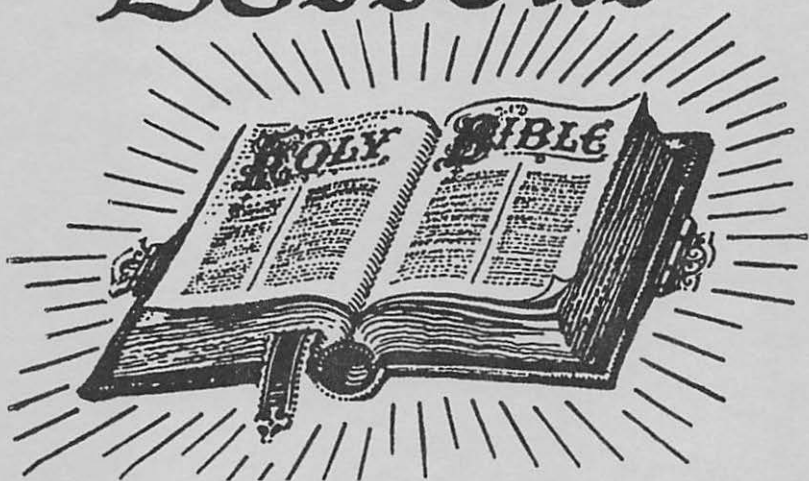


Bible Lessons



Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,
we are CHANGED" II Cor. 3:18

ADULTS -- YOUNG PEOPLE

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THEME FOR FIRST QUARTER, 2006

We are inspired this quarter with a series of lessons on the various Biblical characters who are worthy of being imitated, whose faith and integrity with God we would do well to conform to.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee



JANUARY 1, 2006

RIGHTEOUS ABEL AND WICKED CAIN

Genesis 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen?

7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. and unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

9 And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand:

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

I John 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

MEMORY VERSE: Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. I John 3:7.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Abel, the second son of Adam, attained to the true favor of God in that he made an acceptable sacrifice in faith believing in God's love and faithfulness to Him. Although he suffered death at the hand of his wicked brother, his life and testimony still speaks a message for us today.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 4:2), "*tiller of the ground*": One who seeks for gain through working with the soil to bring forth profit. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his account, speaks of Cain like this: "Cain was not only very wicked in other respects, but was wholly intent upon getting; and he first contrived (was the first to have the idea) to plough the ground."

(Genesis 4:3), "*in process of time*": The Hebrew text says, "at the end of days." "*offering*": Something offered to God as a gift or expression of worship and thanksgiving, a gesture of good will and humility and desire for mercy and favor. It is very likely that Adam had informed these sons of his former status with God, and of his error and fall from His favor. So we can understand why they were taught to sacrifice to God in an effort to draw near to Him and renew a good relationship. Adam Clarke said that this offering was the thanksgiving offering by which was testified belief in God as the Lord of the universe and the Giver of material blessings.

(Genesis 4:4), "*also brought*": This infers that Abel brought the thanksgiving offering of the fruit of the ground as Cain did, but that he included the animal blood sacrificial offering which was meant to respect and honor the justice and holiness of God, implying a conviction of one's own sinfulness and a confession of transgression and a faith in the promised Deliverer. This was Abel's sacrifice, and it is very evident that Cain did not include

such with his offering. This indicated that Cain expressed no sense of guilt and conviction for sin as he should have done. *"firstlings"*: The first born of the increase of his flock. *"fat"*: The richest or choice part. *"had respect"*: Looked upon with favor and approval. This was because Abel was repentant and sorry for his sins and had confidence in the promise God gave to Adam of the Seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head, which was pointing toward Christ.

(Genesis 4:5), *"was very wroth"*: Glowed with anger. *"countenance fell"*: His face was full of resentful displeasure.

(Genesis 4:7), The Hebrew renders this verse: "If you do well, will you not be exalted? And if you do not well, sin is crouching at the door; and toward you is its desire but you should rule over it." There is much contained in this admonition of the Lord to Cain. The choice was his. He could have done well even as Abel. Sin was crouching at the door of his heart, ready to spring in and take him over if he fell short of God's pleasure. He did not need to let this happen. He could have taken his stand to do the right and overcome the temptation to do wrong. It is still that way today with us.

(Genesis 4:9), *"Am I my brother's keeper?"*: Am I to guard and protect my brother?

(Hebrews 11:4), *"By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice"*: By his faithfulness Abel prevailed to gain God's favor. Josephus says: "Abel was a lover of righteousness; and believing that God was present at all his actions. He excelled in virtue." And the very fact that he offered a blood sacrifice expressed his confession of sin and belief in the coming Messiah. *"obtained witness"*: Gained evidence and a clear testimony. *"God testifying of his gifts"*: God made His approval of Abel's sacrifice very plain so that both Cain and Abel recognized it. Abel knew he was accepted, and Cain knew that he had been rejected.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Cain and Abel were the first two children of natural birth to Adam and Eve, the first created man and woman. They were both by the same parents, raised under the same jurisdiction and rule, but were entirely different in character and choice of manner of life. This condition can still be repeated, as every person is responsible to choose his own direction. Cain did not

need to take the attitude and course that he took. He could have joined with Abel in his repentance and faith, but he chose not to. So instead of overcoming the temptation of self and fleshly lusts, he yielded and stood as an affront to God. It is the same today with the children of men. Every person has a right to make his own choice. God gave that right to us. He forces no one to serve Him.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who is really responsible for the decisions a person makes?
2. What made the difference between Abel and his brother, Cain?
3. Why was a blood sacrifice so needful to be made?
4. What constituted the faith of Abel?
5. What steps can we take in imitating the faith of righteous Abel?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Abel stands as a great example of faith and decision for the Lord. He braved his own brother's anger in doing what he did to gain God's favor. He was probably already aware of Cain's ugly and selfish disposition. But he wanted to please God and be clear before Him. So, along with the thank-offerings, he included a blood sacrifice, one of his choice lambs, invoking God's mercy and forgiveness for his sins. This pleased God and He made it known. Is it not a worthy endeavor for each one of us to make in our short earthly life, a sincere and wholehearted effort to diligently obey the will of God? Let us take the example of Abel and gain a lesson on the importance of doing all to please Him.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

After Adam and Eve were banned from the beautiful Garden of Eden because of sin, they were no longer able to eat of the tree of Life. Death was the inevitable result. However the Lord blessed them with children and allowed mankind to continue to inhabit the earth. No doubt they often remembered the blot of sin that stained their own lives as their children were young and innocently playing childish games around their home. This period of childhood innocence would last only for a short duration of time.

These children, Cain and Abel, had inherited a sinful nature from their parents that they individually were going to have to deal with.

As these children grew, they became aware of a need to bring an offering to the Lord and they both did. While they obviously had different personalities and took up different occupations in life they had both experienced an increase from the Lord. But when it came to the offering they made to Him, the Scripture says, "...And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect...." This acceptance of Abel caused the weed of jealousy to grow and burst forth with passion in Cain's heart. It is likely this was not the first time that Cain had allowed unbridled passions to rule in his life and his choice of sacrifice and worship was probably influenced by his own convenience and desires which were obviously contrary to the plan of God.

The Lord was faithful to deal with Cain before the sin of his heart wreaked its vengeance on his brother. The question God asked Cain, which illustrates God's fairness and justice, rings out to humanity of all ages—"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?..." However, Cain once again shrugged off the counsel of the Lord and allowed self to be the focus of his life. His feelings, his passions, were more important than his brother's life. This same pitiful state is where many in our society are dwelling. Their lives are more or less following the pattern of Cain and God is not pleased. He sees the trouble that is ahead of that person who indulges and is consumed by his own lusts. The same spirit of rebellion against God boils in their hearts and they despise anyone who seeks the blessing of the Lord on their life.

While the dark side of this event brought such heartache, sorrow and separation from God, the side of Abel is where we want to be, even if it means death to this natural body. To have the precious blessing of the Lord on our life is the only thing that will satisfy the inner craving of the heart for God. If the Lord has been sought to answer the cry of our heart in this life then He will not allow the cry of our blood to go unanswered in our death. Men may destroy this body but they have no power over the soul, which lives forever. Therefore we are encouraged to lay up treasure in heaven for some day we will enter our eternal home and we surely want the approval of the Lord resting upon us so we can dwell with Him in the realms of glory.

—Bro. Willie E. Murphey

JANUARY 8, 2006

ENOCH, WHO WALKED WITH GOD

Genesis 5:21 And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

22 And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

23 And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

24 And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Leviticus 26:21 And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins.

23 And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me;

24 Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.

Proverbs 26:2 As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.

Jude 14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,

15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

Revelation 11:18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great, and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

MEMORY VERSE: He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Micah 6:8.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We should take heed to keep ourselves from walking contrary to the will of God, but agree with His Word and measure our lives faithfully to its standard of humility and holiness; for the Lord will one day pour out His wrath and judgment upon the ungodly.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Genesis 5:21), "*begat*": Fathered, or became the father of.

(Verse 24), "*walked with God*": Lived, moved and spoke in perfect agreement and well-pleasing with God. This means that he allowed no surrounding influence of the wicked world to prevail over him. He purposed in his heart and diligently applied himself to the manner of life that he knew was pleasing to His Maker. He was persuaded of the truth of God and that His way was right and best for him to follow.

(Hebrews 11:5), "*translated*": Transferred, transported or moved from one place to another. "*had this testimony*": This is the same expression as that of Abel. He obtained witness that he was pleasing God, even as Abel obtained witness that he was righteous.

(Leviticus 26:23), "*if ye will not be reformed by me*": The Hebrew says, "if you are not chastised to me." In other words, if the judgments God sends on mankind because of their sins will not cause them to repent and reform their lives, they can expect greater and more terrible judgments.

(Verse 24), "*punish*": Smite or strike.

(Jude 15), "*convince*": The Greek says "to convict fully, to rebuke and punish."

(Jude 16), "*great swelling words*": The Greek simply says, "proud things." "*having men's persons in admiration because of advantage*": The Greek says, "having their faces admired for the sake of gain." Much is done to influence men's minds by outward beauty and charm. One of man's greatest weaknesses is the glitter and attraction of a beautiful countenance and charming voice.

(Micah 6:8), The Hebrew says, "Man, He has declared to you what is good, and what is Jehovah seeking from you except to do justice, and to love grace (mercy and kindness), and to humble yourself to walk with God."

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson today is about a man that the Scriptures are limited about, but there is enough said to incite fervent admiration and interest from us, "Enoch walked with God."

Oh, the length and breadth and depth and height of those words! Nothing better could be said of anyone. The Scriptures in our lesson express that he thus walked with God for three hundred years. Much can be attained in a man's spiritual life by faithful fellowship with God for such a long length of time. It is no wonder, then, that God saw fit to "take" him, and not allow him to experience death. He translated Enoch, that is, God transported him from this earthly existence into the realm of eternal life. This means that he was changed from this corruptible to incorruption, from this mortal to immortality, just as Paul said that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord will be changed. (I Thessalonians 4:15, I Corinthians 15:52.) Thus this faithful man who walked with God here on earth abides eternally in the heavenly realm. We who will be accounted worthy to share in Christ's resurrection at the last day will be privileged to meet him face to face along with all of the rest of the faithful and true.

But we also have from the scripture in the epistle of Jude, a quotation from Enoch. Yes, we have his own words in a prophecy of the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. God, in His great wisdom, provided that we have on record the words of Enoch foretelling the great Judgment Day. Just retribution is going to be handed out to the ungodly mortals who have used their God-given power of speech to speak against the ways of the almighty God and His saints. And Enoch gave this prophecy concerning that great and dreadful day!

Along with the thought of Enoch walking with God we have the warning of God given to Israel in Leviticus 26 of what they could expect if they walked contrary to the Lord. So we can readily see what a serious thing this matter of walking with God is. If we dare to walk contrary to His good pleasure, it will not profit us anything, but bring woe and destruction upon us. We include the quotation from Proverbs 26:2 that the curse will not come unless there is a cause. There is a reason why calamities come. God almighty is highly displeased with the sins of this nation. The drug traffic, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, abortion, undress and corruption of morals is mounting up before the eyes of a Holy and Righteous Creator. The calamities

we have experienced are just a drop in the bucket compared with the wrath that shall be poured out upon this wicked world in that last great day. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of testimony did Enoch have before he was translated?
2. What do you think caused Enoch to desire to walk with God?
3. What are some of the things we must have to be able to walk with God?
4. What will be the end of those who choose to walk contrary to God?
5. Why can we not walk with God and also have worldly fellowship?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

As it was with Cain and Abel, so it was with Enoch. I am confident that the world in which Enoch lived and the society around him was not conducive to the ways of God. There is no doubt that he was in conflict with the men of his day. But Enoch chose to seek the Lord God and to have fellowship with Him. He saw and understood the great value and benefits there were in walking with His Maker. And if people would but lift up their eyes, see and behold the wonderful opportunity afforded to them in the gospel of Christ, there would be more people seeking after this life of pleasing God. But it is so easy to cater to the desires of the flesh and what everybody else is doing around us. We note in that 5th chapter of Genesis and verses 21, 25-27 that Enoch's son Methuselah lived a total of 969 years. Adding up the totals of the years given in this chapter we find that Methuselah died the year of the flood, making it probable that even Enoch's son missed out on the salvation of the Lord. Of course, we do not know for sure, but we also know that many godly people have had children who turned out wicked and rebellious. It is because such choose to be so. A person can be godly and reap the benefits of a life for Jesus, but to do so one must set his face like a flint and obey God at all cost. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Let us consider the question at the end of the lesson, concerning how we must live in order to walk with God. This will

give us some insight into what Enoch's life must have been like. And to walk closely for three hundred years! To blink the eye, and find oneself in eternal rest! It is hard to comprehend how it must have been, but it is a thrilling thought, that if we are faithful to God in our time, and live to see that glorious day of the Lord, we too shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye. We will find ourselves rising effortlessly into the air, joining those who have been resurrected from their grave—and our Lord—in the air.

The verse from Micah lets us know that we must humble ourselves to walk with God. Surely the very beginning of this is to acknowledge and recognize that our breath and life and all things are *gifts* from God. Then we are to cultivate a deep gratitude for every breath and every thing we have. We are to express this thanks and praise, from the rising of the sun to its going down, and in waking times during the night.

Humbling ourselves also means we acknowledge His *wisdom* to govern and control our lives, and day by day, moment by moment, give Him the control of our thoughts, emotions, desires, intellect, preferences and plans.

We also humble ourselves by constantly acknowledging God's *power* to work in our lives. We bring every difficulty and care to Him. We look to Him with cheerful expectance to either change our circumstance or give us grace and power to endure it.

A humble heart is, without doubt, a happy heart. Think about it.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck



JANUARY 15, 2006

LOVING, WISE AND FAITHFUL JOSEPH

Romans 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Acts 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

Psalm 105: 17 He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant:

18 Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron:

19 Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him.

Genesis 39:2 And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man;...

3 ...And the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

Genesis 49:22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:

23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him:

24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)

25 Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:

26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.

Genesis 50:19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Hebrews 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

MEMORY VERSE: For the precious things of the earth and fullness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. Deuteronomy 33:16.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Joseph triumphed over adversity and abuse to emerge from obscurity and bondage to fill an important and God-given place to save his family and the world from starvation and death.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Acts 7:9), "*the patriarchs*": The ten older sons of Jacob, half brothers of Joseph. "*moved with envy*": Motivated by the intense

hatred and jealousy in their hearts toward Joseph.

(Verse 11), "*dearth*": A famine, or time of hunger and lack of food. "*sustenance*": Food supply.

(Psalm 105:17), "*sent a man before them*": God had Joseph sent to Egypt to prepare him to be their saviour in the time of famine that was coming.

(Verse 19), "*until the time that his word came*": Until the time came when Joseph assumed the governorship and rule of Egypt to direct the work of preparation for the famine. "*the word of the LORD tried him*": God commanded that Joseph be fully tested, tried, and prepared to fill the position that He wanted him to fill.

(Genesis 39:2-3), "*prosperous, prosper*": The word in the Hebrew means to make progress and go forward.

(Genesis 49:22), "*fruitful bough*": The Hebrew expression is "a fruit bearing son." "*by a well*": The Hebrew expression is "by an eye," but evidently refers to a spring which is the sustenance or "eye" of the landscape. "*whose branches run over the wall*": The Hebrew word for "branches" is "daughters." We may wonder at this, because Joseph had two sons, and no record of daughters. But it could very well be applied to *spiritual* daughters, which is greatly possible and something to be desired. To walk in the same wisdom and courage that Joseph had would make us spiritually his sons and daughters.

(Verse 23), "*archers*": The archers refer to the various elements in humanity that were as such who sorely grieved, shot at and hated him. First were his brothers, then the evil wife of Potiphar and, also, the butler who forgot Joseph even after his earnest entreaty to be remembered to Pharaoh.

(Verse 24), "*the shepherd, the stone of Israel*": A direct reference to Christ Jesus.

(Verse 25), "*blessings of the deep that lieth under*": The benefits derived from going through the depths of sorrow, disappointment and suffering long for righteousness.

(Verse 26), The Hebrew says, "The blessings of your father are above the blessings of my offspring to the limit of everlasting hills (for eternity); they may be for the head of Joseph and for the leader prince of his brothers."

(Genesis 50:19), "*unto them*": Unto his brothers who had sent a messenger to Joseph requesting his mercy and forgiveness, feeling that he would hate and requite them after his father's death. "*am I in the place of God?*" In other words Joseph is saying: "Vengeance is not mine, but God's." This is the attitude we are all called to possess.

(Deuteronomy 33:16), The Hebrew says, "And with the best of the earth and its fullness, and the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush; let it come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the consecrated one of his brothers." What a blessing and reward was bestowed on Joseph, reaching far into eternal joys of the Saviour! Yes, it is the very good will of Him who called on Moses from the burning bush: the possession of eternal life for all who love and follow the Lord.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today we will survey the commendable character of Joseph. Space will not permit an extensive account, but we have sought out scriptures that bring out the various stages of his life. After our opening word of counsel from Paul, we have part of the testimony of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Then we have part of the 105th Psalm in which part of Israel's history is recalled. And from Genesis we see the secret of the skill and success Joseph had. The Lord was with him and made him to prosper. And from the dying bed of Jacob came his last blessings on his sons, from which we include his blessing upon Joseph, excelling all the rest. And we have the expression of Joseph's mercy and forgiveness for his brothers followed by the writer in Hebrews stating Joseph's faith as he expressed it as he was dying concerning the future promised blessings to the children of Israel. For our Memory Verse we have part of the blessing Moses gave Joseph and his lineage before he was taken away. Putting these all together, we can see the wonderful blessings that can be ours if we will imitate the character and faith of this wonderful man. And it verifies the counsel of our first scripture: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Can you name something Joseph suffered and how he overcame it?
2. What kept Joseph from becoming bitter from the things he suffered?
3. Why does God take one through sufferings before being exalted?
4. Why was Joseph able to go forward and overcome as he did?
5. Who will decide whether one will overcome or be overcome?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

God has a special plan for the life of every one of us. He wants to fulfill His good will in us. But He has special ways and means to accomplish it. I am sure that when Joseph left his father one morning on a mission to see about how his brothers were faring, he was totally unaware of what lay before him. He was a young lad of seventeen, but he was a grown man of at least thirty-seven before he saw his father again. That was some of the price he had to pay to accomplish what God wanted him to. He had dreams in his youth of people bowing down to him. But, oh, the route that he had to take before seeing those dreams fulfilled! But God was with him and helped him to rise above and triumph in every difficulty he encountered. Do we want to be a success as he did? Are we willing to suffer and bear injury and keep a forgiving attitude as he did? We can do it if we set our face like a flint to be faithful to God. It will not be easy, but it will be worth all the effort and self-denial we can muster. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Lord blessed Joseph and his wife, Asenath, with two sons during the seven years of plenty. Joseph named the first son, Manasseh which means "For God hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." What an example of "forgive and forget!" He refused to let the injustices of the past rule his present and future. He had already nurtured a heart of forgiveness and was ready to receive his brothers and care for them through the years of famine as well as thereafter.

Joseph named the second son Ephraim, which means "God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." He was not paralyzed by his experiences of slavery, betrayal and imprisonment. He was able to move forward and be fruitful as well. While in slavery, he rose to be Potiphar's overseer. While in imprisonment, he served as the prison keeper. In serving Pharaoh, he was second to the throne.

We thank the Lord for the example of Joseph. He was a chosen vessel of the Lord. He triumphed in each traumatic situation by his proper attitude of heart. He refused to become a victim of his circumstances—but a victor of the circumstances. This just further proves that the Lord is interested in each of our spiritual successes. He does not promise easy paths but He does promise that through Him, we can be "more than conquerors." We can have the testimony of Joseph, "But God meant it unto good." —Sis. LaDawna Adams

JANUARY 22, 2006

MOSES, FAITHFUL IN ALL GOD'S HOUSE

Acts 7:17 When the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair,...

Hebrews 11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

Acts 7:21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

28 Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

Numbers 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)

6 And he (the LORD) said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.

8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold:...

Acts 3:22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

MEMORY VERSE: By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Hebrews 11:24-25.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God allowed Moses to be raised as a son of the daughter of the king of Egypt and became great in the eyes of Egypt, but, in beholding the humiliation and suffering of the people of God beneath their oppression, Moses gave it all up, and chose rather to follow God and be the leader of His people in their escape from that bondage.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Acts 7:19), "*subtilly*": Sly and cunning evil craft. "*evil entreated*": oppressed.

(Verse 20), "*exceeding fair*": The Greek says, "beautiful to God."

(Hebrews 11:23), "*By faith*": Because of or on the strength of their persuasion and conviction of the will of God concerning them. "*proper*": The same as "fair" in verse 20, meaning "beautiful."

(Acts 7:21), "*when he was cast out*": The Greek says, "And he, being exposed." This is referring to his being put into the ark and placed out into the waters of the Nile. Thus his mother put him in God's hands for Him to do as He saw best. "*nourished*": This means that Pharaoh's daughter reared and brought him up to manhood.

(Hebrews 11:24), "*was come to years*": Became great and mighty.

(Verse 25), "*the reproach of Christ*": Moses had full knowledge about these people who were being held in bondage by the Pharaoh. Further on in Stephen's defense in Acts 7:23 he stated that when Moses was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit (or look upon) his brethren, the children of Israel. Then he said in verse 25 that Moses supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God, by His hand, would deliver them. Here the writer labels this woeful suffering of Israel as "the reproach of Christ." This means that he relates Israel's suffering to be on the same level as what Christ suffered in this sinful, dark world. And it is rightly so that they are closely related. In Moses

taking action against this tyranny, it caused him to have to give up his position in Egypt and flee; and flee he did to the land of Midian. It was because of his persuasion that God would, by His hand, deliver His people that he made this firm decision.

(Verse 27), "*endured*": This means that he kept on, was strong, steadfast and patient. Consider what that meant for Moses to forsake Egypt and give up all the glory and honor that he had and, perhaps, even to be the king himself. He forfeited it all for the sake of the people of God and, as our text implies, the reproach of Christ. He kept on, as seeing the Invisible One. He relinquished the glory of the tangible that he might attain to the unseen eternal treasures.

(Verse 29), "*assaying*": Seeking or trying.

(Numbers 12:3), "*meek*": The Hebrew word means depressed, gentle, needy, saintly, humble, lowly and poor.

(Verse 7), "*faithful in all mine house*": This means that he was firm, trustworthy and true in all that God had called him.

(Verse 8), "*similitude*": Likeness of form, shape or manifestation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Through the application of the New Testament Scriptures we will consider another important Old Testament figure, that of Moses. We generally associate Moses mainly with the giving of God's law on Mt. Sinai. But there were numerous things that went before in the life of Moses that helped to prepare and qualify him for being used of the Lord to bring out the lively oracles of the Law.

We draw from the defense speech of Stephen, one of the seven deacons of the New Testament Church, several things of the early rise of Moses. His sayings along with what the writer in Hebrews brings out make up a good part of our lesson text.

We also include in our lesson what was said in Numbers concerning Moses being meek above all men on earth. This is a very important attribute for a man invested with leadership to have. On this occasion Moses' sister Miriam and brother Aaron were criticizing Moses concerning the Ethiopian woman he had married. At this we find Moses silent and not seeking to justify himself. Being defenseless is one of the qualities of being meek. And we see in this case that God took action on Moses' behalf to speak for him.

Our final scripture is from Peter's message given to the people at the temple on the occasion of the healing of the man

lame from birth. Peter declares that it was through the power of the name of Jesus that the lame man was healed, and that what Christ had accomplished was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. And this quotation from Moses was applied to that. This was from Deuteronomy 18:18-19.—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What conditions prevailed in the time of the birth of Moses?
2. To what state did Moses attain to in his first forty years?
3. What caused Moses to give up his honor and glory in Egypt?
4. How did Moses manifest himself to be meek?
5. What did Moses say concerning Christ Jesus?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

It is very certain that if Moses had chosen to retain his honor and prestige as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, we would never have heard of him. How much in one's life depends on the choices he or she makes! People do not accidentally become true Christians. We do not just happen to become children of God. There is a decision that has to be made, a resolve that has to be formulated in one's own mind and heart. Moses had it in his mind to go out and look upon his brethren, the Israelites. There was already something being formed in his mind. There was a feeling of concern and pity for them in their vile oppression. He took action for an Israelite who was being beaten. He killed the Egyptian oppressor and buried him in the sand. Yes, that was a rash action, but it brought about his decision to forsake Egypt. He gave up the pleasures and security that he had and took his stand for the sake of the humiliated and abused people. How many have taken this very stand for Christ through the years to give up fame and fortune, honor and praise, to follow the meek and lowly Lamb of God! And how many have turned away from the call of the gospel because they were not willing to give up the fleeting things of this world! —Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"...For he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Hebrews 11:27. Moses at some point in his life had a Divine revelation. He saw something beyond what the present life had to offer him. It also said that he esteemed the reproaches of Christ greater

riches than the treasures of Egypt. He had a vision in the spiritual realm that caused him to choose it over all his gain and advantage of the flesh. The inner eyes of his understanding had been opened to see the spiritual side.

II Corinthians 4:18 reads, "...We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal." Oh how we desperately need this today. It is so human for us to be affected by what we see in the flesh. Peter, you remember, started walking on the water—A feat that he could not have possibly done in the human. But when he took his eyes off Jesus and fastened them on the storm he began to sink. Did you know that living up to the Scriptures is a feat that is impossible to you and me without Divine aid? We don't have enough understanding, courage or will power to do it alone. I Peter 1:13 lets us know that grace is brought into our hearts and lives at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Moses endured and was faithful in God's house because he saw the eternal side. The only way we are going to be faithful is through seeing Him who is invisible. In other words, keep our spiritual eyes and focus on Jesus Christ.

We can become ensnared if we begin to focus on the temporal and that is all we really are seeing. We can get our eyes on the cares and storms of this life, riches, pleasures, people and even our own human weaknesses. And just like Peter we begin to sink in our faith and courage. Let us all be encouraged to look unto Jesus; He is the Author and Finisher of our faith.

—Bro. Bob Wilson



JANUARY 29, 2005

THE FAITH OF RAHAB

Joshua 2:1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

6 But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we had heard *these things*, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

14 And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

18 Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

21 And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

15 She let them down by a cord through the window; for her house was upon the town wall, she dwelt upon the wall.

Joshua 6:22 But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her.

23 And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel.

25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

James 2:25 ...Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

MEMORY VERSE: By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. Hebrews 11:31.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Rahab believed the report of the God-given success of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the triumph over their enemies, and took advantage of affording protection for the two spies whom Joshua had sent to view the land and negotiated with them for the salvation of her and her family. By this she gained a place in the great lineage of faith in God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Josh. 2:1), "*harlot*": Adam Clarke asserts that this is more accurately termed as an innkeeper. The Hebrew word means "highly fed," which could refer to one who feeds and houses people. Clarke also asserts that it is very unlikely that these two trusted men on such a dangerous mission would resort to a harlot (in that sense of the word).

(Josh. 6:25), "*dwelleth in Israel even unto this day*": If she was a harlot, we can be assured that by her faith and testimony she was no longer one, but a true Israelite from then on. In the lineage of Jesus Christ Matthew 1:5 states that Salmon begat Booz (Boaz) of Rachab (Rahab). Clarke believes that this wife of Salmon (the father of Boaz who married Ruth) is this selfsame Rahab.

(Hebrews 11:31), "*them that believed not*": The Greek says, "those disobeying." Rahab's faith took action in her receiving and shielding the spies and her confession to them of her faith and godly fear.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We feel inspired to study about an obscure woman who lived in a house located on the town wall of the city of Jericho. This Jericho was the first obstacle that Israel had to overcome in the beginning of the conquest of Canaan. It is very evident, as expressed by Rahab to the spies, that the progress of Israel from

their escape and miraculous deliverance from Egypt through the wilderness and up to the present time of our lesson was noised and reported to the nations about. Rahab had heard of these things and she had great cause to be concerned. She knew that it would be hopeless to resist the onward march of this people who exhibited the presence of such a powerful God. Rahab acted wisely in humbling herself and confessing what was in her heart to the two Israelites who sought lodging in her place.

Our New Testament writers who mentioned Rahab did so along with other people of faith. Where she is mentioned in James 2 the writer had proposed the question of whether faith can save a man without works to go along with his faith. He brought out that to tell the poor and needy to depart in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them things they need is of no profit. He made the statement that it is not enough to believe that there is one God, for "the devils also believe and tremble." (Verse 19.) Then he mentions about how Abraham was justified by "works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar" in obedience to God's command. And then he added one more illustration of this point by mentioning what Rahab did in receiving and protecting the two spies from Canaan. This shows that the faith of Rahab was accepted and well-pleasing to God.

It is the same with the repetition of the account of this woman in Hebrews 11:31, our Memory Verse. She saved herself and her family by her steadfast faith in the power of God and what she did to express her faith. God is not listening to talk as much as He is observing our actions and ways. True repentance is the amending and changing of our ways and conduct. Rahab could have believed what she heard about Israel without doing anything about it. But she put herself forth in a bargain plea to the Israelite spies for her life and the life of her loved ones. Hers is a great example to follow.

Are we not living under the shadow of destruction? Has not God, in His Word, made plain that He will destroy this world and all of its wickedness? Are we not destined to stand before God in the final judgment? Do we really believe this? If we do, we have a move to make. We need to renounce our worldly and fleshly ways and seek "by patient continuance in well-doing glory and honour and immortality,..." Romans 2:7. By doing this we shall both save ourselves and them that hear us. I Timothy 4:16.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What caused Rahab to open up her heart to the spies?
2. What did she do to show her confidence and fear of God?
3. What shows us that she was a changed woman after that?
4. In what ways are we in a situation similar to Rahab's?
5. What steps must we take to prepare for the coming destruction?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We are living today in a world that is destined for eternal destruction. One of these days, (we know not when), the Lord Jesus will invade upon this earthly realm with His mighty angels in flaming fire. The elements and atoms of all nature will disintegrate and pass out of existence. All the works of man will be burned up. Everybody alive and all who have died in previous ages will be brought to consciousness and awareness of the reality of their Creator. We will all stand before that great judgment seat where Christ Jesus is Judge. We need to believe this, for the Bible teaches it emphatically. We must take appropriate action. We need to flee from sin and this present evil world and seek refuge in the Saviour's love and grace for forgiveness and deliverance from guilt and condemnation. We should do this earnestly with all of our hearts.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

It is easy when reading or hearing about the faith of others to discount the real courage that was necessary for that faith to go into action. One of the characteristics of faith is that there is not generally an immediate gratification for the one who possesses it. An action or work is carried out before the reward is realized or perhaps even promised. Such was the faith of Rahab. She risked her personal safety to shelter the men Joshua sent to spy out Jericho, especially if the king found out she was harboring spies and she provided cover for them.

The people of Jericho were fearful of the children of Israel because they had heard of the wonderful ways God had delivered them from their enemies. Yet, being fearful is not sufficient in itself to result in an appropriate action. It may motivate an action, which very likely would be the wrong action. The natural response for her to have taken would be to destroy her enemy, reveal their identity or hinder their mission. But the faith she possessed in the God of Israel caused her to take a different

approach and plead for her life and the lives of her family. It would have been easy for her to look at the huge walls surrounding her city and feel secure from the armies of Israel, but her faith realized those walls were no defense against God. What a blessing it would be if more people today would realize they will not be saved from eternal destruction by the earthly things they are trusting in—their money, their intellect, their electronic gadgets, their weapons or their government.

Another attribute of the faith of Rahab was her willingness to break her allegiance with the sinful society she had been brought up in and give her allegiance to those who worshipped the true God of heaven. She would have been considered a traitor and despised by her fellowmen but her faith saw a way of escape and she became determined to pursue a path that brought about her deliverance.

After Rahab instructed the men to flee to the mountains to avoid those who were searching for them, she let them down the wall through a window in her house. Then she hung the scarlet line in the window according to their instructions as a token of their agreement. She did not know when they would come back but her obedience caused her to be prepared for their return.

Those who have had true faith in God have also demonstrated similar characteristics in the actions of their lives. II Peter 1:1 introduced his book with this verse, "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." May the Lord help us to have this same testimony of a "like precious faith." Truly, if we will manifest faith that is of the same caliber of Rahab we will also find the way to escape the destruction that is about to descend upon this wicked world.

—Bro. Willie E. Murphey



FEBRUARY 5, 2006

THE SACRIFICE OF RUTH AND HER REWARD

Ruth 1:6 Then she (Naomi) arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

14 ...And Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

18 When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

Ruth 2:2 And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

3 And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

12 The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Ruth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife:...and she bare a son.

14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD,

which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

17 ...And they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

MEMORY VERSE: The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. Ruth 2:12.

CENRAL THOUGHT: When we sacrifice our interests and desires for the sake of the Lord Jesus, His people and His cause, we bring ourselves under His almighty wings and He will reward us with blessings far greater than we had otherwise.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Ruth 1:14), "*clave*": Clung to; would not leave her.

(Ruth 1:18), "*steadfastly minded*": The Hebrew says, "made herself strong." Ruth firmly made the choice to give up her dreams and hopes for the sake of another's welfare and happiness. So it is in the power of our will to make ourselves strong for Christ and His kingdom.

(Ruth 2:2), "*glean ears of corn*": To gather or pick up from among the ears of grain.

(Ruth 2:3), "*her hap was to light*": Her chance happened. It was the Providence of God that brought Ruth to choose the field that she did.

(Ruth 2:8), "*abide here fast*": Stay with.

(Ruth 2:10), "*take knowledge*": Notice. "*stranger*": Foreigner.

(Ruth 2:11), "*nativity*": Birth. "*heretofore*": The Hebrew says, "yesterday and the day before."

(Ruth 2:12), The Hebrew renders this verse: "May Jehovah repay your work, and may your wages be complete from Jehovah, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

LESSON BACKGROUND

Naomi and her husband Elimelech with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion had sojourned from Bethlehem-Judah to Moab on account of a famine in their land. After Elimelech died,

the two sons took them wives of the women of Moab, one whose name was Orpah and the other's name was Ruth. Then both of Naomi's sons died. Our lesson today begins with Naomi, who upon hearing that the Lord had broken the famine in Israel, decided to return to her old home again and her two daughters-in-law with her also. After going a ways, Naomi stopped and entreated the two young women to go back to their mother's house, praying that the Lord would grant another husband to each of them. Orpah decided to go back, but Ruth steadfastly clung to Naomi and let her know that she would accompany her to her home country regardless of what it held for her. How much Naomi had influenced her daughters-in-law we know not, but it is sure that she had built up confidence and faith in Ruth that enabled this young Moabitish woman to relinquish her home ties to venture forth into a land unknown, for the sake of Naomi, whom she loved so greatly.

So they made their journey together and came to Bethlehem. When the people of the city greeted them, Naomi told them to call her Mara (which means bitter) instead of Naomi (which means pleasant), "seeing," she said, "the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me."

They arrived at Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest, and Ruth went out to glean in the fields from the grain so they could have bread to eat. She gleaned in the field of Boaz, a kinsman of Elimelech's family, a mighty man of wealth. Boaz showed mercy and favor to Ruth, having learned of her leaving her country to come with Naomi and help care for her. Their association ripened into love and Boaz decided to buy up the property of Elimelech and take them under his care, but to do so he had to obtain the consent of another man who was closer kin to Naomi than he was. He obtained the consent and bought all that was Elimelech's from the hand of Naomi. He took Ruth to be his wife, and she bare him a son named Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

So we have another case similar to our previous lessons on Rahab and Moses. Here a woman from another country came and cast her lot with the people of God. And so it is with many down through the years who have left their lives of sin and the world, and oftentimes forsaking even their own families, to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Not every person is willing to do this, but those who do leave all to follow Jesus will, as He Himself said, "receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Matthew 19:29.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What decision did Ruth make, and what caused her to do it?
2. What did Ruth say that shows that she believed in the Lord God?
3. What impressed Boaz so greatly about Ruth?
4. What value did the women put on Naomi's daughter-in-law?
5. How is Ruth's decision to be compared to concerning us?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The almighty God is weighing our hearts today. He beholds every one who sacrifices their desires to please Him. He has a special favor for all who will give up the world and their own pleasures to come and take up the cross for Jesus and follow Him. He has promised a rich reward for those who will choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. People have to have a vision beyond what this fleeting mortal earth affords. They must hear and heed the message of the gospel of Christ that calls one to leave the lusts of the flesh, and of the eyes, and the pride of life, and be willing to follow Jesus all the way. The majority of people, sad to say, are not willing to forfeit their own selfish interests of wealth and pleasure. But for those who see Jesus and understand what He affords is the open door to enter into wonderful happiness and blessings here, and in the world to come, eternal life.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." Psalm 45:10-11.

What stands out to me about Ruth is her simple trust—the whole-hearted *transferring* of her childhood's worship of Moab's gods to the Lord God, Jehovah. She submitted heart, soul and life to this God and His laws. As she heard Naomi explain about the Redeemer, the near kinsman who would rescue a poor widow from shame and loneliness, I wonder if Ruth connected the whole idea to the true God of heaven, Who would rescue poor humanity from the despair and darkness of ignorance and sin.

Her words to Boaz, as she humbly obeyed Naomi's instructions for pleading their cause to him and simply asked him to redeem her, make me to believe that she grasped the deeper meaning of the ritual.

"...I *am* Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou *art* a near kinsman." Can we also say with Ruth, "Oh, my dear Redeemer and Lord! Spread Your mantle of love and acceptance over me and let me remain in Your house all the days of my life! May I learn of Your ways and keep Your laws! Forgive me of my erring ways and many sins and redeem my life from destruction."

Can we also see the beautiful comparison between the way that Boaz showed kindness and mercy to the foreigner and the loving way in which Christ reached out to us, who were also strangers and foreigners? —Sis. Angela Gellenbeck



FEBRUARY 12, 2006

HANNAH'S SACRIFICE AND PRAISE

I Samuel 1:10 And she (Hannah) was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

24 And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her,...and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young.

25 And they...brought the child to Eli.

26 And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.

27 For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

28 Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

1 Samuel 2:1 And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

2 There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.

3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

5 They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.

6 The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

7 The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

8 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's and he hath set the world upon them.

9 He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed..

MEMORY VERSE: He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. 1 Samuel 2:9.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: It is the joy and pleasure of the Lord God to lift up the downcast, poor and needy souls and fill them with wonderful blessings. God will bring down the self-sufficient proud man to nothing, and all who go against Him will He judge in the last great day.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(1 Samuel 1:11), "*LORD of hosts*": The Lord of armies, peoples and innumerable angels at His command.

(I Samuel 1:20), "*Samuel*": His name means "heard of God." His mother Hannah prayed earnestly for a son and the Lord heard her cry and answered her petition.

(I Samuel 1:24), "*weaned*": Drawn from the breast. It is generally believed that this was accomplished when the child was three years old.

(I Samuel 2:1), "*mine horn*": Triumph and success. "*mouth is enlarged*": Given great liberty to speak and testify of what God had done.

(I Samuel 2:3), "*Talk no more so exceeding proudly*": The Hebrew says, "Do not multiply nor speak very haughty things." "*arrogancy*": Deliberate license and liberty taken to speak or do according to one's selfish desires. "*a God of knowledge*": The Lord God knows everything, nothing being hidden from His all-seeing eye. "*actions are weighed*": God takes notice of all that man performs and weighs the purpose and intent of his heart in all that he does.

(I Samuel 2:4), "*stumble*": Totter or waver in their own strength and ability.

(I Samuel 2:5), "*hungry ceased*": Their hunger is appeased and satisfied. "*she that hath many children is waxed feeble*": This in referring to Peninnah, the other wife of Elkanah, who was an adversary and provoked Hannah sore to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb. I Samuel 1:6-7

(I Samuel 2:9), "*by strength shall no man prevail*": Not by power does man become mighty.

(I Samuel 2:10), The Hebrew renders this verse: "His strivers against Him will be smashed by Jehovah, in the heavens He thunders; Jehovah judges the ends of the earth, and gives strength to His king, and exalts the horn of (gives triumph and victory to) His anointed." This is a worthy prophecy of Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today we will consider the account of another conqueror and hero of faith. Hannah was one of two wives to one man, Elkanah. This kind of practice has been proven to be unwise and not pleasing to God, although God in times past has tolerated it. It has been made clear in the Scriptures that God's plan is for man to have ONE woman, and for man to have more than one wife is adultery and sinful. In this case the two wives were very much in conflict. Hannah was not able to conceive and bear

children, but the other wife, Peninnah, was able to have children; just how many it does not say. But, every year when Elkanah went up to the house of the Lord to worship, evidently taking his two wives and children with him, Peninnah greatly provoked Hannah and made her weep and not want to eat.

So Hannah did a wise thing. She rose up and left the others and went into the temple of the Lord to pray. She prayed in bitterness of soul and agony of spirit, sorely weeping. Her lips moved but her voice was not heard. She vowed a vow to the Lord, that if He would look upon her affliction and give her a man child, she would give him back to the Lord all the days of his life. Eli, the priest, was watching her, and, thinking she was drunk, sought to reprove her. But after Hannah had humbly entreated Eli about the bitterness of her soul and her complaint and grief, Eli encouraged her to go in peace, that the God of Israel would grant her petition.

Shortly after this God answered her prayer and she was with child. Samuel was born and Hannah rejoiced in the Lord. She did not go up with Elkanah to the temple until she had weaned the child and was ready to go and present him to the Lord. She left him there in the care of Eli. The Lord blessed and rewarded Hannah, and she bore three sons and two daughters after that. (I Samuel 2:21.)

We have included in our lesson the prayer, testimony, declaration and prophecy that Hannah put forth. It is a worthy exaltation of the goodness and righteous judgments of the almighty God. It is a stroke against the self-sufficient arrogance of the proud and those who are unaware of their need of God. It shows the inclination of God to favor and consider the poor, the hungry, the weak and the destitute who call upon Him. And it also reveals His judgment against His adversaries and those who refuse to acknowledge their need of Him. And it is a prophecy of Christ Jesus, our King and Saviour and the victory that He accomplished for us, and also, of the final judgment.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was Hannah's great burden and need before the Lord?
2. What kind of vow and promise to God did Hannah make in her prayer?
3. What did she do in conformity to the vow that she made?
4. What does she say about the proud who do not feel their need of God?
5. What does she say that God will do with His adversaries?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The Lord God looks down upon the poor and afflicted people to save them, but will bring down high looks. David said this in Psalm 18:27. He, along with Hannah and many other people down through the ages, have proven that the Lord favors the downtrodden and broken in spirit. God is gracious to the crushed and cast out. When the poor and needy cry unto Him in their distresses He will open up rivers of blessings and wonderful answers to their prayers. He will regard the prayer of the destitute and not despise their prayer. (Psalm 102:17.) The brazen soul who refuses to acknowledge his poverty and need will be a pauper and a cast away at the final judgment regardless of his standing in this life.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Children are a precious gift from the Lord. “Lo, children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is* his reward.” Psalm 127:3. When Hannah presented herself to the Lord, she was experiencing the natural, womanly hunger for a child. Rachel, who was also barren, had this same deep desire for a child when she told Jacob, “...Give me children, or else I die.” Genesis 30:1.

There is a spiritual parallel that we would like to note. “...For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.” Isaiah 66:8. Zion is described in feminine form. We (as Zion) should also have that natural hunger for souls (newborn babes in Christ). There is a lot of sacrifice, prayer, fasting and tears in bringing a soul to fruition. Many times souls are lost because of our lack of concern for them. We either do not want the responsibility or are too busy to properly care for them. (Spiritual abortion?)

If we are to be a caring spiritual mother, we should be patient in the extra feeding, holding and carrying of this newborn babe. Be careful that we do not drop, starve, force-feed or neglect this fragile new life. And what a delight a newborn babe brings to a congregation! We glory in those first words and first steps. May we each have Hannah's vehement desire for newborn babes in the kingdom of God.

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

FEBRUARY 19, 2006

OUR ETERNAL INHERITANCE IN CHRIST

I Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Ephesians 1:9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

13 In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Colossians 1:12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

I Corinthians 6:9 Knowye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

MEMORY VERSE: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:12.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: While inheritances and earthly possessions are soon to pass away, in the Lord Jesus Christ through the mercy of our heavenly Father, we can be saved from our sins and be made worthy to inherit eternal possessions in the kingdom of God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(1 Peter 1:3), "*begotten us again*": Regenerated us. "*lively*": Living.

(Verse 4), "*incorruptible*": Undecaying in essence and continuance; everlasting. "*undefiled*": unspoiled, unstained, unspotted from sin. "*fadeth not away*": Unchanging, perpetual in beauty and value.

(Verse 5), The Greek text says, "Being guarded by the power of God through faith to a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Our present salvation is that great deliverance from sin and the victory over satan and all of his works. But there is a salvation that will be revealed when Christ comes and changes us to immortality. Between now and that glorious appearing of the Lord we are preserved by His Holy Spirit's power and kept ready to meet Him in the air.

(Eph. 1:10), "*dispensation of the fulness of times*": This means the stewardship of the gospel of Christ that has fulfilled the old law system and the prophecies of the Scriptures. This is the fullness of times, the completeness and perfection of the good pleasure that God has had from the beginning.

(Verse 11), "*obtained*": Been assigned or chosen. "*predestinated*": Determined in advance. This means that God had this plan of salvation planned to perfection and willed it to all who will qualify through faith and obedience. "*purpose*": What God has set forth and intended should be.

(Verse 12), *"praise of his glory"*: That which the beauty, brightness and perfection of God commends and is pleased with. *"who first trusted in Christ"*: These are the apostles and those who were first to accept the gospel and anchor their faith in Jesus.

(Verse 13), *"after ye believed, ye were sealed"*: Having believed, they were blessed to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the seal of the living God, placed within those who have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. This guards and preserves the children of God from the defilement of this evil world.

(Verse 14), *"earnest"*: A pledge: that is, part of the purchase money or property given in advance as security for the rest. *"until the redemption of the purchased possession"*: Just as a man makes a down payment, called "earnest money," to hold the property he is buying and keep someone else from getting it, so the Holy Spirit living within us is a seal and an earnest of what we will get at the last when Jesus comes and brings this world to an end.

(Colossians 1:12), *"meet"*: Fit or worthy. *"partakers"*: Sharers of the inheritance given to holy people who are walking in the light of God.

(Romans 8:14), *"as many"*: The number of the real sons and daughters of God is made up exactly of those whose lives are led and governed by the Word and the Spirit.

(Verse 15), *"bondage"*: Slavery. *"adoption"*: Sonship, the relation of us to God as sons. *"Abba"*: This is the Hebrew word for "father." We call God our Father because we have His Spirit living within us, and He is a Father to us.

(Verse 16), *"beareth witness with"*: Testifies jointly and in agreement.

(Verse 17), *"heirs"*: All who receive the inheritance.

(I Corinthians 6:9), *"effeminate"*: This takes in any who uses the sex function wrongfully. *"abusers of themselves with mankind"*: Homosexuals.

(Verse 10), *"extortioners"*: Those who plunder and seize that which is not rightfully theirs.

(Hebrews 6:12), *"slothful"*: Sluggish, lazy and dull.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We are inspired to bring forth a lesson today concerning the inheritance that we can have in Christ, a wealth and possession that is eternal, reserved in the heavens. In comparison with an earthly inheritance it makes this fleeting world and everything

within it as nothing. And that is what it will all be in the last great day: nothing. Those who make it their aim and good pleasure to seek for worldly riches will be left out. But all who give up this world and its pleasures and treasures and take up their cross and follow Christ will be rewarded with everlasting life and fellowship with Christ in that blessed world to come.

From the writings of Simon Peter and Paul we have a good view of the wealth of this inheritance. It is not earthly houses, lands, bank accounts, stocks, bonds and material gain. It is rather a promise of being a partaker of the resurrection from the dead with Christ Jesus when He comes again. This earthly sphere will melt beneath the power and glory that will accompany Christ when He descends from the heavens. He will gather His people and to the faithful He will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Matthew 25:34. Oh, what a glorious day that will be! Let us set our hearts on these treasures above and live so we can be accounted worthy to be in that number!

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. How much of this present world do we really possess?
2. What will happen to all of our earthly possessions at His coming?
3. What is our inheritance in Christ made up of?
4. Why is the Holy Spirit an earnest of our inheritance with Christ?
5. Who are the only kind of people who will inherit this great possession?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

How sad so many of our day on earthly love are borne away, from all the great reality of wealth that lasts eternally. A man may have inheritance of money's bright alluring stance, of houses, lands, securities and all the flesh can show and please. But if he has no hope in Christ and lacks the treasures that He priced, this earthly wealth will soon decay and all its treasures fly away. And he will just a pauper be, condemned for all eternity, far from the fold of God's great love and all the holy saints above. Had we not better seek to own a right to come before God's throne, and for our spirits gain a lot, inheritance that knows no blot?

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Not long ago my son and I had taken a little outing to the woods. Crossing a bridge, we stopped and looked down into a shallow stream to see these large dead salmon.

The story of the salmon is an amazing one. They are hatched in small mountain streams, they swim downstream and into the Pacific Ocean where they live several years. Toward the end of their life cycle they begin their journey "home" to lay eggs and die. It's an uphill battle going upstream. They have a very strong instinct and drive that tells them to go home and they exert tremendous effort to get there. Many times they have survived attacks from predators, waterfalls and shallow streams. They are usually heavily battle scarred when they arrive and not all of them make it.

Many analogies can be drawn between the salmon and our spiritual life. One is that a close walk with God will take us against the currents of this world. You can't simply get into the flow of everything and expect to make it home. We will have to press against the temptations of the world and flesh. I believe the Holy Spirit can give us the recognition that this is not our home and also the inner drive of faith, courage and determination to continue on firm unto the end. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

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FEBRUARY 26, 2006

DAVID, THE SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL

II Samuel 23:1 ...David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,

Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

3 Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

4 One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

5 For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

6 And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

8 When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

9 Hide not thy face *far* from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

10 When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.

11 Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

12 Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.

13 *I had fainted*, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

MEMORY VERSE: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. Psalm 23:6.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Being a child of the Lord God brings the greatest joy, protection, strength, pleasure, hope, security, peace, help, fulfillment and happiness that one can have.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(II Samuel 23:1), "*sweet psalmist*": Pleasant singer. Singing songs and hymns for Jesus is one of the sweetest exercises one can be involved in. This is because the joy of the Lord in the heart accompanies our singing and makes it pleasant and delightful.

(Psalm 27:2), "*wicked*": Evil doers. "*enemies*": Those who trouble and distress us.

(Verse 3), "*host*": Great army. "*will I be confident*": I am trusting and holding on for a refuge.

(Verse 4), "*seek*": Search out or strive for. "*the beauty of the LORD*": The delight of Jehovah. This is referring to those ways and traits of the Lord which are enjoyable and delightful to the soul. Blessed is the man who has found that special delight that comes through living with all the heart and soul for the Lord! "*inquire in his temple*": This means to ask about, open up, inspect and examine with all curiosity and consideration.

(Verse 5), "*pavilion*": This is a shelter, a place of safety and protection. This is one of God's great benefits, spoken oftentimes in the Holy Scriptures. As it states in Psalm 91:1, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "*secret of his tabernacle*": God's tent of covering is a secret place, unknown and unfelt by the world and its crowd. A child of God's interest are not in the fleshly and worldly fashion. As it says in Philippians 3:20, "For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." And in Colossians 3:1-4, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

(Verse 7), "*have mercy also upon me*": And favor me.

(Verse 11), "*plain path*": A level path which is straight, right and just. "*because of mine enemies*": Because of those who watch me. It is a prayer for the Lord to help us to walk in a way that those who are looking for faults will not find anything.

(Verse 12), "*breathe out cruelty*": Puffs out violence and harm.

(Verse 13), "*I had fainted*": These words in the text are in italics, added by the translators to help convey the meaning. The expression is good. Because of those around us who are seeking

our hurt, we are tempted to faint and say, "It's no use, I give up." But it is for us to resist that temptation and hold fast to our faith. Let us keep confidence that the Lord has His all-seeing eye upon us and He is going to fulfill His good promises and bring us to a wealthy place, as it says in Psalm 66:12.

(Verse 14), "Wait": Tarry, hold on, and hope with expectancy.

LESSON BACKGROUND

For our lesson today, in this series of studies of the various characters of those who found favor with God, we have chosen a beautiful psalm written by David. It would be impossible to condense a study of this man into one lesson. So we decided that one of his psalms would be a worthwhile object of study, and we were drawn to this 27th Psalm. And for our Memory Verse we were immediately inspired with the final words of the 23rd Psalm.

At the first foolish error of King Saul after but two years of being king of Israel, the prophet Samuel declared that the Lord had sought Him a man after His own heart and commanded him to be captain over His people. (I Samuel 13:14.) And in Acts 13:22. Paul verified that this was David the son of Jesse. But, oh, the route that it took for David to attain to the throne! Saul did not step down, but continued to hold the leadership for the rest of the forty years he was king. And David? He passed through a good while of that time in exile, living in the wilderness, with a band of men who had joined themselves to him. Saul became jealous and full of hatred for David and sought fervently to kill him. But David endured those years of trial and affliction and finally was able to fill the place that God had called him to. Twice he had a chance to avenge himself of Saul, standing over his sleeping form, with his men begging him to take his enemy's life. But he refused to do so, choosing rather to let the vengeance be His who was the God of his life.

So let us take this Psalm soberly in mind as well as in admiration, for there will be times when we, too, will face similar adverse conditions. David knew the depths of waiting on the Lord, and we would do well to take heed to the counsel of the Psalm.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was the one thing that was David's desire to seek after?

2. What are the various points of the admirable beauty of the Lord?
3. What was David's response to God telling him to seek His face?
4. What kept David from fainting in the conflicts he met from his enemies?
5. What word of counsel does he give to us in our lesson?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Oh, how wonderful to have the Lord God almighty as our Light, Salvation and the Strength of our life! With Him on our side there is nothing and no one that we need to fear. Isaiah 54: 17 declares that "no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Our confidence will remain unshaken when we keep our desires steadfast to stay in the house of the Lord all the days of our life. For here in the fold of God's embrace we will be permitted to behold His wonderful, delightful beauty and fellowship. And we can also explore the blessed treasures and experiences of being in His service. Here we will be sheltered and kept hidden from the troubles that will come to us. They will come and we will suffer from them, but we will not be moved or affected. We will triumph over all the devices of the devil and our souls will be filled with songs of victory and everlasting joy. Then, as we continue to daily seek the face of the Lord in prayer, He will teach us *His* way and lead us in the paths of *His* righteousness. We will not faint in the times of trouble, nor draw back in unbelief but will continue to believe to the saving of our souls, being followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6: 12.)

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The secret to living an abundant life in the Lord is contained in this short verse found in II Corinthians 5:7. It says, "(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)" Unless we can grasp this principle and incorporate it into our lives we are going to continually be carried about with the whims of our emotions and our environment. David was able to place his trust in the Lord and by steadfastly holding on to that trust he was brought through

some of the darkest hours of his life. It is true that we are people with emotions and feelings. We laugh and we cry. We feel pain and sorrow, but we should not allow our feelings and emotions to overshadow or diminish our faith in God. Rather we are instructed to "...Gird up the loins of your mind,..." "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day,..." "Fight the good fight of faith,..." "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." These scriptures and many others help us understand that our shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit should be up and in use, not hanging limply at our side while we languish in despair.

It is wonderful to read about some of David's victories, but it would be more wonderful to be able to tell about some God has given you. The Lord has victory for you in the battle you are in today. Let David's faith in the Lord also be your testimony. Focus your eyes on the God of David and realize that He has never lost a battle yet and through His strength and power you can prevail also. You can be a valiant warrior in the blood-washed army of our King.

May the inspired writings of this 27th Psalm lift your spirits. It was written and has been preserved over the decades of time to give us courage and motivate us to move forward in the kingdom of our God until we obtain the glorious crown of Life. Then we also shall be one of that number that "...shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."

—Bro. Willie E. Murphey



MARCH 5, 2006

FAITHFUL DANIEL

Daniel 6:1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom.

2 And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.

3 Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

4 Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

5 Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

6 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.

7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.

9 Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree.

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

11 Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

13 Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day.

14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

15 Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him.

19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

23 Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

24 And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

MEMORY VERSE: Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? Proverbs 20:6.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Daniel worshipped his God, as God had told his people to do, in the same manner he had done before, even though it meant that he would be thrown into the lions' den for doing so.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Dan. 6:1), "*princes*": Men appointed to govern as protectors of the land.

(Verse 2), "*president*": One who rules or presides. "*have no damage*": Not suffer loss.

(Verse 3), "*excellent spirit*": A spirit superb, preeminent and exceeding all others. "*thought*": The Hebrew says, "was planning."

(Verse 4), "*faithful*": Trustworthy, dependable and sure.

(Verse 7), "*All*": Everyone. But in this they lied, for Daniel was not included.

(Verse 11), "*making supplication*": The Hebrew says, "seeking mercy." Oh, how we need, as Daniel did, to seek mercy daily and continually through the day, for God to have mercy upon us and protect us from our enemies and this wicked unsafe world

we live in! Daniel knew that the decree had been made, but he was imploring his faithful God to have mercy and spare him in this threat.

(Verse 24), Let us read what the Hebrew Interlinear says: "And the king ordered, and they brought those men who had chewed the bits of Daniel. And into the pit of the lions they cast them, their sons and their wives. And they did not reach the bottom of the pit before the lions over-powered them, and all their bones they crushed."

LESSON BACKGROUND

Daniel had come to the kingdom of Babylon as a young captive from Judah. His first showing as a man faithful to God was when, with three other young men, he refused to defile himself with the king's meat and drink and requested that they be fed with vegetables instead. God blessed these young men and when they were presented to the king, they were found looking better than all of those who had eaten the king's food.

King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a troublesome dream that he asked the wise men, not only to explain the meaning, but also to tell him what the dream consisted of. When the wise men confessed that they were not able to do so, the king was enraged and angered, commanding that all the wise men should be destroyed. Daniel and his three friends were on the list also to be killed. But Daniel answered the chief executioner with counsel and wisdom, asking why the decree was so hasty from the king. When he was told what had happened, Daniel requested an audience with the king and obtained an extension of time in which he and the three young men could pray and seek God about it. And God revealed the dream to Daniel and also what the dream meant. This so impressed the king that he made Daniel great, and, at Daniel's request, set the other young men in higher offices.

Later Daniel interpreted another dream of Nebuchadnezzar in which was foretold the king being changed to like a wild beast to live in the wild for seven years. It came to pass just as the dream said, and, after spending seven years like a wild beast, the king came back to his throne a wiser and more God-fearing monarch.

When Belshazzar, a later king who had rejected the fear of God, was having a banquet and drinking wine from the vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem, a hand was seen writing on

the wall. Daniel was called and he interpreted the writing which spelled the fall of Babylon and the Medes' and Persians' take over.
—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why was Daniel preferred above the presidents and princes?
2. What did these men find when seeking an occasion against Daniel?
3. What did they persuade the king to do?
4. What did Daniel do when he heard the decree had been made?
5. What effect did Daniel's deliverance have on King Darius?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Daniel was a man much respected and the new king was greatly impressed by what he saw in Daniel and what he had heard of him. He discerned an excellent spirit in Daniel and decided to set him over the whole kingdom. But, as Abel, Joseph and David had suffered before him, Daniel soon learned that the other princes and presidents were filled with jealousy and envy toward him. Not finding (as told in our lesson) any fault in Daniel, these vain and ruthless men figured out how to get rid of Daniel by catching him in a snare concerning his faithfulness to his God. Such foolish and deceived souls had no idea of what they were running into by fooling with one of the sons of God. Their judgment was swift when Daniel was delivered from the lions and the king saw what their purpose had been. What a great lesson this has been down through the years to those who dare to obey God rather than man! Those three young associates of Daniel had their chance to experience the Lord's deliverance when they took their stand before the great image. They refused to bow down to it, even at the threat of being cast into the fiery furnace. God brought them through the fire and showed His great power. Thank the Lord for the faithful obedience and testimony of Daniel and his friends! —Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

How important are your "little" trials and tests? What difference does it make when you're young? Are the decisions

that significant? Do they have connection with life farther on? The story of Daniel emphasizes to me the way in which God prepares me for tomorrow with what I face today. Yes, there is connection. You and I overcome today—it's like putting money in the bank to draw from twenty years from now. Each experience has a deeper meaning than what you see at the moment. Daniel and his friends faced peer pressure at age seventeen or so. Did they cave? No, they stood firm and proved God faithful. They grew then, in wisdom and understanding. They had more ammunition on hand for the next round—figuring out the king's dream. Again, they could have run from the trial and lost their lives. But they *knew God*, and God did not fail.

Daniel, after standing up to Nebuchadnezzar with the truth and seeing him fall and rise, was still there when grandson Belshazzar needed a moment of truth. An old man now, Daniel still *knew God*. Kingdoms could change in Daniel's life, but he *knew God* was the same.

Was not praying three times a day—an old habit established in his youth—even an option to Daniel now, with the decree of death staring him in the face? Not a chance! Years of preparation now bolstered him with calmness and peace to face the king of beasts. *He still knew God.*

Remember that when you face your trials today. It will mean everything in the future.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck



MARCH 12, 2006

LOWLY MARY HIGHLY FAVORED

Luke 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

35 ...The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

MEMORY VERSE: Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. Luke 1:45.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Mary, the lowly maiden of Galilee, rejoiced and gave glory to God that He had favored her in her humble situation to be the mother of the long looked for Messiah.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Luke 1:27), "*virgin*": A maiden, an unmarried daughter. "*betrothed*": Engaged or promised to be married. "*Mary*": The Greek form is "Mariam."

(Luke 1:32), "*throne of his father David*": The prophecy of this was from Psalm 132:11 and also quoted by Peter at Pentecost in Acts 2:30. "The LORD hath sworn in truth unto

David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." Here the angel said that the Lord God would give unto Jesus, the promised Son of Mary, that throne. And Peter said in Acts 2:30 that David, being a prophet, knew that God had made that oath to him and said further that he seeing this spake of the resurrection of Christ and his being exalted to the right hand of God. He stated further that David was not ascended into the heavens: but said himself, (from Psalm 110:1) "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Putting this all together, we can readily see that the throne of David that was to be given to Christ is that throne in the heavens at the right hand of God, an intercessory throne of grace. (Hebrews 4:14-16.) The teaching in our time that Christ will come and sit on an earthly throne over in literal Jerusalem is a false doctrine.

(Luke 1:38), "*handmaid*": Female slave. "*be it unto me*": May it come to pass unto me. This was an assent to what the angel had spoken, an agreement and declaration of acceptance of her faith and confidence in God. This was a different and much better attitude than that of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, who had questioned this same angel in response to the promise of his son, saying, "Whereby shall I know this?" The angel gave him a sign of being dumb and not able to speak until after the child was born. It is much better to believe the promises of God rather than try to figure out how they will be fulfilled.

(Luke 1:46), "*magnify*": To extol or declare as great.

(Luke 1:47), "*rejoiced*": The Greek expression is: "leaped for joy." The babe leaped in Elisabeth's womb for joy when she heard the salutation of Mary, her cousin. So the soul of Mary likewise leaped for joy as she surveyed the blessedness that had come to her.

(Luke 1:48), "*regarded*": Looked upon with favor. "*low estate*": The Greek word means "humiliation." It is the same word as in Acts 8:33 where the prophecy of Christ said, "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away." And it is the same word in Philippians 3:21 where it speaks about Christ's coming to change our "vile" body, which means "the body of our humiliation." It means depression in rank or feeling. Who is willing to accept the humiliation and reproach of Christ that He wills that we share with Him? "*call me blessed*": Count or esteem me fortunate and happy.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today we want to study the spirit of Mary, the maiden whom God chose to conceive and give birth to the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ. It was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 thus: "...Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." As with many of the ways of the Almighty, He rejected the high and lofty, the rich and the full, and condescended to men of low estate. He found Mary, a lowly maiden, but in her spirit the Lord found a faith that could take Him at His word.

Mary was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. After the angel's visit and her hasty trip to visit and tell her cousin Elisabeth about this wonderful blessing, it was expedient for her to tell Joseph about it, too. Perhaps she dreaded this part, wondering how he would take it. The account of Joseph's reaction in Matthew 1:18-25 shows that Joseph was minded to secretly terminate their engagement but was visited by the angel of the Lord in a dream and informed that he was not to fear to take Mary as his wife, for her conception was a special ministry of the Holy Ghost. And Joseph did as he was bidden and took Mary to be his wife.

Both Joseph and Mary are to be commended in our hearts and admired for their faith and obedience to the will of God. We would do well to imitate their faithfulness to the Lord. When we wait upon the Lord and hold fast our confidence in Him and experience the joy of being rewarded by Him, we will have experienced the greatest of the blessings of the almighty God.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What was Mary's response to the promise of being the mother of Jesus?
2. What were the factors that helped her to qualify for that honor?
3. Why did she magnify the Lord and rejoice in God her Saviour?
4. Why does God pass up the high and the rich and choose the poor and lowly?
5. For what reason is God pleased for us to believe before we receive?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

It is true even as James 2:5 states: "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him." People who are rich in their own estimation stand very little chance of rating with God because they are unaware of their poverty and need. A man who desires and hungers for God does so because he is unhappy with what he is and sees that what His Maker offers him is so much better. A man oppressed with the guilt of sin and condemnation and dread of eternal damnation is a good prospect for the gospel of Christ. But, to a person who makes a mock at sin, the plan of salvation in Jesus has no attraction. (Proverbs 14:9.) The hungry and thirsty for righteousness are the ones who will be filled and they that mourn shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4, 6.) The Lord scorns the scorner, and resists the proud, but He giveth grace to the humble and lowly. (Proverbs 3:34 and I Peter 5:5.) There are so many who in their own sight are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and know not that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17.) And Jesus said in John 9:41 to the Jews: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Mary was truly a lowly handmaid of the Lord. Not only did she witness the visit from the angel, but she was also the vessel for the conception and birth of the Son of God. She observed the visits from the wise men and shepherds. She watched as Simeon and Anna prophesied over her precious baby. She was there when Jesus performed His first miracle. She was at the crucifixion and witnessed His death. She was also one of the first to visit His tomb.

While Mary was an observer and witness of the greatness of the Lord, she was not interested in taking any of the glory for her own. "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart." Luke 2:19. She was willing to stay in the background. She exemplified true humility. What a mockery it seems to observe all of the statues, visions and inordinate adorations given to a woman who only wanted to be a "handmaid of the Lord."

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

MARCH 19, 2006

JESUS CHRIST MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

Hebrews 5:7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared:

8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

MEMORY VERSE: Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7:25.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus became our Lord and Saviour by submitting to the suffering and death of the cross, putting Himself in a condition for the almighty God to quicken and raise up unto eternal glory, defeating the devil and giving us the victory over sin and death.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(Philippians 2:5), "*Let this mind be in you*": Exercise the mind; entertain and have the same sentiment and opinion.

(Verse 6), "*thought it not robbery to be equal with God*": Counted not equality with God to be seized upon.

(Verse 7), "*made himself of no reputation*": Emptied himself.

(Hebrews 5:7), "*prayers and supplications*": Petitions and entreaties. Proverbs 18:23 says that the poor useth intreaties. And the Hebrew definition for the word translated as *Intreaties* is "earnest prayer." Jesus, in His poverty of spirit, employed earnest prayer and supplication to the Father for His deliverance from the power of the death of the cross He was submitting to suffer. "*strong crying*": Forcible weeping. "*in that he feared*": For his godly fear.

(Verse 8), "*learned*": Gained knowledge through experience.

(Verse 9), "*being made perfect*": Completed, accomplished, and fulfilled.

(Philippians 2:8), "*became obedient unto death*": Willingly allowed himself to be killed by being hung on a cross.

(Verse 9), "*Wherefore*": Consequently or for this reason.

(Verse 10), "*under the earth*": The realm of the dead, that is, departed souls.

(Hebrews 2:9), "*lower*": Less.

(Verse 10), "*it became him*": It was fitting and appropriate for him.

(Verse 14), *"destroy"*: Annul or render entirely useless.

(Verse 14), *"profession"*: Confession, testimony or acknowledgment.

(Verse 15), *"touched with the feelings"*: Sympathize.

LESSON BACKGROUND

For our lesson today we want to survey the mind and spirit of the greatest of all figures in the Holy Scriptures. Truly Jesus, the Christ of God, was submerged into deeper sufferings than any other living person in the scroll of time. And He has also been exalted to the highest peak of honor and glory, far beyond any other mortal in time. And also, He, as our Lord and Saviour, offers to share this pinnacle of glory and happiness with whosoever will take up their cross and follow Him all the way.

We combine our lesson text from the epistle of Paul to the Philippians with the epistle to the Hebrews. We are being called as Christians (followers of Christ), to seek to have the same mind as Jesus had. And then the writer describes the spirit and mind that Christ had. In the first place He was in the form of God. He existed with God from the beginning before the world was created. But He did not hold on to that position, not counting equality with God as the position to hold on to. But He was willing to relinquish it, in preference to be made a little lower than the angels into the likeness and infirmities of the flesh. This He did willingly and eagerly because of the great love He had for us poor lost and hopeless mortals. Then, after He got down to a human level, He went on farther down, humbling Himself to be obedient unto death. He submitted to die. But it was not just an ordinary death. It was the most horrible death that could be suffered that He submitted to. The death of the cross is believed to have been the worst painful and tormenting death a person could endure. There was shame and reproach and disgrace with it. But Jesus submitted to go through with it in obedience to His heavenly Father's command.

But because Jesus was obedient to suffer the awful cross, the heavenly Father rewarded Him by raising Him from the dead and setting Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named. He sits on a mediator throne

interceding between God and us poor and needy souls. He is worthy of all the love, devotion and faith we can offer Him.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Christ not hold on to His equality with God?
2. What was the first phase of His humility and coming down?
3. How did He humble Himself as a man?
4. What did God do to Christ as a reward for His humility and obedience?
5. What blessings and benefits can we receive from Jesus Christ today?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Jesus Christ is truly the blessed and only Absolute Ruler, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He was born of the virgin, Mary. He had no earthly father. His Father was the Lord God almighty. He was born amidst poverty and humiliation and grew up to become the meek and lowly Saviour of lost humanity. He was given power and dominion over sickness and mortal infirmity. He healed all manner of diseases. He opened the eyes of the blind and even raised some from the dead. He showed every sign that was needed to prove that He was the Messiah, the chosen and anointed Christ of God.

He condescended into a world ruled by satan and the power of sin. But Christ Jesus was triumphant and, though tempted sorely, did not yield to the allurements of sin. He was victorious. He overcame the world and promises to help us to overcome the world also. The world and its leaders hated Him because He came not according to their fancies. He came fulfilling the Scriptures and the words of the prophets spoken hundreds of years before. The evil men of the leaders of Israel, who were supposed to be the people of God, thirsted for His blood. And Jesus gave Himself over to their will and allowed them to arrest Him, accuse and convict Him, sentence Him and finally execute Him. It was all done in one day. No mercy was shown, no time to be sheltered in the security of a prison cell for people's tempers to cool down so He could have a fair trial. There was nothing fair about the way He was handled. The whole thing of His trial was

a mockery of justice. "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away." Acts 8:33.

But the grave could not hold Him. On the third day He came out of the tomb alive forevermore. His disciples saw Him and felt of Him. For forty days He conversed with them of His kingdom and His work. And then they witnessed Him ascending up. The Holy Spirit that He sent upon them is a living reality in the hearts of His saints today. Let us live for Him, suffer for Him, die for Him and in that last day share His resurrection!

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Recorded in the tenth chapter of the gospel of John, are wonderful scriptures portraying Jesus as the Shepherd of the sheep. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth;..." The prophecies of old foretold of the coming Messiah. They gave many details of His birth, life, ministry and crucifixion hundreds of years before it was to occur. This created a doorway, you might say. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy of Scripture. In other words, He came through the right channels—God's way. This gives us a firm foundation upon which to build our faith. "...We have not followed cunningly devised fables...."

Peter, in his second book, describes being with Him on the mount, seeing with their natural eyes the glory of the transfiguration and hearing God speak from heaven. They saw and heard it. Yet he goes on to mention that there was a surer way to know. In other words, Don't just believe me, search in the Scriptures, it is "...a more sure word of prophecy...."

When He was suffering on the cross they mocked Him and said, "...Come down from the cross, and we will believe him." On the contrary, His love held Him there to fulfill the Scriptures that we might believe He loves us. May we worship, trust and adore Him who died for us. He paid a debt that you and I could never have paid. I'm not sure what all heaven will entail, but I hope it will afford me the opportunity to put my arms around the One who made it possible for me to be there. —Bro. Bob Wilson

MARCH 26, 2006

PAUL, WHO PREACHED THE FAITH HE ONCE DESTROYED

I Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;

11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE: I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20.

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Paul formerly bitterly sought to destroy the influence and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, but God mercifully dealt with him to make him aware of Jesus and what He had to offer. From then on for Paul it was Christ Jesus all the way.

WORD DEFINITIONS

(I Timothy 1:13), "*injurious*": Insolent, boldly disrespectful in speech or behavior. "*ignorantly in unbelief*": Without knowledge and without faith.

(Verse 15), "*of whom I am chief*": Of this kind of people I was foremost.

(Verse 16), "*first*": Now in the beginning of the gospel era. "*pattern*": Example.

(Philippians 3:8), "*excellency*": The excelling superior status or rank. "*win Christ*": Gain, obtain, have and possess Jesus for the good of one's soul.

(Verse 10), "*know*": Experience, understand and be closely acquainted with. "*power*": Force. The Greek word here, "*dunamis*" is the word from which comes our word "dynamite." "*fellowship*": Being a partner and participating with. "*conformable*": To make or render to be like or similar to.

(Verse 11), "*if by any means*": So that somehow. "*attain*": To arrive at, achieve, experience as Christ experienced.

(Verse 12), "*Not as though I had already attained*": Not counting that I have obtained or reached the goal at the present time. "*follow after*": Pursue or chase. "*apprehend that for which I am also apprehended*": Lay hold of as also I was laid hold of.

(Verse 13), "*count not myself to have apprehended*": Reckon not myself to have laid hold of. "*reaching forth unto*": Stretching forward toward.

(Verse 14), "*press toward*": Pursue after. "*high calling*": Heavenly invitation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

From his own writings in his epistles to the different congregations we have gathered the text for our lesson today about the apostle Paul, the man who preached and gave his life for the faith that he at one time sought to destroy. Although he pictures the past of his life before he received Christ as being in darkness and ignorance, he states in other places that he was really trying to serve the God of Israel. He had been brought up and "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God." Acts 22:3. He was surely sincere and vehemently earnest in his zeal for the law, which was the cause for him to persecute the Christians so. He believed they were wrong and set out in his blinded zeal to stamp them out. It appears that the Lord saw in Paul, while he was in that blinded condition, a heart that would be very useful for the truth if he could but be turned around. And for that very reason Christ appeared so vividly and brightly on the road to Damascus. When it dawned upon Saul (which was his name previously) that Christ was alive and in such glory, his soul wilted in surrender to Christ, saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And when he was told what to do, he got up and started doing it. And, just as the Lord saw in him, he became a very efficient vessel in the hand of the Lord.

In our first scripture text from I Timothy we see the past described and the great grace that abundantly changed the whole picture. Paul believed that he obtained mercy because the Lord knew that the account of his conversion would echo through the centuries down to the end of time as a great evidence of the truth of the gospel. It would show the great long suffering and goodness of the Lord and inspire great comfort and assurance in the hearts of the saints of all the coming ages.

Then in the second part from Philipians 3 we have the beautiful description of Paul's change of life and the great fervent press that he employed in seeking for Christ to be his in truth and the goal that he desired to reach of retaining Christ in His righteousness, power, suffering and death to self and this present evil world. It is all inspiring and challenging to our souls that we attain, as he sought, to the resurrection of the dead.

—Bro. Leslie Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What caused Paul to be a blasphemer, persecutor and injurious?
2. Why did it mean so much to Paul for Christ to lay hold of him like that?
3. What was the great goal that Paul was constantly reaching for?
4. Why did he not count himself to have attained to it?
5. What was the prize that he hoped to win for attaining to that goal?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Paul was employing several things in the pursuit of attaining to the resurrection of the dead. He had to let go of his past endeavors that he was occupied in under the old law system. All of that was useless and of no value to him as he realized that Christ was all and in all. He gave it all up and counted it as worthless in order for him to really lay hold of Christ. He could not keep his law experience and have Christ at the same time. He also wanted to be found in Him with the righteousness of faith. Understanding came to his heart about it. He had to guard against that old law spirit, just as we have to be careful to keep away from it today. He wanted to know Christ, learn about Him and His great way. He wanted to experience and let work in his life the power of Christ's resurrection. The power that was exerted to quicken Christ from the grave and set Him at the right hand of God is needed in our hearts and lives today. We need to seek for it and trust God to work it within us. Living by that spiritual power and might and letting it be the strength of our life will assure us of partaking of it in that great day of resurrection. He also wanted to experience the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, His humiliation and shame. If we are to experience the quickening power of being resurrected in that day from the grave, we need to have His reproach working in us now. And then to be made conformable to Christ's death means that we are willing to die as He died, not seeking to save our lives, but choosing to relinquish and give it up. All of this Paul was endeavoring to have in reality as the true means of attaining to the resurrection of the dead with Jesus. —Bro. Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The zeal and dedication Paul had toward the service of the Lord has been a blessing to many throughout the ages. His writings to the congregations of saints in his day have provided a great source of strength, encouragement and enlightenment to us.

The Lord had great mercy on Paul when he was so zealous and yet so wrong. The example Christ gave when visiting Simon's house in Luke 7:40-43 comes to mind where He told about the two debtors that were forgiven by their creditor. One owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. Jesus then asked Simon which would love him most. Paul was forgiven a great debt and after he was forgiven he responded to the calling of the Lord. Paul proved his great love for the Savior by giving himself completely for the sake of the gospel. While the example Jesus gave is true yet the price He paid for man's sin required His death and, no matter whether our sins were great or small, all have sinned and have required His atonement to bring about our redemption. So all that are saved have been forgiven a debt we could not pay and we all likewise should feel a responsibility to give ourselves in some way for the sake of the gospel.

Paul's conversion is a wonderful example of the transforming power of God. The change that took place in his life was so radical that some of the saints had a hard time believing that it was real. May the Lord help us to not underestimate what He can do for those around us. And most of all, never allow the enemy to make you believe that there is no hope for you. If that thought is ever presented, read the story of Paul's conversion again and listen to his voice of experience. The verses contained in our lesson today should be more than enough to help us realize that there is great hope for those who will respond to the call of the Lord and become partakers of His great mercy.

—Bro. Willie E. Murphey



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