Twelve. Peter was also the leader of this special group. They were the only three allowed to witness the raising of Ja'irus' daughter from the dead (Mk. 5:35-43; Lk. 8:49-56); these three were with Jesus at His transfiguration on the mountain (Matt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36); and they stayed nearest to Jesus during His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Mk. 14:32-42; Lk. 22:39-53). They were the three most intimate disciples of Jesus.

Peter's Confession

- Peter had already accepted Jesus as the Messiah when he first followed Jesus (Jn. 1:41-42). About a year and a half later Jesus performed a spectacular miracle by feeding 5,000 men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two fish (Matt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:30-44; Lk. 9:12-17; Jn. 6:1-13). The people were deeply impressed and want to make Him their king (Jn. 6:14-15). Then Jesus preached a sermon on the Bread of Life; He told them that the real purpose of His coming into the world was to save men's souls. The crowds began to lose interest; many of them turned away and deserted Him. Then Jesus sadly said to the Twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Again Peter acted as the group's spokesman and promptly replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:25-71).
 - One day, a year after Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Holy One of God, Jesus and His disciples were in the region of Cae'sare'a He asked the disciples, "Who do men say the Son of Man is?" "Well," they replied, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; Some, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets" (Matt. 16:13-14). The question of Jesus was not because He did not know what people said, but rather, evidently, to test the disciples. Most people admitted that Jesus was a prophet, or someone special; but they did not believe He was the Messiah, the Son of God and the Savior of the world.
 - Now Jesus brought the question right home to the disciples, "Who do you think I am?" We can imagine that all the disciples looked toward Peter, their spokesman. Without hesitation Peter answered, "You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16). Peter's confession of Christ's deity and Messiahship has become the foundation of the Christian Church, for Jesus made the declaration, which was so often misunderstood, "... I tell you that you are Peter (a stone), and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades (or hell) will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:17-19).
- ? Jesus was simply saying here that the church was to be built upon what Peter had said in

confessing Him as Messiah. The Church was not to be built on Peter, though his name meant a rock, a small stone. The "Rock" was not Peter, but the "Truth" to which he confessed; the Church was to be built upon the fact that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Living God Who is the Bedrock. The apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 3:11, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Simon Peter has been called "The Big Fisherman" because of his outstanding leadership in the early Christian Church. He was the most prominent of Jesus' twelve apostles. He was a pioneer in the early establishment of Christ's Church. He first came to know Jesus through his brother Andrew. We are glad that Andrew led Peter to Christ (Jn. 1:40-42). He might have lived and died a fisherman on the Sea of the Galilee. Instead he became one of Christ's mightiest servants, winning thousands to Christ.

Have you ever led anyone to Christ?

2. The old name of Simon meant something vacillating and unsteady. Jesus gave him a new name Peter which meant a rock or stone. Peter's own nature was unstable and impulsive; but when Jesus finished with him, he was molded and made a new creation in Christ fit for the Lord's work.

The Lord Jesus will make us useful in His Church if we humbly ask Him to mold and make us after His will.

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 16:13-16, When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

LESSON 76

Simon Peter - Part II

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

- Immediately after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16), Jesus said to him, "... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:19).
- The key is often used in Scripture as a symbol of power and authority (Isa. 22:22; Matt. 16:19; Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1). The keys mentioned in Matt. 16:19 seemed to mean that Peter was given the opportunity of preaching first, at Pentecost, to the Jews (Acts 2:14-41), and that he was also given the opportunity of preaching first to the Gentiles, the Roman centurion Corne'lius and his household (Acts 10:) after the resurrection of Christ.
- Peter was not given the authority to forgive sins. No one can forgive sins but Jesus alone (Matt. 9:2-8; Mk. 2:3-12; I Jn. 2:5-6). The keys of the kingdom of heaven were not given to Peter alone. They were for all of the apostles and for the church in all ages (Matt. 18:18; Jn. 20:21-23). The Church of Jesus Christ has been given the great commission to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mk. 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20); and then the Church would base upon the authority of Jesus Christ to pronounce that "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:16; Matt. 18:18; Jn.20:23).

Peter's Denial of Jesus

- At the Last Supper in the Upper Room, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus announced that one of His disciples (Judas Iscariot) would betray Him (Matt. 26:20-21; Mk. 14:17-18; Lk. 22:21-23; Jn. 13:10-11,21-30). He also said to them, "This very night you will all fall away..." (Matt. 26:31; Mk. 14:27). But Peter blurred out, "Though they all fall away because of You, I will never fall away." And Jesus sadly replied, "I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows in the morning, you will deny (disown) Me three times." Again Peter declared, "Even I have to die with You, I will never deny You." And all the other disciples said the same (Matt. 26:33-35; Mk. 14:29-31; Lk. 22:33-34; Jn. 13:36-38).
- Poor Simon Peter, he meant well; he loved the Lord and never intended to deny Him. But he trusted only in the flesh; he boasted about his own strength. Shortly afterwards he failed his Lord miserably in an hour of crisis.
- All the disciples had fled when Jesus was arrested by the enemies, but Peter, along with John, followed Jesus at a distance to the courtyard of the high priest's palace. And while Jesus was being tried and beaten on the inside of the palace, Peter mingled with the guards in the courtyard warming himself at the fire. While he was there he was accused three times of being a follower of Jesus. He denied it each time. Finally he lost his temper, swore like a fisherman and said, "I tell you, I don't know this man Jesus!" Immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered what Jesus had told him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny (disown) Me three times." And just about this time Jesus turned and took a look at Peter. It was not a look of hatred, but one of love and forgiveness. Now he realized what he had done; and the big fisherman went out and wept like a baby (Matt. 26:57-75; Mk. 14:50-72; Lk. 22:54-62; Jn. 18:12-27).

A Broken and Contrite Heart and Bitter Tears

- During the Supper in the Upper Room, Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to shift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Lk. 22:31-32).
- From the beginning Simon Peter seemed to have a special place in Jesus' affections and expectations. He was one of the inner circle of the three apostles to whom Jesus turned frequently as most trusted friends and closest companions (Matt. 17:1-8; 26:36-46; Mk. 5:35-37; 9:1-8; 14:32-42; Lk. 8:49-51; 9:28-36). He was the first apostle who made the great confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon..., for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven..." (Matt. 16:13-17).
- Peter twice declared his loyalty to Jesus. In Jn. 6:68, he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You are the Holy One of God." Then at the Last Supper in the Upper Room Peter declared again, "Though they all fall away..., I will never fall away" (Matt. 26:33; Mk. 14:29; Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). After Jesus was arrested, the other disciples fled and forsook their Master. But Peter still followed Him even though at a distance. It was true that Peter failed; but he failed in the high priest's courtyard where the others dare not set foot. Whatever happened that night, Peter did sincerely repent of his sins. And with a broken and contrite heart he shed bitter tears; and wept his way back to the feet of the Lord.

Restoration and Recommission

- On the resurrection morning, the Risen Lord graciously remembered His erring disciple Peter. He appeared to Peter first before He appeared to the rest of the apostles (Lk. 24:33-34; I Cor. 15:5; cf. Mk. 16:6-7).
- A few days later, the disciples returned to Galilee as directed by the Lord (Matt. 28:7; Mk. 16:7). The Lord had told them to meet Him on a certain mountain (Matt. 28:16), and at a certain time. While waiting, Peter and other six disciples went out upon the Sea of Tibe'rias (same as the Sea of Galilee) and fished all night. When morning broke, Jesus appeared to them on the shore (Jn. 21:1-4).
- Here, by the Sea of Galilee, the Lord had an important conversation with Peter. He asked Peter three times the same question. The first question was: "..., do you truly love Me more than these (these other disciples)?" Peter had said before, "Though they all fall away because of You, I will never fall away" (Matt. 26:33; Mk. 14:29). Peter made no boast now but humbly said, "Lord You know that I love You." Then Jesus said to him, "Feed My lambs (the weakest and little ones in the flock)." Again the Lord came back with the same question, "..., do you truly love Me?" And again Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." This time Jesus said to him, "Take care My sheep (My people)." Then the Lord asked the third time, "Do you love Me - Do you really love Me at all?" Three times Peter had denied Christ, and now three times he was called upon to confess his love for Christ (Jn. 21:15-17).
- We are told that Peter felt hurt (grieved) because Jesus asked him this question the third time. He was deeply sorrowful as he remembered how he denied the Lord. His word showed his deep

penitence, "Lord, You know all things; I remembered the way I treated You and I am genuinely sorry. Never again will I deny You in any way. You can see my heart. You know that it is overflowing with love for You." Again Jesus told him, "Feed My sheep (My people)" (Jn. 21:17).

- Now in accepting Peter's statement and entrusting to him the care of His lambs and sheep, the Lord showed that He had freely forgiven and fully restored Peter to the Lord's work; He re-commissioned him to preach the Gospel and to care for His people.
- At the same time the Lord told Peter that life ahead of him was not going to be a bed of roses. Troubles, hardships and persecutions would beset him along the way, and he would finally die a martyr's death (Jn. 21:18-19). But this time Peter was determined to take up his cross and follow Jesus to the end.

What Have We Learned Today?

- * Peter denied the Lord, cursing and swearing like a drunken and unbelieving fisherman. But not one of us can condemn Peter. If we were in his shoes, we would have probably done worse things. We must remember also that the other disciples had already abandoned Jesus; but Peter still followed Him, even though at a distance, to the high priest's courtyard where the others dared not set foot. None of us is perfect. So then let us on the one hand deal tenderly with Christians who fall into sins, and on the other hand let us take heed lest we ourselves, being tempted, fall into the same sins.
- The remarkable thing was that Christ never gave up on Peter. In spite of his failure, the Lord loved him back and restored him to a place of usefulness. If you fall, the Lord still loves you; He wants you to come back to follow him and enjoy His blessings.

Memory Bible Verse: I Corinthians 10:12, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

Assignment for Lesson 76

Simon Peter - Part II

Scripture Readings: Matthew 16:13-20; 26:30-35,69-75; Mark 14:26-31,66-72; Luke 22:31-34,54-62; John 18:15-27; 21:1-19

1. What does the word "Key" stand for in the Scriptures? (Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:19; Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1)
What did Jesus mean when He said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19)?

2. Was Peter alone given the keys of the kingdom of heaven? (Matthew 18:18; John 20:21-23; cf. Mark 16:16).

3. How many times did Peter deny (disown) Jesus? How and why did he deny Jesus? What happened to him after he denied the Lord? (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:15-18,25-27)

4. Why did Jesus, after His resurrection, ask Peter the same question three times? What was the question? (John 21:1-19)

Memory Bible Verse: I Corinthians 10:12

LESSON 77

Simon Peter - Part III

Peter and the Early Church

- After the ascension of Christ, Peter assumed the leadership role among the early disciples. Since Judas Iscariot was dead, Peter suggested that another qualified disciple be selected to fill his place; accordingly Matthi'as was chosen and added to the eleven apostles (Acts 1:15-26).
- Seven weeks had gone by since Jesus' resurrection, and the Day of Pentecost (the Feast of Harvest) had arrived. The disciples, about 120 of them, were all together in one place (Acts 2:1; cf. 1:15). Suddenly a roaring sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where there were worshiping and praying. And the disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in languages which they didn't know, for the Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak different languages, telling the assembled crowd about the mighty works of God (Acts 2:2-12).
- The coming of the Holy Spirit into the world, which marked the birthday of the Christian Church, was to take Christ's place on earth to do His work until He comes again. On that same day Peter preached a Spirit-empowered sermon. As a result of his message, 3,000 souls were added to the newborn church (Acts 2:14-41).

Miracles Performed by Peter

- One day Peter and John went to the Temple to attend the daily prayer meeting. Peter performed his first miracle right at the Temple Gate by healing a lame man from birth in the name of Jesus Christ. When the people saw what happened to the crippled man, they ran up to Peter and John, looking upon them in amazement and wonder. Peter, then, preached his second sermon to the crowd, exhorting them to repent and turn to God, so that their sins might be wiped out..." (Acts 3:1-26).
- As a result of this miracle and Peter's preaching, he was arrested and persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders. But many of the people who witnessed the miracle and heard the message believed; and the number of believers grew to about 5,000 (Acts 4:1-4). No longer did Peter fail the Master. He boldly bore witness to the saving power of the risen Christ, and unashamedly declared his allegiance to the Savior before the authorities (Acts 4:5-12).
- Peter continued to play a key leadership role in the early church. It was he who exposed the hypocrisy of Anani'as and Sapphi'ra (pronounced safi'ra) and passed judgment on them (Acts 5:1-11).
- The apostles did many signs and miracles among the people. More and more men and women believed in the Lord. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on them. They brought their sick and those possessed by demons; and every one of them was healed (Acts 5:12-16).
- Later Peter and John were sent by the apostolic group in Jerusalem to Sama'tia to help new converts there. They laid hands on them and prayed for them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

- As Peter traveled from place to place, he visited the saints (Christians) in Lydda. There he met a man named Aeneas (read: ene'as), paralyzed and bed-ridden for eight years; and Peter healed him in Jesus' name. As a result, the whole region was converted to Christ (Acts 9:32-35).
- Afterwards he went to Jo'ppa and there he raised Dor'cas from the dead. When this became known all over Joppa, many people believed in the Lord. And Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with a tanner (a leather worker) named Simon (Acts 9:36-43).

The Opening of the Door to the Gentiles

- Peter was the first apostle to preach salvation to the Gentiles. While staying in Joppa, he was commanded by God in a vision to visit a Roman centurion (a captain of the Roman army) named Cornel'ius in Caesarea. Cornel'ius was a converted Gentile, a godly man, attended synagogue services, prayed daily and gave money to the poor. While Peter was preaching to him and his relatives and close friends, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. And without hesitation, Peter baptized them in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:1-48; cf. 15:7-8).
- The conversion of Cornelius, along with his relatives and friends, showed that God accepted the Gentiles as He did the Jews; He granted His saving grace to both without distinction (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-18).
- When King Herod began to persecute the believers, he killed the apostle James, the brother of John. He also arrested Peter and put him in jail under the guard of 16 soldiers. But the church kept on praying to God for him. The night before he was to be executed, the Lord sent an angel to him and miraculously delivered him (Acts 12:1-11).

Peter's Later Life

- After his miraculous deliverance, Peter dropped into the background. Beginning with the 13th chapter of the Acts, Paul emerged as the apostle to the Gentiles; nevertheless, Peter still retained his rank as the chief apostle and remained a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9).
- Peter was last mentioned at the meeting in Jerusalem where the apostles and elders gathered to consider the question whether Gentile converts should be circumcised. Peter took the lead in the discussion; he contended that all were saved by grace, and that circumcision was not necessary for Gentile (non-Jewish) believers. His statement was unanimously accepted by all, and the question was settled (Acts 15:5-22).
- It seemed that in later year Peter traveled widely with his wife, doing evangelistic work among the Jews (I Cor. 9:5; Gal. 2:9). During this time Mark worked closely with him, and took time to record the story of Jesus (the Gospel of Mark) as told by Peter. In fact, Peter regarded Mark as his "son" (I Pet. 5:13).
- Peter wrote two letters, apparently from Rome, shortly before his martyrdom. In the first letter he sought to strengthen believers in their suffering for Christ's sake (I Pet. 3:13-5:10), while in the second letter he warned believers against false teachers (II Pet. 2:1-22), and concluded with an appeal for holy living in anticipation of Christ's return (II Pet. 3:1-18).

- According to reliable tradition, Peter was in Rome in his old age, laboring for his Lord. He was crucified during the time of the great persecution under Nero the Roman Emperor in A.D. 67 or 68. It was said that Peter was crucified with his head downward at his own request, for he deemed himself unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord had.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Simon Peter's life was so colorful and interesting. He was often on the mountaintop and often in the valley. He seems more human than any other Bible character. In the Gospels, he was the man who appeared to be eager, ardent, impulsive, self-confident, aggressive, daring, dominant, and unstable. He was always a man of action in the apostolic circle, often rash and inconsistent; and he even denied his Lord in three rounds of denials. But Peter also exhibited his tremendous possibilities and capabilities through his deep love for and undying devotion to Christ. He had the glorious privilege of walking with Jesus for three and a half years; and finally, as he stands out before us in the Book of Acts, he had been transformed and molded by the Lord into a man of stability, humility, and courageous service for Lord, becoming one of the greatest and most noble disciples of Christ. What a wonder the Lord had wrought in the life of Peter!
2. The story of Simon Peter teaches us that all of us are human, liable to failure, and that God can transform and mold us into boys and girls, men and women of usefulness.

Memory Bible Verse: Jeremiah 32:27, "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for Me?"

LESSON 78

Stephen - the First Christian Martyr

Scripture References

- Acts 6:1-15; 7:1-60; 8:1-3; 11:19; 22:20

The Choosing of Seven Church Workers or Deacons

- Beginning with the Day of Pentecost, the early Church kept growing rapidly; the number of believers were increasing by leaps and bounds. There were two groups in the early Church, the Hebraic Jews (the Hebrews or native Jews) and the Grecian Jews or the Hell'enists (Greek-speaking Jews who were raised in a Greek culture outside Jerusalem). We read Acts 6:1-4 that the Greek-speaking Jews complained against the Hebrew-speaking Jews that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. Then the apostles suggested that seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom should be chosen from among the believers to look after the daily distribution to the poor in the church, so that the apostles could devote themselves to prayer, preaching and teaching.
- As a result, Stephen was chosen, along with six other men. Then these seven men were presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:5-6).
- The arrangement worked so well. The growth of the church continued and God's Word kept on spreading. The people were encouraged and the number of believers multiplied greatly in Jerusalem (Acts 6:7).

Opposition from the Jews

- Stephen's name means "a crown," signifying authority and victory. He was full of God's grace, and did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people (Acts 6:8).
- It soon became evident that Stephen was something more than an efficient administrator of relief or welfare worker. He was a gifted and dynamic preacher. This was what got him into trouble. We are told that some of the men who belonged to the Synagogue of the Freedmen started arguing with him. These people were so disturbed by Stephen, perhaps out of jealousy or envy. But they were not able to stand against Stephen's wisdom or the Spirit by Whom he spoke; he was clearly too much for them. Then they secretly hired some men to lie about him, saying, "We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God." The accusation spread, and Stephen was dragged before the San'hedrin (the highest Jewish religious court in the time of Jesus) which was intensely hostile toward him (Acts 6:9-12).

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

- As Stephen stood before the San'hedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court, charges were brought against him. False witnesses testified against him. But he was not dismayed. And the members of the court saw his face become as radiant as the face of an angel (Acts 6:13-15).

- Then Stephen was confronted with a direct question from the high priest, "are these charges true?" Thus they gave him a chance to speak; but he did not speak in his own behalf. He forgot his own danger and preached a lengthy and eloquent sermon to the Jewish religious leaders, which was recorded in detail in Acts 7:2-53.
- Let's look briefly at the content of his sermon:
 - (1) Verses 2 to 19 - Stephen began with Moses through Jacob, down to the time of the establishment in Egypt. This is the story of the development of the Hebrew race. He showed them that God from the beginning had seen leading, Israel to a definite goal.
 - (2) Verses 20 to 41 - This is the story of the leadership of Moses. Stephen showed them how God used Moses to bless Israel, and how Israel had turned away from the leadership of Moses in their own unbelief and rebellion. He told them in v.37 how Moses prophesied that God would send them a Prophet like him, even Jesus.
 - (3) Verses 42 to 43 - Stephen told of the constant recurring idolatry among the people which led to their captivity in Babylon.
 - (4) Verses 44 to 50 - He showed them that God never limited Himself to one location; God Himself was greater than any human building.
 - (5) Verses 51 to 53 - Stephen bitterly charged them with resisting, as their fathers had done, the Holy Spirit, with having murdered the Righteous One (the Christ) as their fathers had killed the prophets, and with failing to keep their own law.
 - (6) Stephen's speech enraged the Sanhedrin. They were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. On the other hand Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:54-55).

The Stoning of Stephen

- Stephen's fate was sealed when he declared, "Look, I see the heavens opened and Jesus standing beside God." At this point the crowd covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they rushed together upon him; they dragged him out the city to stone him (Acts 7:56-58).
- In striking contrast to the terrible madness of his enemies was the spirit shown by Stephen. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59-60). Thus, Stephen died in the spirit of His master, Lord Jesus. He died as the first Christian martyr.
- Among the people consenting to Stephen's death was a young man named Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, a great missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 7:58b; 8: 1).
- After the death of Stephen a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and all the believers, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. The result, however, was that Christianity spread throughout the region, as the believers preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went (Acts 8:4; 11: 19).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Stephen was not an apostle, nor a pastor, but a layman chosen to serve his Lord in the local church. As a man, he was "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5); as a lay preacher, "full of God's grace and power" (6:8); before the Sanhedrin, his enemies saw that his face like the face

of an angel" (6:15); as death came upon him, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (7:59); and his last words were uttered in a prayer for his enemies, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60).

Stephen had the spirit of his Master; he was a perfect example for us to follow.

2. Stephen knew the Word very well, as indicated in his sermon (Acts 7:2-53). He was a man used of God and died for his Lord. He lived and died a young man with a brief career of service like his Master before him. Yet so well and so fully did he live his life that his influence still lives on. He stills lives today in us, and in millions who have read the account of his faith in the Word of God. "... he still speaks, even though he is dead" (Heb. 11:4b).

Memory Bible Verses: Acts 7:59-60, While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

LESSON 79

Paul - Part I

Scripture References

- Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-31; 11:19-30; 13:-28;; I Corinthians 15:9-10; Galatians 1:13-16; Philippians 3:4-6; I Timothy 1:12-17

Personal History

- Paul, formerly Saul, first appeared as the archenemy of Christ. Prior to his conversion, he was the most notorious persecutor of the church. He was a scholar, he was brilliant. He was also a Jewish zealot who despised the very name of Jesus and did all he could to put to death all who called on His name. But God took hold of him and turned him around; and the most vicious persecutor became the greatest servant of Christ the world ever known.
- Paul was a man of marvelous personality and of the highest Christian experience. Through his evangelistic activity, church leadership, and extensive writings he had a unique role in the development of early Christian Church. He probably suffered more for Christ, work harder for Christ, and won more souls to Christ than any other Christians. There is nearly one-half of the New Testament devoted to his life and writings. It is impossible to sketch in a few pages the life and work of this great apostle. Here is only a brief summary of his life story in our next few lessons.
- Saul, which means "asked for" or "demand," was his Jewish name. He was a Jew, born near the beginning of the first century in the busy Cili'cia-Roman city of Tar'sus (Acts 21:39; 22:3), located at the NE corner of The Mediterra'nean Sea. The City was known for its manufacturing of goats' hair cloth, and here the young man Saul learned his trade as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1-3). Since Saul inherited from birth the privilege of Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-29), his father must have been a Roman citizen, though we know not how his father acquired his Roman citizenship. It may have been for service to the state or possibly by purchase. Saul's name was changed to a Roman name Paul (Acts 13:9) shortly after he began his preaching ministry. The word Paul means "little." Paul wanted to be known as the "Little One" in Christ's service.
- Though a Roman citizen, Paul was brought up in the strict manner of the Hebrew religion and traditions, since his father was a Pharisee Jew (Acts 23:6). He received a good education in Jerusalem under Gama'liel, the most learned and distinguished teacher of the law of the day (Acts 22:3; cf. 5:33-39). Paul grew up to speak, read and write Greek and Hebrew fluently (Acts 21:37,40). He must feel very proud of his Jewish heritage, for he described himself as "a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6), and "a Hebrew born of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5).

Persecution of Christians

- Saul first appeared as a persecutor of Christians. He was there looking after the men's clothes (outer garments) while they were throwing stones at Stephen; he was one of the men who was responsible for the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:5 8; 8:1). He was certainly glad to see Stephen die.

- Saul was probably, at that time, 30 years old. He took a leading part in the persecution of the Christians following Stephen's death. He entered house after house, dragged off men and women and put them in jail (Acts 8:3). His hatred of the new Christian religion was so intense that he not only despised their crucified Messiah, but regarded them as being both politically and religiously dangerous. And he had determined to blot out the name of Jesus of Nazareth, for in his later years he remembered with deep regret how he had persecuted the Church of God beyond measures (Acts 22:4; 26:9-11; I Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6; I Tim. 1:13).

The Conversion of Saul

- Owing to the persecution of the Church in Jerusalem, the believers were scattered everywhere; and they preached the Gospel wherever they went (Acts 8:1,4). The spread of Christians to foreign cities only made Saul all the more furious against them. He heard that there were many Christians in Damascus. so he asked the high priest to give him the authority to go after them, to arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem as prisoners. Damascus was the most important city in Syria, located northeast of the Sea of Galilee, 150 miles away from Jerusalem, and a journey of about six days in those days. It showed how overzealous Saul was to make this trip across the desert from Galilee to Damascus in order to persecute Christians there (Acts 9:1-2).
- Saul acted like a madman whose chief delight was the killing of Christians. But he sincerely believed that in persecuting them he was rendering the highest service to God. He was filled with fury, breathing threats and murder against the believers up to the very moment of his conversion.
- So Saul, armed with authority from the high priest, was on the way to 'Damas'cus to capture Christians. It was about noon when Saul was nearing Damas'cus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed down around him. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute Me?" And Saul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" The voice replied, "I am Jesus the One you are persecuting." The question asked here was not, "Why are you persecuting these Christians?" but, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Saul was persecuting Christians, but he was actually persecuting Christ (Acts 9:3-5).
- Now Saul at once realized how terribly wrong he was in persecuting Jesus; he surrendered immediately and completely, as he trembled before the Living Lord and humbly asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" "Get up," the Lord said, "and go into Damascus. There you will be told about all the things I have planned for you to do." The men who were with Saul stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. When Saul got up from the ground he found that he was blind. So the men led him by the hand into Damascus, where he stayed in the house of a certain Judas (Acts 9:6-9,11; 22:6-11).
- Saul was a poor figure as he was led into the city. For three days he remained blind, and did not eat or drink anything. He kept thinking about the heavenly vision which he encountered on the Damascus Road. He became a humble sinner before the Lord. With bitter tears and deep remorse he prayed for forgiveness (Acts 9:11) and asked, "What shall I do now, Lord?"
- On the third day, the Lord commanded a certain Jewish believer, named Anani'as, to go to lay hands on Saul that he might receive his sight. When Ananias hesitated, the Lord said to him, "Go and do what I say. For this man Saul is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the

Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for Me" (Acts 9:10-16).

- Anani'as obeyed. He found Saul and laid his hands on him. Immediately Saul received his sight. He confessed his faith in Jesus and was baptized. Then he stayed in Damascus for several days with a group of believers. These were the people who had enough love to forgive Saul because of the injury and murder he had committed against their fellow Christians. Now Saul had become one of them, and they ministered to one another.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen. To him, Stephen was an archenemy of his Jewish faith, so he was in complete agreement with the killing of Stephen. But he could never forget Stephen's dying testimony. He saw him dying so willingly for Jesus and heard him say that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he heard Stephen praying for God to forgive those stoning him. All this must have left an unforgettable impression on him. It may be, in part, at least, that Stephen's death was the price paid for Saul. And when time came, Saul was ready to make his surrender to Stephen's Lord.
2. Saul's dramatic experience on the Damas'cus changed him completely. He made his full surrender to Jesus as he asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" The rebellion was over! He called Jesus Lord, and willingly offered to do whatever the Lord Jesus commanded!

Have you made a full surrender to Jesus? Are you willing to do what He wants you to do?

Memory Bible Verses: I Timothy 1:12-13, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, Who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointing me to His service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief."

LESSON 80

Paul - Part II

Scripture References

- Acts 9:1-31; 11:19-26; 22:12-21; 26:9-18; Romans 9:1-5; 11:13; 15:14-16; Galatians 2:6-10

A New Creation in Christ

- After Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damas'cus, he was led into the city where he stayed in the house of a certain disciple named Judas. Saul was now at peace with the Lord Jesus; but he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drink. Anani'as, a disciple at Damascus, was told in a vision by the Lord, "Go to the house of Judas on straight Street, and enquire in the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying (Acts 9:3-11). For three days Saul was fasting, and praying, and meditating on the heavenly vision which he received on the Damascus Road.
- Ananias was fearful at first. He had heard reports about Saul, how he violently persecuted the disciples in Jerusalem and put many of them to death; and he had come to Damascus to arrest all believers and bring them back in chains to Jerusalem. Ananias did not know anything about Saul's conversion, but the Lord told him, "Go! This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name (Acts 9:13-16).
- Ananias responded immediately. He went to Saul and laid hands on him, and Saul regained his sight, and at once was baptized. A murderous persecutor had now become a humble disciple of Christ. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17). Saul had undergone a tremendous transformation. Ananias had the privilege of nurturing this spiritual "babe" in the first hours of his Christian life. Before long Saul would become the apostle Paul, a mighty Gospel preacher and great apostle to the Gentiles, who serve the Christ he had sought to destroy with a devotion unmatched in history. And Saul never tired of telling the story of his unique conversion experience on that Damascus Road (Acts 22:3-16; 26:9-18).

The Beginning of His Preaching Ministry

- After being baptized, Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus (Acts 9:19b). There he was in the little group of disciples, enjoying sweet fellowship, learning, growing, being nurtured and accepted. Soon Saul began to preach in the synagogue that Jesus was the Son of God. All the people were astonished by the sudden change when they heard him preach (Acts 9:20-22).
- Many days had gone by, the Jews in Damascus, aided by the city government, plotted to kill Saul. But one night some of his follower helped him leave the city. They lowered him on a basket through an opening in the city wall (Acts 9:23-25; II Cor. 11:32-33). Then he went to Ara'bia and afterward returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:15-17). We don't know where he went to Arabia, nor how long he stayed there.
- Three years after his conversion he returned to Jerusalem for a visit with Peter and the Lord's

brother James (Gal. 1:18-19). But the disciples there were afraid of him. They could not believe that the notorious persecutor had become a preacher. They still remembered vividly how Saul had destroyed their church and put many of them in prison, and even to death. Then Ba'nabab, one of leading disciples in Jerusalem, stepped in and took him to the apostles, and told them how Saul met the Lord on his journey, and how in Damascus he had courageously preached in the name of the Lord Jesus. So finally Saul was accepted and stayed with the disciples and preached boldly to the Greek-speaking Jews. But Saul faced opposition again, for the Jews viewed him as a major threat to their religion and tried to kill him. When his friends learned about this, they sent him to Tarsus, his own hometown (Acts 9:26-30).

His Call to Be an Apostle to the Gentiles

- One day shortly before Saul left Jerusalem, he was praying in the Temple, and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Get out of Jerusalem quickly. These people here will not listen to you.... Go; I will send you far away to preach to the Gentiles" (cf. Acts 22:17-21).
- So Saul, who was also called Paul (Acts 13:9), was clearly appointed "apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people)" by the Lord. Years later he wrote in Romans 11:13, "I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry..." Paul was obedient to God's command in all his missionary journeys. So always, though he began with Jews and preached in the Jewish synagogues wherever he could, it ended up in his preaching to the Gentiles and fulfilling the work God had appointed him to do. But his deep love for his own Jewish people never ceased. "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart for the Jews. I wish I could help my own people. I even wish that I were cursed and damned if that would save them" (Rom. 9:2-5).

Saul and Barnabas at Antioch

- Following Stephen's martyrdom, a great persecution broke out against the believers in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the surrounding region (Acts 8:1). Some of them went to Antioch, where the Christian refugees preached the Good News about Jesus, not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles also. The Lord was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. As a result, the first Gentile Christian church was founded there (Acts 11:19-20).
- Note: Antioch, a large commercial city, was the capital of the Roman province of Syria during Paul's time, about 17 miles from the Meditea'nean Sea and 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Its population in the first century A.D. was about 500,000 including many Jews.
- When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to help the new Gentile believers there. When Barnabas arrived and saw the great things God was doing, he was glad and encouraged them to stay close to the Lord, whatever the cost. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith; and the church grew rapidly under his leadership (Acts 11:22-24).
- Soon Barnabas saw that he needed help; the church had grown so large and the task was too much for him. He thought of Saul, the young man who had been saved on the Damascus Road, and who had preached so courageously and enthusiastically in the face of opposition. So he went to Tarsus and brought Saul back to Antioch. For a whole year they served the Lord together and

taught great numbers of people. It was there at Antioch that the believers were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:25-26).

- Note: The word "Christian" simply means a follower of Christ. The name was first given by the non-Christian population of Antioch, intending to make a mockery of Christ's followers. Eventually, however, Christians adopted it as a name of honor, not of shame. The name occurs in the New Testament three times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Pet. 4:16 - Note what Peter says, "However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name").

What Have We Learned Today?

1. After Saul was converted, he never ceased to tell others about Jesus. The disciples, who were driven from Jerusalem by the persecution which followed Stephen's death, brought Jesus with them wherever they went. Soon the Gospel was preached and churches were established all over the Roman Empire. These disciples were not trained preachers nor officers of the church. They were ordinary people of the church, but they loved the Lord and wanted to tell other people about Jesus and His love. This is always true, if we love Jesus, we want others to have Jesus too. Have you told your loved ones, your friends about Jesus?
2. A Christian is a believer in and follower of Christ. The name was first given to followers of Christ by unfriendly people in Antioch in derision. But the believers were proud to be called Christians. They were glad to be identified as followers of Christ. And the name stuck with them.

Are you proud to be a Christian? Do others know that you are a Christian?

Memory Bible Verses: I Peter 4:15-16, "If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

LESSON 81

Paul - Part III

Scripture References

- Acts 9: to 28:; II Corinthians 13:23-29

Preparation for Future Ministry

- While Saul was at An'tioch, some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch and predicted that a severe famine would soon spread over the entire Roman world. The Antioch Church quickly raised a generous contribution for the relief of their fellow Christians who were suffering hardship in Judea. This gift was brought to Jerusalem by Barnabas and Saul. It was Saul's second visit to Jerusalem since his conversion (Acts 11:27-30). Having fulfilled their mission, Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, bringing with them a young man named John, also called Mark (Acts 12:25).
- One day as the believers at the Antioch Church were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart Barnabas and Saul for Me for the work to which I have called them." So after more fasting and prayer the leaders of the church laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul, and sent them on their way (Acts 13:1-3). Henceforth, Antioch had become Paul's headquarters for his missionary work. From Antioch he started on his missionary journey, and to Antioch he returned to report (cf. Acts 14:26-28; 18:22-23).
- Shortly after he began his first missionary campaign, Saul's name was changed to Paul (Acts 13:9). Saul was his Jewish name, and he was proud of his Jewish ancestry and privileges. But he changed his name to the Roman name Paul after he began his evangelistic work among the Gentiles in the Roman Empire. From now on Paul emerged as the recognized leader of the missionary group.
- The Book of Acts recorded three missionary journeys which Paul and his several companions undertook in the next ten years (A.D. 48-58). Time will only allow us to give a summary account of these trips.

The First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:4 to 14:28)

- Paul and Barnabas started on their first missionary journey probably in the spring of A.D. 48. From Antioch of Syria they passed through Barnabas' native town Sy'prus (Acts 13:4-12; cf. 4:36 - an island south of modern Turkey), crossed Asia Minor (modern Turkey) into the mountainous interior of Antioch of Pisi'dia, in the Roman province (Acts 13:13-50), and turned eastward to the cities of Lycao'nia including Ico'nium, Lys'tral and Der'be in the Roman province of Galatia (Acts 14:1-20).
- Note: Antioch of Syria and Antioch of Pisidia are two different places.
- Then they retraced their steps, visiting and strengthening the new converts (the new believers) and encouraging them to remain faithful to the Lord; and finally they returned to Antioch of Syria, where their journey had begun, and where they had been committed to God for the work now completed. It was a journey of more than 1,200 miles (14:21-26).

- Upon arrival, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how He opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Then they stayed a long time with the disciples (14:27-28).

The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-35)

- The success of Paul's evangelistic work brought a large number of Gentile believers into the church. Some of the Jewish Christians feared that the increase of Gentile Christians would hurt the character of the church. They insisted that unless the Gentile Christians were circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they could not be saved (15:1).
- This demand, contrary to what Paul's teaching that "man is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works" (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 5:6; 6:15), so disturbed the believers in Antioch that the church determined to send Paul and Barnabas, with others, to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this matter (15:2-5).
- The leaders of the Jerusalem Church, with Paul and Barnabas in attendance, met in A.D. 49, and God led the apostles and elders unanimously to the decision that circumcision was not necessary for Gentile converts, but they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals (un-bred animals), and from sexual immorality (15:6-31).

Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36 to 18:22)

- Some time later after the conference, Paul decided to revisit the churches in the cities where he and Barnabas had preached. This time Paul chose Si'las as his partner. Soon he added Timothy as a young assistant (15:36-41; 16:1-3). First they traveled widely in Asia Minor; but one night Paul had a vision in which he saw a man over in Ma'cedo'nia, Greece, pleading with him, "Come over here and help us" (16:4-10). In response to God's call, Paul and his teammate, now joined by Luke himself (writer of the Book of Acts) - beginning Acts 16:10 Luke used "we," indicating that he was one of the team - sailed from Tro'as (a city of My'sia in NW Asia Minor) to Europe and landed at the important Roman city of Phi'lippi. Here Paul won a woman named Ly'dia to Christ, who became the first Christian in Europe; and the Phili'ppian Church was begun in her home (16:11-40), which ever remained very dear to Paul's heart (cf. Phil. 1:4-7; 4:1, 15-16).
- Paul continued to preach in cities through the Greek peninsula before returning to Asia Minor, and finally to Antioch, the home for missionaries (17:1 to 18:22).

Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23 to 20:38)

- On his third missionary journey Paul returned to Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, visiting all the believers, encouraging them and helping them grow in the Lord (18:23 ff.).
- Paul's three missionary journeys lasted about 10 years from A.D. 48 to 58, during which time large Christian churches were established in almost every city of Asia and Greece, in the very heart of the Roman World.

Paul's Final Days

- Wherever Paul went, he stirred up opposition with his preaching about a Gospel of Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ Whom God raised from the dead (cf. 13:37-39). And the enemies of the Gospel did everything possible to persecute him. Ever since he began to preach Jesus, he suffered greatly for his Lord. In II Cor. 13:23-29, he wrote, "... I have been in prison more often, been beaten many times, and faced death again and again. I have been stoned; I have been often in great danger from rivers, from thieves, from the Jews, and from the Gentiles. I have labored and toiled and gone without sleep or food..."
- But nothing stopped Paul. He preached the Gospel with a consuming passion out of his love for Jesus. Later he was attacked by a mob in Jerusalem and sent to Rome for trial in A.D. 67 (Acts 21:1 to 28:30). Finally, according to tradition, he was beheaded by Emperor Ne'ro about A.D. 67.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. It is impossible to sketch in a few pages a biography for so great a man. In the beginning the Lord said two things to Ananias about Paul (9:15-16): First, he was to be a chosen instrument to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. Second, he would suffer much for Christ's name. These two things had literally come to pass.
2. Paul was a great missionary and church builder. His ministry, including three missionary journeys, lasted about 35 years. In those 35 years he won vast multitudes to Christ, and the world was never the same again.

We may not be called to a prominent work as Paul was, but we can do the job God has called us to do, and use our Christian influence to lead people to Christ.

Memory Bible Verse: Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me."

LESSON 82

Paul - Part IV

Scripture References

- Read Paul's thirteen letters, from Romans to Philemon, as much as possible

The Writings of the Apostle Paul

- There are twenty-seven books in the New Testament, and Paul was the author of thirteen of them. The following is a list of the thirteen books or letters written by Paul to various churches and individuals. We shall touch each of them briefly.

(1) Romans (Date: A.D. 58) - the Church in Rome had already been established, probably by Christian travelers, when Paul wrote this letter from Co'rinth (Acts 20:2-3). This book (or letter) is the most complete doctrinal exposition in the N.T. The central truth of Christianity is stated in Rom. 1:16, "... the Gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, ..."

(2) I Corin'thians (Date: A.D. 56) - Paul found the Corinthian Church on his second missionary journey, and stayed there a year and a half (Acts 18:1-11). From E'phesus he wrote the letter to deal with problems in that church, such as factions, immorality, lawsuits, meat offered to idols, abuses of the Lord's Supper, questions about marriage, etc.

(3) II Corinthians (Date: A.D. 57) - After writing the I Corinthians, the problems in the church grew worse. Some of the people in Corinth even questioned Paul's apostolic authority. From Macedonia (a mountainous country north of Greece), Paul wrote this letter to explain to the Corinthians the principles of action in his ministry, and defended his apostleship, then he followed it up with his final visit to the church (Acts 20:1-3).

(4) Galatians (gala'shanz - Date: A.D. 49 or 55) - On his first missionary journey Paul won multitude of people to Christ and established many churches in the Roman province of Galatia (gala'shia). Then some Jewish teachers, who were also Christians, came along and taught the Gentile believers to observe Jewish feasts (4:10-11) and accept circumcision (5:2-6). Paul wrote this letter about A.D. 49 or 55, either before the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 50) or after the Council to defend Christian liberty in the Lord. This letter may be called rightly the Magna Charta of Christian Liberty - (note: Magna Charta was the great charter of English political and civil liberties granted by King John on June 15, 1215).

(5) Ephesians (efe'zhanz - Date: A.D. 61) - Ephesians is grouped with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon as Paul's Prison Letters, since they were all written during his two-year imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 61-63). Paul on his second missionary journey founded the Church in E'phesus (Acts 18:19-21). Then he spent three years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1-20; cf. 20:31). Paul in this letter reminded his readers of their standing in grace (1:-3:), and their responsibilities as Christians to live a life worthy of the calling they have received (4:-6:).

(6) Philip'pians (date: A.D. 51) - The Church in Phil'ipi was the first church in Europe founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:9-40). Paul wrote the letter from the Roman

prison to acknowledge a gift of money sent to him from the Philippian Church. It was written from a pastor's tender heart with deep affection to a group of believers who were especially close to him.

(7) Colossians (colo'shanz - Date: 61) - The Church in Colo'sse may have been founded by one of Paul's followers name E'paphras (1:7; 4:12-13), for Paul never visited Colosse personally (cf. 2:1-1 - note: Colo'sse and Lao'dice'a were two cities close to each other.) In this letter Paul dealt with false and dangerous philosophy and pagan mysticism that invaded the church. He also wrote, at the same time, a letter to the church in Laodicea (Col. 4:16) which was apparently lost later.

(8) I Thessalo'nians (Date: A.D. 51) - Paul visited Thessaloni'ca the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia from Philippi on his second missionary journey. He worked there three weeks and won a large number of people to Christ, and established a vigorous church in that city (Acts 17:1-4). Later the apostle went to Corinth (Acts 18:1) where he wrote this letter to encourage the Thessalonian believers in their Christian walk and answer certain questions about the Second Coming of the Lord.

(9) II Thessalonians (Date: A.D. 51) - The second letter was sent to Thessalonian Church not long after the first one. In this letter Paul corrected the misunderstanding of his teaching concerning the Return of the Lord. Both letters to the same church emphasize the coming of Christ and the practical effect on believers' lives.

(10) I Timothy (Date: A.D. 64) - The two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus are called the Pastoral Letters, since they mainly dealt with the qualifications and duties of ministers of the church. Young Timothy became Paul's assistant during the apostle's second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). He accompanied Paul on many journeys, and was sent on difficult errands. He was with Paul during the apostle's imprisonment in Rome (Col. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Philem.1), and later was sent to pastor the Ephe'sian Church at Paul's request (I Tim. 1:3ff). It was generally believed that Paul was released after his two-year imprisonment; he enjoyed a short period of liberty and traveled widely over the Roman Empire while Timothy was left in charge of the Ephesian Church. It was during this period Paul wrote the first letter to Timothy with regard to his pastoral duties.

(11) II Timothy (Date: A.D. 67) - It was traditionally believed that Paul was arrested again during Nero's great persecution of Christians. Deserted by friends, except Luke, and with death approaching (4:6-11), the apostle longed to see Timothy, his beloved son in the faith (I Tim. 1:2,18; II Tim. 2:2) in his final and lonely hours. From the Roman prison he wrote this letter to urge Timothy to come to Rome (4:9,21). Whether Timothy actually saw Paul again is not told; but we are sure that he made the trip to Rome.

(12) Ti'tus (Date: A.D. 65) - As a young man he accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem at the time of the Council (Acts 15:2; Gal. 2:1-5). He became one of Paul's most trusted helpers, and was once sent to be in charge of the Church in Cret'e (1:5 - a Greek island in the Mediterranean Sea). This letter was written from Macedonia shortly before Paul's second imprisonment in Rome. It dealt chiefly with problems of the Church in Crete.

(13) Phile'mon (Date: A.D. 61) - written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. One'simus, a slave, had stolen from his master Philemon of Colosse and fled to Rome, where he was brought to faith in Jesus through Paul's ministry (v.10). Paul wanted Onesimus to return to his master, so

he wrote a personal letter to his good friend Philemon, whom Paul had led to Christ (v.19), interceding with him to forgive the runaway slave, and receive him as a new brother in Christ. This short letter was the most personal of Paul's letters, filled with warmth and tenderness, pleading for mercy in behalf of the guilty slave.

Paul's Achievement and Character

- The Church today looks to Paul as one of the greatest of all saints. He was the greatest missionary in all history. He was the most convincing preacher the world has never heard. He was a brilliant scholar, and the most prolific writer in the Bible. His writings set forth fundamental doctrines of Scripture. They are vital to Christian theology and practice. He stressed man's inability to attain to righteousness through his own efforts; he preached that God had provided a way of salvation, wholly out of grace and love, in His Son Jesus Christ; and man could be saved only by grace through faith in Christ alone. He also taught that the Gospel made strenuous moral demands on the life and conduct of the believers, and that they should live as children of light (cf. Eph. 5:8).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Paul left an indelible influence on the world through his missionary journeys and writings. We honor him as one of the greatest men who ever lived, not because of his learning, his brilliance, his eloquence, his works, but because he let Jesus fill his whole being and possess every thought he had and guide his every deed, as he declared in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ (His life in me); and to die is gain (the gain of glory of eternity)."
2. During his final days, Paul was shut up in a lonely and cold Roman prison cell, waiting to be executed. He was now over 60 years old, after a strenuous life of service for Christ and much persecution and affliction; yet he was never discouraged. He remained steadfastly faithful to his Lord, as he wrote in II Tim. 1:11-12, "And of this Gospel I was appointed a herald (preacher) and an apostle (special messenger) a teacher (of the Gentiles). That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know Whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard (that which has been entrusted to me and) what I have entrusted to Him until that day (of His return)." Read also Paul's last declaration of faith in II Tim. 4:6-8.

Memory Bible Verses: II Timothy 4:7-8, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing."

LESSON 83

Timothy

Scripture References

- Acts 16: - 20; I and II Timothy

Family Background

- Timothy means "honoring God." He was a native of Lys'tra (a remote town of Lycho'nia located in modern Turkey) and the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother (Acts 16:1-2). It seemed that the father had died during Timothy's infancy and the boy was brought up by his grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eu'nice (II Tim. 1:5).
- Both Timothy's grandmother and mother were devout Jewish women who instructed Timothy from his childhood in the Holy Scripture and trained him to hope for the Messiah of Israel (II Tim. 3:14-15).

A Model Young Christian

- Grandmother Lois and mother Eunice were probably led to Christ when Paul, along with Barnabas, on his first missionary journey, visited Lystra in Lycaonia (Acts 14:5ff). Timothy, who was then a teenager, was also instructed in the new faith which his grandmother and mother had adopted (II Tim. 1:5).
- Timothy was now a third generation Christian, and the faith had firmly struck root in the young man's heart; and he became a faithful and model young Christian in his community, for he was held in high regard in his hometown churches (Acts 16:2-3).

Ordained to the Ministry

- Two years later, Paul on his second missionary journey visited Lystra again, and found Timothy well spoken of by the believers of his home churches at Lystra and Ico'nium. Paul was so impressed that he decided to take Timothy along as his assistant (Acts 16:1-3).
- Because Timothy was born of a Greek father (a Gentile), he was not circumcised as a Jewish boy would have been; Paul had him circumcised at this time in order to make it easier for him to reach the Jews with the Gospel (Acts 16:3). Then Paul and the elders of the church laid their hands on him and ordained him to the ministry (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim.1:6). From that day on, the young man was to share with the great apostle the troubles and the triumphs, the depths and the heights of the first-century Christian leadership.

Paul's Companion and Fellow-Worker

- Young Timothy often traveled with Paul and others as a team on many dangerous journeys. Many times he was sent by Paul on special assignments. He first accompanied Paul and Silas by crossing over into Europe (Acts 16:12) and traveled through Thessaloni'ca and Bere'a (a city in SW Macedonia). Later Paul was forced to leave Berea by the hostile Jews, Silas and Timothy were left behind to give spiritual support to the new believers at Berea, while Paul went on to

Athens (Acts 17:13-15). Some time later Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul at Athens (Acts 18:5).

- Soon Timothy was entrusted with his first important mission when Paul sent him back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the members of the young church in their faith (I Thess. 3:1-3); and the report that Timothy brought back to Paul occasioned him to write the first letter to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 3:6).
- On the third missionary journey, Timothy was with Paul during the 3-year stay in Ephesus. And from Ephesus, Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to deal with serious problems in the church. (Acts 19:21-22; I Cor. 4:17; 16:10).
- Later in the third journey Timothy, together with others, accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4ff) where Paul was attacked by Jews and rescued by Roman soldiers, and sent on to Rome to be tried by the Roman Emperor about A.D. 60 or 61 (Acts 25:1-11). From the letters which Paul wrote in prison indicated that Timothy was with him during his two-year imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philem. 1).

Pastor of the Ephesian Church

- After two years' imprisonment in Rome, Paul was released. Timothy traveled with him again. In I Timothy 1:3, we learned that Paul asked Timothy to stay in Ephesus to have charge of the church there. It was a tough job with tremendous responsibilities, considering that he was still a young man (I Tim. 4:12). For this reason, Paul wrote Timothy a special letter which we call I Timothy. In this letter Paul showed his deep concern for the personal responsibilities that had placed upon Timothy; he charged Timothy to guard the spiritual heritage that he had received by teaching sound doctrine to the people he served (I Tim. 6:20; II Tim. 1:13-14; 2:2).
- Two or three years later Paul was arrested and sent to prison in Rome again during Nero's severe persecution of Christians. Shortly before he suffered martyrdom (II Tim. 4:6-8), Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy, urging him to come to Rome quickly (II Tim. 4:9,21). It is not known whether Timothy reached Rome before Paul was executed, but from Hebrews (author unknown) 13:23, we learned that Timothy also suffered imprisonment, and was set free again.
- According to some old tradition, Timothy returned to Ephesus and became the first bishop there. He died a martyr under Roman Emperor Domitian (domi'shan) or Nerva.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. From his infancy, Timothy was taught the Word of God by his grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice (II Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15), and Timothy had grown into a strong Christian. This reminds us of Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."
2. The relationship between Timothy and Paul was close and enduring. The apostle often affectionately called Timothy, "my son when I love" (I Tim. 1:18), "Timothy, my dear son" (II Tim. 1:2), "my son" (II Tim. 2:1). Paul showed his high esteem for Timothy as he wrote in Phil. 2:20, "I have no one else like him ... For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the Gospel."

Timothy's dependability, sensitivity, affection, loyalty, and willingness to learn won Paul's heart; and together they served the Lord faithfully even unto death. We need Christians like Timothy today.

Memory Bible Verses: II Timothy 2:20-21, "In a large house there are articles for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."

LESSON 84

Philemon and Onesimus

Scripture References

- Colossians 4:; Philemon vv.1-25

Historical Background of Slavery

- Phile'mon means "affectionate." He was a wealthy Christian man of Colos'sae and one of the slave owners in the Colossian Church (cf. Col. 4:1).
- Slaves are known to have existed in the ancient world long before Israel formally became a nation. People became slaves in several ways. Slaves could be purchased, as in the case of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen. 37:28). Prisoners of wars usually became slaves. Children born of slaves became slaves by inheritance, etc.
- Slaves among the Hebrews in O.T. times were treated more kindly than slaves among other nations. Hebrew slaves were given some special rights under the Law of Moses, such as a full day of rest each week (Ex. 20:10), protection against unjust treatment, and so forth (Ex. 21:26-27).
- Slavery continued in N.T. times. But the implications of the Gospel of Christ stands in opposition to slavery. In modern times, slavery was abolished in U.S. after the Civil War (1861-1865).
- The apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, later he was transported to Rome to await a hearing from the Roman Emperor (Acts 28:16-31). During his two-year confinement in prison, he was allowed to preach the Gospel to his guards and all who came to visit him (Acts 28:30-31). At that time, there were about sixty-million slaves existed throughout the Roman Empire.

Philemon and the Church in His House

- We know Philemon from Paul's personal letter he wrote to him. This letter was not only addressed to Philemon, but also to Ap'phia (believed to be his wife) and Archi'ppus (believed to be his son). At the same time, Paul sent a letter to the congregation of the church in Colossae. In both letters the apostle mentioned that Ep'aphras, Mark, Luke, Aristar'chus and De'mas were with him in Rome (Col. 1:7-8; 4:10,12, 14; Philemon 23-24). In both letters, Paul mentioned Archippus who was one of the church workers in Colossae (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2). Like Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, Philemon was written during Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 61-63).
- Philemon was a well-to-do citizen of Colossae (100 miles east of Ephesus). The church in Colossae was established on Paul's third missionary journey during his three years' ministry in Ephesus, not by Paul himself (cf. Col. 2:1), but by his disciple Ep'aphras (Col. 1:7). Philemon was converted under Paul's ministry, perhaps in Ephesus (Philem. 19), and became a leading member of that church which met in his spacious home (Philem. 2). It was a common practice of the early Christians to organize their meetings around believers' homes.

Onesimus, a Runaway Slave

- One'simus means "profitable." He was a slave owned by Philemon. He had run away from his master and made his way to Rome. There he met Paul, repented of his wrong doing and became a dedicated Christian and useful helper to Paul's ministry (Philem. 10-11).
- One'simus may have been a talented and intelligent young man. The Roman army, in its excursions, often captured the brightest and best young men and women and sold them into slavery.
- One'simus now, as a sincere Christian, had become very dear to Paul as his own son (v.10). Paul would like very much to keep him as his attendant in Rome, but did not feel at liberty to do so without Philemon's permission (vv.13-14). On the other hand Paul felt strongly that Onesimus should return to his master to seek forgiveness, and to correct the wrong he had done. So Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon (vv.12-13).

A Letter of Intercession on Behalf of a Runaway Slave

- Paul knew Philemon very well, but he wanted to make sure that Philemon would receive the runaway slave back, that he would forgive him on basis of love (v.9). He then wrote a personal letter to Philemon, besides the one to the Church in Colossae, and sent it along with Onesimus (v.12).
- In this letter, Paul first thanked God for Philemon's faith in the Lord Jesus and for his love for all the saints (vv.4-5). He then interceded with Philemon to forgive the runaway slave and welcome him back as a brother in the Lord, as if he would welcome Paul himself (vv.16-17). With all his earnestness he said, "If he (Onesimus) has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me" (v.18). What love the apostle had for a penitent runaway slave! Paul had great confidence in Philemon's obedience, so he said in v.21, "Confident of your obedience. I write you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask."
- The letter to Philemon consists of one chapter of 25 verses; it is the most personal of all Paul's letters. Though the letter did not speak against slavery, it did provide a suggestion as to how Christian masters and slaves live within that evil system in Paul's day. Between the lines of this short letter, there is a message for all of us today. Christians have valued this beautiful letter for its grace, tact, affection, warmth, sincerity, simplicity and delicacy of feeling.
- It is believed that Philemon did forgive Onesimus and sent him free. There is a tradition that Onesimus afterward became a bishop in Bere'a, a city about 45 miles west of Thessalonica, where Paul won many people to Christ on his second missionary journey to Europe (Acts 17:10-12).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Philemon was a convert of Paul as was Onesimus (see v.19 and v.10). Both of them were very dear to the apostle. Philemon must have been a devoted Christian with a godly family. He opened his home for the meeting of Colossian Church with both his wife, Apphia, and son,

Archippus, assisting in the ministry (vv.1-2). Every Christian home ought to follow and emulate his example to serve the Lord!

2. Onesimus is a picture of every Christian. From birth we were all runaways, running away from God.. But Jesus found us and brought us back to God. We are sure that Onesimus was forgiven and restored to his master, because the apostle Paul interceded for him and pledged to repay whatever Onesimus owed his master. "If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me" (Philem. v.18).

We can be sure that we, as Christians, have been forgiven and accepted by God, because Jesus paid the price on the cross to redeem us from sin, and never cease interceding for us; He says, "Father, forgive them; whatever wrongs they have done. Charge them to Me." "So Christ was sacrificed once to take the sins of many people;" "Therefore, He is also to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them " (Heb. 9:28a; 7:25).

Memory Bible Verses:

Isaiah 53:6, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Philemon 17-18, "So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me."

LESSON 85

Jesus, the Son of God - Part I

Who Is Jesus Christ?

- Throughout the ages people have asked, "Who is Jesus? Who is this Man Who has claimed the attention of all the world? Who is this Man Who has such an abiding influence in the hearts and lives of countless millions of people?"
- There are many conjectures and opinions about the Lord Jesus. People say He is a great human teacher, the founder of Christianity, a carpenter's son, a Jew who claimed to be the Messiah, a martyr who died for a noble cause, etc.
- One day Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you. Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:13-17).
- Now our eternal destiny depends entirely on our attitude toward Jesus, our acceptance or rejection of Him as the Son of God determines for each of us life or death, heaven or hell.
- Everything we need to know about our Lord Jesus Christ comes from the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In our study of the life of Jesus we can discuss but briefly and simply some of the high points as we endeavor to show the uniqueness of His life, and His relation to men.

His Precious Name - Jesus Christ Our Lord

- Jesus was His human name which means "Savior or the Lord saves." It was given by God before His birth as the angel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "She (Mary) will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."
- Christ is a Greek word equivalent to the Hebrew "Messiah" (Matt. 22:42). It was His official title, meaning "the anointed one." In the O.T., the people of Israel anointed their kings (Saul - I Sam. 9:16; 10:1; David - I Sam. 16:1,12-13; II Sam. 2:4,7; Solomon - I Kings 1:34, 39; and others); priests (Ex. 28:41; 29:7; Lev. 8:12,30), and prophets (I Kings 19:16; I Chron. 16:22). Olive oil was poured on the head of the person being anointed; the oil symbolized the Holy Spirit, and the anointed person was thus set apart for a specific work in the service of the Lord. In the N.T., Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was the Lord's Anointed (Lk. 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38); Jesus is our King, and Priest, and Prophet as well as our Savior (Lk. 2:11; Jn. 4:42; Acts 5:31; Eph. 5:23; Titus 1:4; I Jn. 4:14; etc.).
- Lord is the Greek word for Yah'veh or Jeho'vah in Hebrew. The name speaks of God's eternal glory, power, and majesty. At His birth. Jesus was called Christ the Lord by the angel (Lk. 2:11). In the N.T. this name is frequently used of God as well as Jesus as Messiah (Matt. 1:22; Mk. 5:19; Acts 7:32-33; etc.). Through His resurrection and ascension, Jesus was exalted to the absolute lordship (Acts 2:3b; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11; etc.).

The Virgin Birth of Christ

- Over seven hundred years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah prophesied in his book 7:14, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."
- Two of the four Gospels, Matthew and Luke, recounted the virgin birth of Christ. Matthew told the story from Joseph's side (Matt. 1:18-25). In verse 23, Matthew quoted Isaiah, saying, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and they will call Him Immanuel - which means, 'God with us.'" Here Matthew emphasized the fact that the virgin birth of Christ was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in 7:14.
- Luke told the story of the virgin birth from Mary's side (Lk. 1:26-45). Here we read that the angel Gabriel appeared to the virgin Mary and told her that she would become pregnant and give birth to a Son. Mary was troubled and puzzled, so she asked, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God"
- The Scripture explicitly states that Jesus was not born of a union between Mary and Joseph, but through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. Every one of us was born through the fusion (union) of two personalities, but Jesus came through the work of God. All of us were born sinners (Ps. 51:5; Isa. 53:6; 64:6; Rom. 3:10). Jesus was born of a virgin mother, not contaminated by any lust or sin. He was born without a sinful nature; He was born a perfect Man, pure, innocent, and holy. He was called the Holy One, the Son of God (Lk. 1:35), and John told us that Jesus was God incarnate. In John 1: 14 we read, "The Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and made His dwelling among us....."
- The miracle of the virgin birth is so important, because in this Jesus mankind has a SINLESS SAVIOR. Because He was both a Holy Man and the Son of God, this is the kind of Savior we need. We need Someone Who is like us in every way to be our representative before God, yet without sin. A Redeemer cannot be a sinner, because if he is, he will have to pay for his own sin. Jesus' perfect humanity qualified Him to be our representative, and made Him a human Who could make payment for the sin of another man. But His humanity was not enough to bear the full force of God's wrath against the sin of the whole world. No man could have sustained the wrath of God against the sins of the whole world. Our Redeemer had to be God as well as man. And that is Who Jesus was! He was a Holy Man by virgin birth, and He was the Son of God, a sinless Savior supernaturally born. He was God Who became a Man to die for our sins and to bring us back to God. Jesus Christ, being both human and divine, is fitted to be the Savior of mankind.
- The virgin birth of Christ is an essential doctrine interwoven with all the Word of God. To deny the virgin birth is to deny the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, the foundation of Christianity.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. If anyone rejects the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, if the Bible is false in its revelation of this great miracle of the birth of Jesus Christ, there is no hope of redemption whatsoever. If the miracle of virgin birth is false, we are all on our way to hell. If Mary was just another wayward girl and if her son was no different from any one of us, there is no Savior anywhere. We will all live in darkness and sin and die in our sins. Our salvation depends upon our acceptance or rejection of

the virgin birth of Jesus. Christianity is Christ. If Christ is only a human, then Christianity is only a human religion. For a naturally born savior cannot provide supernatural help, a savior who is only human offers no divine hope; and a savior who is born with a sinful nature is no savior at all.

2. The Christmas story centers on Matthew and Luke's accounts. The whole Christmas story becomes significant and meaningful when we see the Baby Jesus and remember that He was God's own Son Whom God sent down into the world in a miraculous manner. Mary was only a vessel that God used to accomplish His purpose. Is it hard for you to believe in the virgin birth? Well, speaking from a human standpoint, it is impossible for a woman to bear a child without a union with a man. But with God all things are possible!

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 1:21-23, She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with Child and will give birth to a Son, and they will call Him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."

LESSON 86

Jesus, the Son of God - Part II

The World in Jesus' Time

- Paul in Galatians 4:4-5 said, "But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of women, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of Sons." God did not send His Son too soon; He didn't wait too long. He sent His Son, the Promised Messiah and Savior, at the right time. "When the time had fully come, God sent His Son....."
- At the time of Christ's birth Augustus Caesar was emperor of the Roman Empire (Lk. 2:1), and Herod the Great king of Judea under the Roman government. God in His providence had prepared the world for the coming of the Savior: (1) All the then known world was subject to one government under Augustus Caesar, and the people enjoyed peace and order; (2) The Romans built an extensive system of roads to link all major towns to Rome and to each other, so that people could travel freely throughout the empire; (3) The Greek language was widely spoken; it was the common language of the Roman Empire (Jn. 19:20; Acts 21:37; Rev. 9:11). Because one language was spoken everywhere, the Gospel was spread more quickly; (4) The Jews scattered everywhere with synagogues and their Bibles. It was the most fitting time in all its history for the coming of the Son of God.

Jesus Christ, the Son of David

- Joseph and Mary were engaged and lived in Nazareth, and that was where Joseph worked as a carpenter. But before they came together, God revealed to them that Mary would be pregnant and give birth to a Child through the Holy Spirit. About 700 years before Christ, the prophet Micah had predicted that the promised Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, in the land of Judah (Mic.5:2). It was no accident that about the time Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the entire empire. Everyone was required to return to his ancestral home for this registration. Since Joseph was a lineal descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea - King David's ancient home - to register with his wife Mary. While they were there, "when the time had fully come," Jesus Christ, the Son of God was born (Lk. 2:1-7). Thus Jesus became a lineal descendant of King David, and was called Son of David (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 21:9; 22:42; Lk. 1:32; Jn. 7:42; Acts 13:22-23; Rom. 1:3; II Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5; 22:16).
- Note: After Mary became pregnant, the angel of the Lord told Joseph to take Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her, that is, Mary remained a virgin until her Son was born (Matt. 1:18-25).

Childhood of Jesus

- Jesus was brought up in an ordinary middle class home in Nazareth. He was the eldest son of the family. The Scripture indicates that Joseph and Mary had normal marital relations between them after Jesus' birth (Matt. 1:25; Lk. 2:7); accordingly Jesus had four brothers: James, Joseph (a variant of Joseph), Simon, and Judas, and at least two unnamed sisters (Matt. 12:46; 13:55-56; Mk. 3:31-32; 6:3).

- Joseph was only Jesus' legal father, not natural father. He must have died before Jesus began His public ministry, for he was not mentioned during Jesus' ministry.
- We know nothing about Jesus' early life, except that He went up with Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover when He was twelve years old (Lk. 2:41-52).

The Baptism of Jesus

- Following eighteen years of silence, Jesus began His public ministry when He was about "thirty years old" (Lk. 3:23). At that time John the Baptist, a relative of Jesus, was preaching repentance and baptizing people. When Jesus sought baptism at John's hands, John remonstrated, which showed that he knew Jesus to be the Messiah. Since John's baptism was for repentance, and Jesus, the holy Son of God, had no sin of which to repent, John's baptism was not for Jesus. But Jesus insisted that John baptize Him and John consented (Matt. 3:13-15).
- By His baptism, Jesus showed that He stood alongside sinners to be completely identified with them. His baptism was a way of saying yes to His Father's will that He was ready and willing to take sinners' place to die on the cross. The Lord Jesus knew from the very beginning that He would be the "Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29,36).
- As a result of His baptism, John saw the heavens opened, and God's Spirit coming down like a dove and resting upon Him. And a voice came out of heaven saying, "This is My dearly beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:16-17).

The Temptation of Jesus

- Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. God's will was that Jesus, Who became a Man, should stand up successfully under temptation and so prove Himself that perfectly qualified Savior to deliver His people from their sins. In Hebrews 2:18 we read, "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted."
- The Gospels record that after Jesus had fasted (and prayed) forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry (Matt. 4:1-2; Mk. 12:13; Lk. 4:1-2). Then the Tempter came to Him with three specific temptations. The first temptation (to turn stones to bread) was an appeal to use His divine power to satisfy His own needs (Matt. 4:3-4; Lk. 4:3-4). The second (to jump off the temple) was an appeal to use startling and spectacular ways to attract people's attention and win their allegiance (Matt. 4:5-7; Lk. 4:9-10). The third was an appeal to bypass the Cross altogether and instead obtain glory and power of the world by worshipping Satan (Matt. 4:8-10; Lk. 4:5-8).
- Satan's intention was to make Christ sin so as to thwart God's plan for man's redemption by disqualifying the Savior. Thank God, Jesus did not yield to the Devil's temptation. He defeated Satan with the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. We read in Matthew 4:3 that those who confessed and repented of their sins were baptized by John the Baptist. Then why did Jesus also come to be baptized (Matt. 3:13-15)? Certainly it was

not to wash away any sin because Jesus had no sin. Anyway, all the baptism in the world can't wash away any sin. Baptism comes after repentance and faith. It was an outward sign of an inner change. Now in this baptism Jesus identified Himself with lost sinners He came to save. In this baptism He expressed His willingness to take the sins of men upon Himself and die for them. In His baptism Jesus also set an example for us to follow. He said to His disciples in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, ..." In Mark 16:15-16 the Lord said, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creatures. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

2. The Lord was tempted, but He overcame the Devil by the Scriptures (the Word of God) as the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The Bible tells us in Hebrews 2:18, "Because He (Jesus) Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." Again in Hebrews 4:15-16, we are told, "For we do not have a High Priest Who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have One Who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Memory Bible Verse: Hebrews 2:18, "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted."

Assignment for Lesson 86

Jesus, the Son of God - Part II

Scripture Readings: Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:1-16; 2:1-6; 3:1-17; 4:1-11; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 2:1-7; 3:2-18; 4:1-13; John 1:6-8, 19-34; Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16

1. Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem, not in Nazareth? What was the significance of His being born in Bethlehem and having Joseph as His legal father? (Matthew 1:1-16; 2:1-6; Luke 2:1-7; cf. Micah 5:2)

Note: (1) Mi'cah was a Hebrew prophet 740 years before Christ.

(2) Messiah was supposed to be born in the house of King David according to O.T. prophecy.

2. What was the message of John the Baptist? What was his purpose of baptizing people? (Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:2-18; John 1:6-8,19-34)

3. What were the reasons for, and significance of Jesus' baptism? Did Jesus need to confess and repent of His sins in order to be baptized? (Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:29-34)

4. What does Jesus temptation mean to us? How did He defeat the Devil in His temptation? (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16; Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13)

Memory Bible Verse: Hebrews 2:18

LESSON 87

Jesus, the Son of God - Part III

The Public Ministry of Jesus

- After His baptism and temptation, Jesus began His public ministry when He was about thirty years of age (Lk. 3:23). His ministry lasted only three and a half years. Like other Jewish teachers, He first gathered a group of disciples around Him. From them, He selected an inner circle of twelve apostles who accompanied Him on His travels (Matt. 10:1-15; Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 9:1-6). Together they lived on contributions and hospitality of people who supported their ministry (Matt. 27:55-56; Lk. 8:1-3; 10:38-42).
- Jesus went through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness, and the Twelve were with Him (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Lk. 8: 1).
- Soon large crowds were gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:36-38).

The Life of Jesus

- Jesus Christ is the greatest personality of the Bible and of all ages. He came into the world of man as the purest and holiest Man ever born. In human form, He was the same as all other men, but unique in character. All the men of the world, with the only exception of Adam, were born with inherent evil (Ps. 51:5). Christ was born sinless, for He did not inherit a sinful nature by virgin birth. In I Pet. 2:22, we read that "Jesus committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth." Hebrews 4:15 tells us, "... He has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin."
- There have been some good men in the world, but only one perfect Man, the Man Jesus. His enemies accused Him of various crimes and offenses but the accusations never stuck. Pilate, the Roman Governor, could find no wrong in Jesus when he put Him on trial (Jn. 18:38; 19:4,6). The penitent thief said to the other thief as together they were dying on the cross, "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this Man (Jesus) has done nothing wrong" (Lk. 23:41). And the Roman army captain in charge of Jesus' execution, who witnessed His death, said, "Certainly this was a righteous Man" (Lk. 23:47).
- No one could point to one bad thing in Jesus' life. Examine Him from every standpoint. Did He ever say an evil word? No. Did He ever do a wrong thing? No. Does He ever think a sinful thought? No. You and I are obliged to say with Pilate, "I can find no crime in Him." The outstanding feature of Jesus' life and character was His sinlessness!

The Miracles of Jesus

- The Lord Jesus performed many marvelous miracles. He made the blind see, the mute speak, the deaf hear, and the lame walk. He cleansed the leper and brought the dead back to life. He fed

five thousand people with a boy's lunch (five small barley loaves and two small fish). He stilled the storm and walked on the sea; great crowds followed Him and sought His healing in every place. In Matt. 8:16-17 we read, "When evening came, they brought to Him many who were possessed with demons; and He drove out the spirit with a word, and heal all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah (53:4), 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'" Mark tells us that people were overwhelmed with amazement, saying, "He has done everything well; He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak" (Mk. 7:37).

- The four Gospels recorded nearly forty miracles performed by Jesus, but these were selected by the Gospel writers from among a large number. We are told by John (20:30-31), "Jesus did many other signs (miracles) in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

The Teachings of Jesus

- Jesus did not consider the miracles and healings His priority; His main task was teaching and preaching the Gospel (the Good News) of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23). The theme of His message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 4:17; Mk. 1:15).
- Note: The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are different names for the same thing; they are used interchangeably (Matt. 19:23-24).
- Daniel (a prophet of 6th century B.C.) declared that one day "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44). Now when Jesus launched into His ministry, He announced, "The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near" (Mk. 1:15). He meant that His coming introduced a new era, and that the kingdom has come in His person.
- God's kingdom is both a present reality and a future event. It is a present reality when people accept Christ's rule in their hearts as their King (through repentance and faith - new birth). It is a future event when at His Second Coming "the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15), and He will rule the people with an iron scepter (absolute power and authority) as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:15-16) and His faithful followers will reign with Him for a thousand years in His millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6).
- The sermon on the mount recorded in Matt. 5: through 7: was Jesus' moral and ethical teachings on human conduct. It was the most marvelous sermon ever preached. The central theme of the sermon is summarized in Matt. 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
- Jesus was the Master Teacher. He often taught people by means of parables. A parable is a simple story designed to illustrate a moral or religious lesson. The Lord Jesus often used short, simple stories to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral value.
- Among the many parables told by Jesus, the most memorable ones are:
 - The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13)
 - The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37)
 - The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt. 18:10-14; Lk. 15:1-7)
 - The Parable of the Lost Son (Lk. 15:11-24)

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31)
The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk. 18:9-14)
The Shepherd and the Sheep (Jn. 10: 1-18).

Remember that each parable or story has a main point and was spoken to make that point easily understood.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Jesus' ministry was threefold: teaching-preaching-healing. Matthew 4:23 says, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News (Gospel) of kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (cf. Mk. 1:39). Though Jesus' main task was teaching and preaching, His healing was an indispensable part of His ministry. "Jesus was the same yesterday and today and forever " (Heb. 13:8). Let us humbly heed His teaching, and also avail ourselves of His healing grace.
2. Jesus was the great Master Teacher that ever lived. He came to tell us about a loving God, and a daily Companion (Savior) Who would help us in life and death. He told about a glorious heaven for God's children. He showed us the way of salvation to bring us back to God. His teachings were not off in outer space. He got down where men lived and touched them at the point of their greatest needs. The common people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as One Who had authority, not as their teachers of the law (Matt. 7:29; Mk. 1:22).

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 7:28-29, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as One Who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."

Assignment for Lesson 87

Jesus, the Son of God - Part III

Scripture Readings: Read Matthew and Mark

1. At what age did Jesus begin His public ministry? (Luke 3:23) How many apostles did He choose to be with Him during His ministry? Can you name them? (Matthew 10:1-8; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6)

Note: An apostle (pronounced a-pos'l) was a special messenger of Jesus Christ; a person to whom Jesus delegated authority to assist Him in His ministry.

2. How did Jesus feel when He saw large crowds coming to hear Him? (Matthew 9:35-38)

3. Did Jesus ever sin? What does the Scripture say about Him? (I Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15; John 18:38; 19:4,6; Luke 23:41,47)

4. Jesus performed many miracles. Can you name some of them?
Jesus often taught people by means of parables or simple stories. Name a few of them.

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 7:28-29

LESSON 88

Jesus, the Son of God - Part IV

Born to Die

- The Lord Jesus did not just come to live, or to teach great lessons, or to set a good example. He came into the world to die. He was born to die. If He had come merely to live, if that were all there was to the Gospel story, we would be lost forever in our sins. But He came to die in our stead, to shed His blood for our sins. Salvation is not through the birth of Christ, nor through His life, nor through His teaching, but through His death. In Matt. 20:28 Jesus told us, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."
- Many prophetic passages in the O.T., written centuries before Christ, foretold the death of Christ. The most prominent one is found in Isaiah 53 written 700 B.C. In this chapter, Isaiah foretold vividly in picturesque language the Savior's humiliation, suffering, and death, followed by His exaltation and glory.
- In the N.T. we read that the apostle Peter clearly stated in Acts 2:23, "This Jesus was handed over to you by God's definite plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross." Again in Acts 3:18 Peter said, "But this is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer."
- The Bible is clear that Jesus' death was planned by God. Jesus knew from the beginning that He was born to die. The angel told Joseph in Matt. 1:21, "She (Mary) will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people (by death on the cross) from their sins." The Lord Jesus knew all along that He would die in sinners' stead to save them from being lost. His death was not an unexpected accident, nor did He die as a martyr. It was God's plan to deal with sin and redeem sinners from hell's punishment. All of us were born to live; but the Lord Jesus was born to die. He gave His life willingly as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

The Agony in Gethsemane

- Gethsemane was a garden on the slopes of the Mount Olives just east of Jerusalem. Jesus went there frequently with His disciples for prayer, rest, and fellowship (Lk. 22:39). On the night before His crucifixion Jesus prayed there in great agony (Matt. 26:36-46; Mk. 14:32-42; Lk. 22:39-46; Jn. 18:1). The most dreadful incident in Jesus' life was that night in Gethsemane where He withdrew from the main group of disciples and took Peter, James and John with Him while He prayed; and He began to be filled with anguish and despair. He said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38; Mk. 14:34). Then He fell with His face to the ground and pleaded three times with God, saying, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me (Matt. 26:39,42,44; Mk. 14:36, 39, 41). Here He was speaking of the cup of suffering and death and separation from God on the cross. Luke told us that so great was Jesus' agony, that His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Lk. 22:44). How terrible and great was our Lord's agony that night as He prayed alone in that garden while His disciples were fast asleep (Matt. 26:40,43,45; Mk. 14:37,40,41).

- Was Jesus afraid to face death? No. But He knew that two things would happen to Him on the cross. In the first place, He Who had no sin was to bear the sin of the world. He was to be made sin for us. The awful weight of our sin would be pressing down upon Him with crushing force. In the second place, because of His bearing our guilt and on the cross, His Father's face was to be hidden from Him; the holy and righteous God was to turn His back upon His Only Begotten Son -- something the Lord Jesus had never experienced before. That was why Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me (Matt. 27:46)? We can never understand the deep agony that lashed His soul as He prayed that night in Gethsemane. We can only know by faith that He died in our place and for our sins. He must have suffered something terrible and awful of what you and I must suffer in hell if we are lost.
- Now we must know that His prayer that night was not an attempt to escape God's plan to save sinners. Three times in His prayer He confessed His obedience to the will of the Father. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt.26:39,42, 4; Mt. 14:36,39,41). And finally the victory was won. Willingly and humbly our Lord obeyed the Father's will, and was ready to carry out God's plan of salvation for mankind.

For me it was in the Garden
He prayed, "Not My will but Thine,"
He had no tears for His own grief,
But sweat drops of blood for mine.

The Arrest and the Trials

- It was in the middle of the night, when the people of Jerusalem were asleep, Judas of Iscariot, the betrayer, led a group of soldiers to the garden and arrested Jesus. The Lord submitted to His enemies, and they led Him away to one unjust trial after another (Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1-2, 11-31; Mk. 14:53-65; 15:1-20; Lk. 22:54, 63-71; 23:1-25; Jn. 18:12-14, 19-24, 28-40; 19:1-16). The Lord had just gone through His soul's agony in the garden, and now He faced a night of humiliation and suffering and a day of death without a murmur. The great prophet Isaiah foresaw the Lord's suffering and wrote in his book 53:7, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth."
- Finally the enemies of Christ convinced Pilate, the Roman Governor, to condemn Jesus to death, even though the governor could not find Him guilty of any crime. Now in His last hours the Lord would endure the most intense suffering.
- Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, but wishing to satisfy the crowd, he had Jesus flogged (Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Jn. 19:1). It is impossible to describe the terror and the agony of this type of punishment. The Romans usually preceded a crucifixion with a flogging. It was done with a whip which was made of a number of leather cords or thongs weighted with pieces of metal or bone. The one to be flogged was stripped to the waist, then his hands were bound to a post high above him. Then a soldier would come to beat on the victim's bare back with the whip till the flesh was all open and blood running down his body. The suffering was indescribable and sometimes the victims died under such cruel punishment.
- Our Lord Jesus, the innocent Son of God, had undergone such severely intense torture. All of His suffering was for you and me. Isaiah must have shed a flood of tears as he foretold the

suffering of the Messiah, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

The Crown of Thorns

- The Roman soldiers had heard that Jesus was accused for claiming to be Christ, a King (Lk. 23:1-3; cf. Matt. 27:11-12; Mk. 15:2; Jn. 18:28-38). Immediately after Jesus had been flogged, the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and pressed it on His head. We can see the suffering that our Lord endured as the long, sharp thorns pierced His brow, causing scores of wounds and spurts of blood. Next they put a purple robe about His wounded, bleeding body; and kneeling before Him they mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat upon Him, and slapped His face (Matt. 27:27-31; Mk. 15:16-20; cf. Jn. 19:2-3). The Lord Jesus stood there silently, enduring physical anguish and deepest humiliation! Ridicule is something hard to bear, especially when it is undeserved. But this was only part of Christ's suffering for you and me.
- After the mockery, the soldiers took off the robe and put His own clothes on Him again, and led Him away to crucify Him.

What Have We Learned Today?

1. In Gethsemane, we watch the Son of God weep in blood. He was about to taste death for every man, to bear the curse which was due to us sinners. As God He was perfectly holy and incapable of sin; and as Man He was without original taint and was spotlessly pure; yet He had to bear our sin to be led as the scapegoat bearing the iniquity of us all. The sinless ONE was to be treated as the vilest, number one sinner in the whole world; the Son of God was to be smitten as the dirtiest, filthiest sinner. It is a terrible thing for you and me to go to hell to suffer there forever. It is infinite worse for the Son of God to suffer and die in our place, so that He might deliver us from hell fire. But He did it all for us. How will you respond to His love which is so amazing and divine?
2. We must know that Christ suffered and died of His own free will. No one could hurt an inch of Him if He had not permitted it. Just one thing compelled Him and sent Him to His death. It was His great love for you and me. He loved us and gave Himself willingly in order to make atonement for our sin. We have a Savior Who is more willing to save us than we are willing to be saved. If we are not saved, it is our own fault. He has done everything necessary to save us, and He yearns for us to come and receive salvation as a free gift. Will you come to Him now?

Memory Bible Verse: Luke 22:42, "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

LESSON 89

Jesus, the Son of God - Part V

The Crucifixion of Jesus

- Having endured a sleepless night of intense suffering - false accusations, beatings, mockery, etc., the Lord Jesus was led away to be crucified (Matt. 27:31; Mk. 15:20; Jn. 19:16). He was forced to carry His own cross while the Roman soldiers led the procession (Jn. 19:17). But this was too much for His weary, broken, bleeding body; and the Lord Jesus fainted beneath the burden of the cross. So the soldier compelled a passer-by, Si'mon of Cyre'ne to carry His cross (Matt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21). The soldiers brought Jesus to the place just outside Jerusalem to crucify Him. In the Hebrew language the place is called "Gol'gotha". In Latin it is called "Calvary" which means Place of Skull. (Matt. 27:33; Mk. 15:22; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19:17).
- Now the soldiers set about to crucify our Lord. First, they stripped His clothes. Then they laid Him on the cross on His back. They stretched His arms and nailed them to the cross beam; and they nailed His feet to the upright beam. Finally they lifted up the cross and dropped it into the hole prepared for it. And in a moment the Son of God was hanging there between heaven and earth, bleeding His life away for you and me (Matt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19:18).
- Crucifixion was a form of torture and execution used by the Romans for slaves and criminals who were not Roman citizens. Death on the cross was an agonizing way to die. It brought the victim a slow and lingering death, and as a result, the victim suffered indescribable and excruciating pain.
- Mark reported that it was the third hour (9:00 a.m. according to our time) when they crucified the Lord Jesus (Mk. 15:25). And from the sixth hour (12:00 noon according to our time) there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m. according to our time); then the Lord Jesus breathed His last (Matt. 27:45-50; Mk. 15:33-37; Lk. 23:44-46).
- For six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon, the Lord Jesus suffered a slowly lingering and painful death on the cross. The first three hours, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, were under the scorching sun; the last three hours, from 12 noon to 3 p.m., were covered with a supernatural darkness, as the Son of God was dying slowly on the cross. It was a scene so terrible on that First Good Friday, that even nature could not bear to look upon what was happening at Calvary. It was the Son of God in the moment of His deepest agony upon the cross. And what heightened His sorrow, as He was hanging upon the cross in that most dreadful physical agony, was that He was enduring in His soul the most fearful torments and unspeakable anguish of the full weight of God's anger against sin; for the Son of God was carrying the sin of the world, and dying in sinners' stead.
- Note: Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Day. It is called Good Friday because it commemorates the Friday on which the Lord Jesus died for the sin of the world.
- Three hours had passed in utter darkness and unbearable silence. The pangs of death were closing in on our Lord Jesus. He was at the depth of His suffering. Then suddenly and almost dramatically, like a sharp clap of thunder, a cry rent the heavens, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "MY GO, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)? Our Lord Jesus must have been in the midst of the most terrible storm of His suffering; He must

have been in the midst of fearful agony. He must have been filled with anguish surpassing human understanding. He must have felt utterly lost in the cry of dereliction, and He must have felt the deepest sorrow of being separated from God by bearing our sins upon the cross. No wonder He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

- While Jesus' physical sufferings were great, His spiritual sufferings were greater. The sufferings of His soul were the most terrible part of His agony. The Lord Jesus died with a broken heart and bled His life away on that cruel cross. But His heart was broken for you and me, and His precious blood was shed to wash away our sins.

The King of the Jews

It was the custom in that day to write a man's crime above his head to show why he was crucified. So above Jesus' head Pilate placed the written charge against Him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS (Matt. 27:37; Mk. 15:26; Jn. 19:19). Pilate could not find any crime in Him. Jesus was crucified because He claimed to be Christ, a King, the Son of God (Lk. 23:2; Jn. 19:7,12). As the Lord Jesus hangs upon the cross, with the crown of thorns on His brow, the blood and sweat flowing mingled down, does He look like a king? Yes, He is! He is! Jesus was born a king. The angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end" (Lk. 1:32-33). Shortly after He was born the Wise Men came from the East to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He Who has been born King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1-2)? The week before His crucifixion (on Palm Sunday), the multitude cheered at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, crying out, "Blessed is the King Who comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 19:37-38; cf. Matt. 21:9; Mk. 11:9-10; Jn. 12:12-13).

- And one day the Lord Jesus is coming back into the world. Every earthly ruler will be put down and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and He shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

The Burial of Jesus

- The Lord Jesus endured six hours unspeakable suffering upon the cross. He died at three o'clock in the afternoon. We are told that a rich and prominent Jewish leader, name Joseph of Arimathe'a received permission from Pilate the Roman governor to have Jesus' body buried. Nicodemus, also a Jewish ruler, went with Joseph. In Jn. 3:1-15, we read that Nicodemus was the man who earlier had come to Jesus at night to seek peace for his heart and salvation for his soul. Now Nicodemus brought about a hundred pounds' weight of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. These two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices. In the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. In the garden was Joseph's own new tomb that he had cut into the rock. And the two men tenderly laid Jesus' body in that new tomb (Matt. 27:57-60; Mk. 15:42-47; Lk. 23:50-55; Jn. 19:38-42).
- So Jesus was buried the day He died. As darkness came on, His precious body was resting in the tomb, and His loved ones walked away with weeping eyes and aching hearts. He was dead now and all their hopes were buried with Him. That was the end, so far as the world was concerned. But it was not! It was only a new beginning! The Lord Jesus had fulfilled God's plan to save sinners. The Scripture says, "We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23a). Sin must be punished in order to satisfy God's

righteous judgment. Someone must be punished and died for our sins. The glorious truth is that "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16). And the heart of the Gospel message in Paul's words is: "For I decided to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2; cf. 1:23).

What Have We Learned Today?

1. Though Jesus died at the hands of sinful men, His death was according to the Scripture. He died to fulfill O.T. prophecy. He was under the curse of God as He hung on the cross, but it was the curse He bore on behalf of us. Gal. 3:13 tells us, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, 'cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree (cross)'. " Jesus had no sin, but on the cross He bore the sins of those who were sinful (II Cor. 5:21). Jesus died for you and me. He was more than a man, He was God from heaven. He died because He loved us; He died to save us from sin and bring us back to God (I Pet. 3:18).
2. When Jesus died on the cross, His sufferings were over. His mission to bring salvation to mankind was done, and the gates of heaven were opened up, so that any one could enter in who would put his or her faith in the Crucified Christ. God's provision of salvation in Christ is sufficient to save all sinners. The work of salvation was accomplished upon the cross. It is a finished work - complete, final, and perfect. It needs nothing to be added. It needs not to be repeated (Heb. 9:12, 25-26; I Pet. 3:18). Salvation is full and free and ready for any one who is willing to accept it.

Memory Bible Verse: I Peter 3:18, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous."

Assignment for Lesson 89

Jesus, the Son of God - Part V

Scripture Readings: Matthew 27:1-66; Mark 15:1-47; Luke 23:1-56; John 18:28-19:42

1. Who crucified the Lord Jesus - the Roman soldiers or the Jewish religious leaders (the chief-priests and his followers)? How many hours did Jesus hang on the cross? Can you describe the humiliation and pain Jesus endured upon the cross? (Matthew 27:1-50; Mark 15:1-37; Luke 23:1-46; John 18:28-40; 19:16-18)

Note: "the third hour" mentioned in Mark 15:25 was 9 a.m. according to our time.

2. For what crime was Jesus crucified? (Matthew 27:22-26, 37; Mark 15:6-15, 26; Luke 23:4-5, 13-25, 38; John 19:4-7, 19)

3. What significance of the darkness that came over all the land at the sixth hour (at 12 noon according to our time) until the ninth hour (3 p.m. according to our time)? Why did Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Why did God forsake Jesus as He hung on the cross? (Matthew 27:45-46; Mark 15:33-34)

4. What does Jesus' death on the cross mean to you?

Memory Bible Verse: I Peter 3:18

LESSON 90

Jesus, the Son of God - Part VI

The Sealed and Guarded Tomb

- The Lord Jesus was buried in a new tomb which belonged to Joseph, a rich man from Arimathe's. He and Nicodemus prepared Jesus' body for burial. They did it according to the custom of that day. They placed 100 pounds of spices in many yards of linen, and wrapped the cloths securely around the body. Then they tenderly laid Jesus to rest in that tomb and rolled a large stone like a sliding door against the entrance of the tomb (Matt. 27:59-60; Jn. 19:38-42). The disciples probably were there for the burial. But no one believed that they would ever see Jesus alive again. So they turned away from the grave with broken hearts and bitter tears. All their dreams and hopes were buried with Him.
- Note: Tombs of Bible times in Palestine were not graves such as we have today, dug down in the earth. People in those days usually buried the dead in natural caves or tombs dug into rocks.
- Before His crucifixion, Jesus had told His disciples many times that He would be killed and on the third day He would be raised to life (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Lk. 18:33). But the idea went right over their heads. It was unthinkable that a man had breathed his last then would later come back to life again. So the disciples put the thoughts out of their minds. They mourned over His death as one dead and lost to them forever. The hours that followed must have been filled with the heaviest sorrow and the deepest grief.
- But the Jewish religious leaders were afraid that His disciple would come and steal the body and then claimed that He had been raised. So they obtained permission from Pilate the governor to make the tomb secure by sealing the stone in the entrance and then putting soldiers to guard it (Matt. 27:62-66).

The Resurrection of Jesus

- The Lord Jesus was crucified and buried on Friday evening. His body rested in that tomb on Saturday which was Jewish Sabbath, observed by the Jews as a day for rest and worship. On early Sunday morning, the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and two other women made their way to the cemetery. They loved Jesus so much. They could not wait until daybreak. They brought spices that they might anoint Jesus' body. On their way to the tomb they wondered how they could ever roll away the huge stone from the entrance of the tomb (Mk. 16:1-3).
- But before they reached the tomb, a great earth quake had shaken that part of the cemetery. When they arrived, they saw that the stone - a very large one - had already been rolled away from the entrance, and the tomb was empty. Then the women went into the tomb and saw a young man (an angel) wearing a white robe and sitting on the right side. The women were sore afraid, but the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; you are looking for Jesus, Who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: He has risen from the dead..." (Matt. 28:17; Mk. 16:1-7; Lk. 24:1-9; Jn. 20:1-9).
- We are glad that the women found the tomb empty. Jesus is not a dead religious leader. He is our living Savior. If Christ had not risen from the dead and stayed in that tomb, we would never

have a Savior. He would have been a false Messiah. All His claims and promises would have been in vain. If He had wasted away in that tomb, no body wouldn't have believed in Him. But thank God, He did rise again in all of His power and glory, and we have a living Savior!

- The world needs a Risen Savior. Only a living Lord can save us from our sins. Only a living Lord can influence the world as He has. Only a living Lord can change the stream of human history as He has done. And one day He is coming back, not to hang upon a cross, but to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords forever and ever!

Jesus' Appearances after His Resurrection

- The empty tomb was not sufficient to prove Jesus' resurrection. Most important still were His appearances after His resurrection. The disciples of Christ believed in the resurrection not because they found the tomb empty or they could not find His body, but because they saw the Risen Lord. Jesus appeared to His disciples at least ten times after His resurrection and before His ascension. In Acts 1:3 we read, "After His suffering, He showed Himself to His disciples and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."
- The Lord Jesus appeared to His followers on ten occasions during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension as follows:
 - (1) To Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:9-10; Jn. 20:10-18), on early Easter morning
 - (2) To the women returning from the tomb with the angelic message (Matt. 28:8-10), on Easter morning
 - (3) To Peter (Lk. 24:34; I Cor. 15:5)
 - (4) To two disciples, on way to Emma'us, toward evening (Mk. 16:12-13; Lk. 24:13-32)
 - (5) To the disciples that night, Thomas being absent (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:19-25)
 - (6) To the eleven disciples (Jn. 20:26-31), a week later, Thomas present
 - (7) To the seven disciples, beside the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:)
 - (8) To the eleven apostles and more than 500 brethren (disciples), in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15-18; I Cor. 15:6)
 - (9) To James, the Lord's brother (I Cor. 15:7). Time and place unknown
 - (10) His final recorded appearance and His ascension from the Mount of Olives (Lk. 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-12).

The Great Commission

- On one occasion the Lord Jesus, by His own appointment, appeared to the eleven apostles in a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 26:32; 28:16-17). When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. Now all the eleven apostles saw Him earlier and believed that Jesus was alive. Who, then, doubted Him? These doubters must have been some of the 500 disciples who had been told to come and yet who could hardly believe that Jesus had risen from the dead (Matt. 28:17; I Cor. 15:6).
- At this time the Lord Jesus gave His followers the Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Mk. 16:15-18).

The Ascension of Christ

- The climax of the Resurrection appearances was Jesus' ascension which marked the end of the forty days. It took place at the Mount of Olives. We read that Jesus led His disciples out (of Jerusalem) as far as Bethany (located on the eastern slope of Mount Olives), and lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven (Lk. 24:50-51; Mk. 16:19; Acts 1:9-12). Thus ended the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, the Son of God. He was exalted to the place in the Heavenly Kingdom which He had laid aside when He humbled Himself to become a Man. While He was with His disciples He promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with them, as He Himself had been with them (Jn. 14:15-17, 25-26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8).
- As the Lord Jesus was taken up out of their sight, the disciples were told by the angels that He would come back in the same way as they saw Him go into Heaven (Acts 1:9-11). All through the N.T. this message rings out - Jesus is coming again! He is coming to take unto Himself forever all who believed in His matchless name; and He is coming in glory to reign with His saints forever and ever. Yes, some day the Son of God is coming back, and that day may be very near. When He does, what glory that will be!

What Have We Learned Today?

1. The resurrection of Jesus proved many things. It proved that He was the Son of God. It proved that every claim that He ever made was true. It proved that He had a power in heaven and on earth. If He had the power to break the bonds of death and the grave, He has the power to save us. Remember, Christianity is a living religion with a living Savior. Jesus in His resurrection has conquered death for us and brought us eternal life. We God's children no longer fear death, because Jesus lives, we shall live also (Jn. 14:19b).
2. The disciples of Jesus believed the resurrection not because they saw the empty tomb, but because they saw the Risen Lord. After Jesus was crucified they became dispirited and disillusioned, hiding out of fear for their lives (Mt. 16:9-11; Jn. 20:19). Jesus' resurrection changed them from people who were confused and cowardly into people who were assured and courageous, ready to suffer for their Lord. The resurrection was a central theme in the apostles' preaching, without which there would be no church or Christianity, and we would still be in our sins, without hope and without a Savior (I Cor. 15:12-28).

Memory Bible Verses: Matthew 28:18-20, Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded."

The Great Characters of Bible

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