

Bible Lessons



"If my people, which are called by my name,
shall humble themselves, and pray,
and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways;
then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin,
and will heal their land."

II Chronicles 7:14

Volume 53, No 3
July • August • September

Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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NOTICE

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THEME FOR 3RD QUARTER 2021 BIBLE LESSONS

Repentance

For weeks the theme verse for this series had been running over and over in my mind, and I began to see a repeated call in the scriptures, from beginning to end, for God's people to return back to Him.

It's easy to make our identity the code we follow or the particular history from which we come, but truthfully, our only identity is in Jesus Christ, and our security is not in rigidly holding to our system of beliefs, but in constantly returning to our true spiritual home, the bosom of God. This series is a call to that; with all humble earnestness it is offered for diligent study and prayerful contemplation.

—Angela Gellenbeck

JULY 4, 2021

A NATIONAL CALL TO REPENTANCE

Isaiah 1:16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Isaiah 55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Jeremiah 25:4 And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear.

5 They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever:

6 And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt.

Lamentations 3:40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

42 We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned.

Ezekiel 14:6 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

Ezekiel 18:30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

Hosea 14:1 O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

2 Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.

Joel 1:14 Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

15 Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

Joel 2:12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to

me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

14 Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:

16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

17 Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

MEMORY VERSE: And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. —**Deuteronomy 4:27 and 29**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: When God formed the nation of Israel, He promised to hear their prayer of repentance when they sinned against Him. In later times when Israel turned away from the Lord, he sent prophets to call them to repentance and remind them of His promise to pardon them when they returned to Him.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 1:17 “Judge”: decide controversy; defend; execute judgment. “Relieve the oppressed”: properly, correct or reprove the oppressor; restrain him within the bounds of justice. “Judge the fatherless”: do justice for the orphans; be their champion. “Plead for the widow”: plead her cause; be her advocate.

Isaiah 55:6 “While He may be found”: in this day of grace. “While He is near”: while He offers Himself by the preaching of His Word.

Hosea 14:2 “Calves of our lips”: the words, praises, and thanksgiving of our mouths offered like burnt offerings of bullocks and calves.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our memory verse describes the promise God made to Israel when He warned them about turning away from Him and going into idolatry. They would be carried away by heathen kings—Assyrians, Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Egyptians—and scattered among the nations, He said, but if from those remote places of exile they would remember Him and turn to Him with whole-hearted repentance, serve Him and put away their idols and evil doings, He would hear their prayers and not destroy them utterly. Israel did repent time after time. The book of Judges tells of a sad time when every man did what was right in his own eyes, but it also tells of the many times God delivered His people when they cried out to Him.

Later, when the Israelites demanded a king like other nations, God warned them of the dangers. Israel’s kings after David and Solomon brought them into grievous national sins. The kingdom was divided, with ten tribes (Israel, whose capital city was Samaria) following King Jeroboam, and two tribes, Judah and Benjamin (Judah, whose capital city was Jerusalem), following Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. In the years that followed, occasionally Judah would have a “good” king who led a reformation, cleansing the land of the idol worship and re-instituting the Passover and other forgotten important parts of the worship of Jehovah. Sadly, Israel never had one “good” king to lead the people back to God.

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Joel and Hosea, “rising up early” and receiving words from God, warned and pleaded with the kings of Judah and Israel. Some would heed the warning and repent when they were chastised. Others were dealt with heavy consequences in their lives and in the nation because they refused and rebelled. Eventually, both Israel and Judah were carried away to foreign lands for seventy years of exile. The documented writings of those years are a lesson for us that true repentance—weeping and sorrow for sin, fasting, confession of sin, turning back to God in

prayer, worship, and obedience, and turning away from sin and idol worship—brought God’s forgiveness and deliverance every time.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Whom did God send to warn His people? Can you list some names?
2. List the necessary steps of true repentance.
3. What question did God ask His people in Ezekiel 18:31?
4. Which prophet spoke of words as being like sacrifices?
5. List the various people God told to join in repentance in Joel’s message.

LIFE APPLICATION

The topic for this quarter makes up a great portion of Holy Scripture; in fact, the entire Old Testament is the story of God’s people turning away from Him and His dealings with them to return to Him.

Today’s scriptures from different prophets contain an often-repeated, common command: in order to “return” to God, the people were to put away their idols and quit their sinning. Reading deeper into the individual stories, one finds that people tried to return to God without doing that; they attempted to worship to Jehovah while continuing to also worship their idols. They tried to bring sacrifices and give worship to God without laying aside their sins, revealing their divided heart. This worship was unacceptable because God expects and accepts only that kind of worship given from hearts entirely devoted to Him.

The entire purpose of repentance was shared by these prophets over and over again: that God would grant mercy, pardon, and forgiveness. God not only wanted to spare His people ruin and death, but He desired to grant blessings, draw them close in fellowship, and cause them to be a blessing to the entire world.

The call to the nation of Israel is a call today to all people. To people professing Christianity. To our nation. God is calling for repentance and turning away from sin. If we will respond with all our hearts, we will find His blessings.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I believe the content of this lesson calls for a moment of reflection and introspection. After first reading through this lesson I found myself asking a series of questions. What is the state of God's church? Are God's people presenting the portrait of Him in our world today that He desires? Have we remained focused on our God-given responsibilities as His church, or have we allowed political tension, racial tension, worldly pursuits, luxurious lifestyles, and a greater tolerance for sin to seep our strength and hinder our closeness to God?

Most of us are familiar with the Biblical remedy for individual sin and repentance, but what about the sins of nations and generations, familial sin, and, yes, the sins of God's people? So many so-called Christians in America today accept actions explicitly condemned as sin by God's Word as okay, and while you or I may not agree with this, it still affects us. So many of us have relatives, friends, and acquaintances that are in this state, and knowing how to hold to God's standards while rubbing shoulders so often with those who have abandoned their previous convictions is not easy to do. Can we look at the spiritual conditions around us and say dismissively, "Well that's them—at least I'm okay?"

Daniel, a man the Bible says had an excellent spirit and was careful not to forsake the laws of God, even in a foreign land, prayed in his old age a prayer of repentance for God's people. Ezra, when he learned that the people had disobeyed God's explicit instructions on not marrying those in idolatry around them, wept and prayed a prayer of "corporate repentance," which so convicted those around him that action was taken to return to God's commandments. Not once did either of these men say "they sinned" but "we have sinned!"

I'd like to remind us all that Peter stated we are "a royal priesthood" and John testified that in Christ we have been made "kings and priests," and I believe it is our duty to intercede and bring before God as a people our sins and plead for His forgiveness. "O God, we have sinned, our nation has sinned, our families are broken, the world in general has forsaken You! Father, you promised that if your people would humble themselves, and pray, and seek your face,

and turn from our wicked ways, that you would hear from Heaven, and forgive our sins, and heal our land! Please, in Your great mercy, let it be so! Amen!"

—Fari Matthews

JULY 11, 2021

A CALL TO REPENTANCE: NINEVEH

Jonah 1:1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

Jonah 3:1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil

way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

MEMORY VERSE: The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. —**Luke 11:32**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: During the time that God called after His own chosen people to return to Him from idolatry and wickedness, He also extended mercy to the Assyrian people when He sent His prophet Jonah to their capital city, Nineveh, to warn the king and the people of His impending judgment. The Ninevites fasted and prayed for God’s mercy, and God answered by withholding His destruction, an example to which Jesus referred when He rebuked the proud Pharisees who rejected Him.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Jonah 3:3 “Three days’ journey”: probably the circumference of the city rather than the diameter; “Herodotus variously reckons a day’s journey at about eighteen or twenty-three miles (v. 53, iv. 101), and the circuit of the irregular quadrangle composed of the mounds of Koujunjik, Nimrud, Karamless, and Khorsabad, now generally allowed to represent ancient Nineveh, is about sixty miles” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

Jonah 3:4 “A day’s journey”: or as far as he could go throughout the city in one day. “Overthrown”: overturned, or destroyed from the very foundations. “The word applied to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah” (*Keil and Delitzsch*).

Jonah 3:5 “Believed God”: believed in God, or in the Word of the Lord, with trust and hope for His mercy, which, as Jesus said, God’s own people were slow to do. This “condemns the men of the Gospel generation” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*). “Put on sackcloth”: a ceremony “very usual in mournings, private or public, in those countries, and a token of their true mourning; this all did, great and small, rich and poor” (*Matthew Poole’s Commentary*).

Jonah 3:6 “His robe”: his large, costly, upper garment (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The story of Jonah and his mission trip to Nineveh is a familiar story in the Bible. Jonah's call, his attempt to run and hide, and God's dramatic intervention—the ship and sailors, the storm, the great fish—are all found in the first two chapters of Jonah. Chapter three contains the part of the story in our lesson.

Nineveh was the capital of the ancient kingdom and empire of Assyria. It was located 250 miles north of Babylon, on the eastern bank of the Tigris River. Its name, meaning “Abode of Ninus,” comes from the name of that Assyrian deity who supposedly corresponds to the Greek deity Hercules. It is described in Genesis as being one of the cities built by Asshur, who is thought by some scholars (there is disagreement on this point) to be the same as Nimrod, a mighty hunter who established kingdoms: from Babylonia in the south, to Assyria in the north, where he built four cities, the greatest of which was Nineveh. Micah referred to Assyria as the “land of Nimrod” (Micah 5:6). Nineveh was not mentioned for nearly fifteen centuries, until, when in the 8th century, B.C., it was described by Jonah and Nahum as an immense city with more than 120,000 children, probably amounting to over 600,000 people.

“It contained ‘much cattle,’ and numerous parks, garden groves, etc. Its inhabitants were wealthy, warlike, and far advanced in civilization. It had numerous strongholds with gates and bars; and had multiplied its merchants above the stars: its crowned princes were as locusts, and its captains as grasshoppers. With this description agrees that of the historian Diodorus Siculus, who says Nineveh was twenty-one miles long, nine miles broad, and fifty-four miles in circumference; that its walls were a hundred feet high, and so broad that three chariots could drive upon them abreast; and that it had fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred feet high” (*ATS Bible Dictionary*).

Jonah was sent more than eight hundred years before Christ, and Nineveh's repentance at that time secured safety from the destruction of Jehovah, at least until 753 B. C., when it was taken by the Medes. One hundred and fifty years later it was taken a second time, fulfilling the prophecies of Nahum 3:13, 16, and 18, and Zephaniah 2:13-15. Nineveh's destruction was so complete that for

centuries infidels denied the entire story of its existence and destruction.

In 1841 archeologists began excavating the natural hill-like mounds and discovered temples and palaces in an area fitting the ancient size and location of Nineveh. Inside the buildings were bas-relief sculptures and inscribed slabs—including Sennacherib’s grandson’s entire library of 10,000 flat bricks or tablets—providing illustrations and written documentary of Assyrian history and customs. These finds have aided in the interpretation of Scripture and confirmed the Biblical accounts in the Kings and Chronicles, such as Sennacherib’s own account of his invasion of Palestine and the tribute Hezekiah was required to pay. There are also mural tablets with images corresponding to Ezekiel’s account in chapters 23 and 26. The ruins also show evidence of destruction not only from human foes, but also from water and fire, further confirming the truth of the Biblical prophecies.

Jesus referred to the repentance of Nineveh—the first mention of the city in over six hundred years—as an example of the kind of repentance God respects, which would stand to condemn the unbelief and apathetic response the Jews gave to the Gospel.

Might not God have dealt thus with the Ninevites, so as to show His own people, the Jews, around the time of the second Jeroboam and Joash, their own sins of unbelief and their great need of repentance and His great mercy?

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Briefly fill in the gap of the story between Jonah 1:1 and Jonah 3:1.
2. Give an explanation of “three-days’ journey.”
3. Share the response of the people and the king to Jonah’s message.
4. What living creatures did the king make a part of the fast?
5. After Nineveh’s eventual destruction many years later, who referred to this story as an example of true repentance?

LIFE APPLICATION

Why did God single out the city of Nineveh from among the nations? What wickedness had “come up” before Him to cause Him to cry out against it? In studying about the founding of the four cities, of which Nineveh was the greatest, I found comments concerning the nature of Nimrod, who is supposed to have been the founder. He was said to have been a great rebel against the Lord. He was a strong leader, who gloried in his domination and oppression of others.

The prophet Nahum, crying out to Nineveh after the time of Jonah, calls the city “the bloody city,” “full of lies and robbery” (Nahum 3:1). In verse 19 of Nahum 3, some translators define the word wickedness as cruelty. “The cruelty of the Ninevite régime is illustrated, as Kleinert remarks, in the sculptures, ‘by the rows of the impaled, the prisoners through whose lips rings were fastened, whose eyes were put out, who were flayed alive’” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

In other places in Scripture, we find that the kind of cry that “went up” to God occurred with violence and bloodshed, such as the time Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:10), the oppression of the Hebrews in Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3:7), and the fraud and oppression of laborers mentioned in James 5:4.

Can we suppose that God turns a deaf ear to the cries of the oppressed today? He surely sees and will judge the oppression of certain ethnic groups of society, the murder of innocent, unborn babies, and the violence against women that is part of false religion. Let us learn a great lesson here, that unless there is repentance, there will be Divine retribution for violence and bloodshed. God’s people are not called to participate in activism that promotes counter-violence and vengeance; Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the LORD is the governing rule of our passions.

Let us also be challenged by the faith in the message of God’s Word and the genuine repentance demonstrated by the Ninevites at this time.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In the book of Genesis we read that there were a couple of other wicked cities that the Lord dealt with: Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 18:20 says, "And the Lord said, because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it." Was there a plea from the victims? Did the cry come from children? Those two cities did not repent and the Lord pronounced judgment by fire; complete annihilation.

The last verse in the book of Jonah mentions 120,000 inhabitants that did not know their right hand from their left. We can assume that these were the children of the city, innocents caught in the midst of this wicked and immoral society. Once again, was there a cry from the children that touched the heart of God?

There is a certain parallel pointing to the same wickedness that is pervading our world today. Last year, the World Health Organization estimated that over 1 billion children were the victims of violence. Children are being subjected to exploitation, physical abuse, neglect and mental abuse. The WHO also reported that there were more than 42.6 million abortions performed globally in 2020. The Lord is mindful of these innocent children and he hears their cries. Jesus said, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." The Father does not forget. The continued abuse of children in our day and time will bring down the vengeance of God over the entire world, not just a few cities.

Beware, for the day of his wrath is approaching.

—LaDawna Adams

JULY 18, 2021

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF REPENTANCE

David

Psalm 51:1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Ahab

I Kings 21:20 And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.

21a Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity,

22b For the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin.

27 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

29 Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.

Manasseh

II Chronicles 33:9 So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

10 And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

11 Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

12 And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

13 And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.

14 Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great

height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah.

15 And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city.

16 And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.

17 Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the LORD their God only.

18 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel.

19 His prayer also, and how God was intreated of him, and all his sins, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers.

MEMORY VERSE: If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; ... if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember. —**Leviticus 26:40-42**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Bible records the repentance of kings David, Ahab, and Manasseh, with the resulting forgiveness and mercy shown to them by God according to His promise and covenant.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 51:1 “My transgressions”: David’s adultery, treachery, and murder.

Psalm 51:2 “Iniquity”: perversity; depravity, guilt. “Sin”: an offence and its penalty.

I Kings 21:20 “Thou hast sold thyself to do iniquity”: surrendered thyself wholly.

I Kings 21:27 “Went softly”: gently, in penitence.

II Chronicles 33:11 “Thorns”: hooks, which the Assyrians often put through a prisoner’s lips and nostrils.

LESSON BACKGROUND

David’s transgression of adultery with Bathsheba, his deceptive plan to cover up the deed, and the premeditated murder of her husband, Uriah, is sadly recorded in II Samuel 11. Chapter 12 gives the account of the prophet Nathan visiting David after the son conceived with Bathsheba was born—so about a year after David’s sin. Psalm 32 could possibly describe the spiritual condition of David’s soul during this period of silence—physically, he felt old and heard a roaring in his head; he felt a spiritual drought and God’s hand heavy upon him. Yet, when he confessed and acknowledged his sin; when he quit running and hiding; he found forgiveness and blessing.

David’s age at the time of this sin probably would have been between forty and fifty years of age; this takes into consideration his age at death (seventy), and Solomon, his fourth son by Bathsheba (I Chronicles 3:5), being made king at his death. Solomon’s age at coronation is not recorded, but the circumstances add up to a probable age of twenty.

It is noteworthy that although David repented and obtained God’s pardon and forgiveness for his sins, his life afterward was very hard and sorrowful because of the consequences of his deed (II Samuel 12:10). The first son Bathsheba bore soon died; his sons committed grievous moral sins publicly; his sons Absalom and Adonijah both tried to usurp his throne; and Absalom died a horrible death. Repentance isn’t always a ticket to a trouble-free life, although it puts a person into right standing with God again.

The story of Ahab’s encounter with Elijah happened after he had desired and plotted to obtain a piece of ground—another man’s legal inheritance—resulting in a rigged trial, false witnesses, and the execution of an innocent man. He was gloating over his newly-acquired property when the prophet, summoned by God, suddenly appeared and pronounced God’s condemnation and judgment upon him and his evil wife, Jezebel. When Ahab humbled himself before God, God delayed the judgment and instead brought it to pass in his

son's lifetime.

Manasseh's sins were worse than those of the heathen nations whom God had destroyed out of the land of Canaan. He was the young son of godly King Hezekiah, born during the period of extended life God gave to his father. Manasseh worshipped the host of heaven, built idolatrous altars in the house of the Lord, burnt his own son as a fiery sacrifice, and used enchantments, wizards and familiar spirits. He "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (II Kings 21:16).

God gave Manasseh a chance first to reform, by sending warning messages to him and the people, which they ignored. Finally, God sent judgment by the hand of the Assyrians, who took Manasseh prisoner and brought him to Babylon. In his affliction he sought the Lord. Not only did he humble himself, pray, and make supplications to God, the scripture says that he "knew that the LORD he was God" (II Chronicles 33:10-13). This is much like the prodigal son, whom Jesus said "came to himself," or came to wisdom.

Proving that he had truly come to wisdom, Manasseh removed idol worship from the Lord's holy house, removing all the altars he had built and throwing them outside the city. He repaired the altar of the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings and thanksgiving offerings upon it.

Although the *King James Version* does not include Manasseh's prayer of repentance (it is included in the *Apocrypha*), we can be sure God heard the earnest pleadings of this man's heart. He reigned fifty-five years; how much of his reign was during the years of his reformation, we do not know. When his grandson, Josiah, became king, he walked in the ways of the Lord and carried on his grandfather's reformation, continuing to cleanse Judah from idols.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Share the requests David made before God when he repented.
2. Which prophet was sent to David? To Ahab?
3. What actions did Ahab take in his repentance?
4. What treatment did Manasseh receive at the hands of the Assyrians, and what was his response?
5. How did Manasseh bring forth the "fruits meet for repentance"?

LIFE APPLICATION

God's everlasting mercies are so clearly illustrated in the three stories in our lesson. The three kings each showed typical human behavior: David covered up his sin and kept silent for months; Ahab tried to portray the man of God as the "enemy," and Manasseh had fair warning about his sins but tried to ignore them. God pursued them with His love. He didn't have to; He would have been justified in cutting them off.

God has surely demonstrated His mercy to each of us. We can learn a lesson from the examples of these three kings; the wages of sin is death and the way of a transgressor is hard. But repentance brings pardon and mercy, as well as grace to endure the reaping of what we have sown.

An important lesson from these examples is the importance of not just praying prayers or saying humble words, but cleaning house. Clear out the idols—the things that have stolen your heart from God. Quit watching, visiting, chatting, listening to, reading, drinking, playing the things that enslave your fleshly desires, take all your time, and rob you of your communion with God. Fill the vacancy with prayer, praise, worship, wholesome family time, and pure, beneficial enjoyments. Has the altar of worship been broken down in your life? Take a lesson from Manasseh and build it again.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"Give me a deeper repentance, a horror of sin, a dread of its approach. Help me chastely to flee it, and jealously to resolve that my heart shall be thine alone." – A quote from "Valley of Vision."

The above words aptly describe the attitude of a truly repentant heart. The prophet said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

The soul that does not perceive a horror and dread of sin, that has not a willingness to forsake it and flee it, is not truly repentant. Preachers who proclaim that Christians sin more or less every day do

not perceive the gospel of repentance.

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of ... For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter”
(II Corinthians 7:10a, 11).

True repentance motivates restitution: “And Zachaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house ...” (Luke 19:8, 9a).

—Harlan Sorrell

JULY 25, 2021

REPENTANCE—PART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

John the Baptist

Matthew 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Luke 3:10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats,

let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

Jesus

Mark 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Luke 13:1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

The Apostles

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

MEMORY VERSE: And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he

hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. —**Acts 17:30-31**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The gospel message preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles was introduced by this exhortation: “Repent!” and included a further explanation of what repentance meant, what rewards followed repentance, and what would happen if there was no repentance.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 3:2 “Repent”: to perceive afterwards, as a change of mind or purpose; especially with an abhorrence toward sin and an intent to obtain God’s pardon. “At hand”: approaches; has drawn close or come near; imminent; a presence.

Matthew 3:3 “Esaias”: Isaiah (a quote from Isaiah 40:3).

Matthew 3:8 “Meet”: weighing as much as; suitable for; worthy of.

Luke 3:12 “Publicans”: those who gathered public taxes from the Jews for the Romans.

Luke 3:14 “Do violence”: to shake violently; blackmail; extort from; intimidate.

Acts 2:38 “For the remission of sins”: a sending away; a release from an obligation or a debt; complete forgiveness. Baptism is a visible sign or seal of that remission. “The apostle exhorted them to repent of their sins, and openly to avow their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, by being baptized in His name. Thus professing their faith in Him, they would receive remission of their sins, and partake of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit” (*Matthew Henry Commentary*). “An ingenuous confession of sin, a solemn purpose to forsake it, and a true hatred of it, is the only thing that can give the mind composure” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

John the Baptist, a prophet whose spirit was like Elijah of long

ago, was a cousin of Jesus. He lived in the wilderness and attracted crowds to the Jordan River to hear his message of repentance. With God-given authority, he called the Pharisees and Sadducees a “generation of vipers.” “Repent!” was the command he issued to them and to the common people, publicans and soldiers alike.

Jesus also came preaching repentance and announcing the arrival of the long-expected kingdom of God. Jesus added, “Believe the gospel” to His message of repentance. John baptized, an outward symbol of the inward cleansing taking place by means of repentance; and Jesus preached, healed the sick and cast out devils. John’s message heralded the imminent approach of the King of the kingdom of God; the Messiah, the Anointed One. John prepared the way of the Lord by showing the people their sins and commanding reform.

Later, in a series of teachings to a great crowd of people, Jesus addressed the people who informed Him of Pilate’s massacre of some Jewish worshippers. The crowd seemed to feel that these were sinners more deserving of a tragic death than others. Jesus answered by relating another tragedy, and asking, “Are these sinners above all men because they suffered such a tragic death?” He answered His own question: “No.” The point He made was that the final end of all of us will be dreadful unless each one repents.

We quote from two different places where Peter preached repentance to the crowds who followed the believers after Pentecost. The first instance was when the people were pricked in their hearts as Peter opened up the prophetic scriptures concerning Jesus and made it clear to them that they had crucified the Messiah. “What shall we do?” they asked, and Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized.” Shortly after that, when Peter and John had lifted up the lame man in the temple, by faith in Jesus’ name the man went leaping and walking. The people looking on, marveling, were admonished by Peter, “Repent.” The promise in each message was the “gift of the Holy Ghost,” or “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord,” which we know was the refreshing, living water of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus in John 7:38.

Peter and John spoke personally to the sorcerer, Simon, who tried to buy the Holy Spirit with money: “Repent of this thy wickedness!” By this passage we learn that not only our outward deeds need forgiveness, but also the inward thoughts, motives and

intents of our hearts can be wicked, echoing the prophet Isaiah's words in Isaiah 55:7. We need to repent and turn away from those thoughts, so we may obtain pardon.

Our memory verse comes from the words of Paul as he stood on Mars Hill in Athens, Greece. Explaining to the Athenians who their "Unknown" God was, he let them know that this God, the Creator, had sent His son to earth, had raised Him from the dead, and was by Him some day going to judge the world. "Repent" was the command and solemn obligation from God, who had overlooked the folly of the Gentiles in previous times, but was now opening their eyes and offering them faith.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Explain the terms: repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and meet for repentance.
2. What did repentance mean to the people, publicans, and soldiers to whom John preached?
3. How did Jesus answer the idea that some people are worse sinners than others?
4. Describe the three passages where Peter preached, "Repent."
5. To what people and in what place did Paul share his message of repentance?

LIFE APPLICATION

These texts are representative of the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, John, Paul, and the many other heralds of the precious gospel message—the good news offered to a world sinking in idolatry's degradation, demonic possession, and religious confusion. Everywhere they went, they preached the fiery message of repentance and offered the comforting announcement of the heavenly kingdom.

Sadly, the popular "Christian" world leaders today offer a dumbed-down, half-a-message to a world sinking in idolatry's degradation, demonic possession and religious confusion. They present a "good news" of grace, unconditional love, and heaven-

when-you-die without the important “Repent!” Many people make a profession of salvation but never change their lifestyles, never forsake their sins, and never throw out their idols. It isn’t working. Masses of next-generation hearers of this “gospel” are forsaking Christianity altogether and embracing total godlessness, gross immorality, and shameless idolatry.

The repentance message is still relevant. You can’t be filled with the sweet, refreshing water of the Holy Spirit without first confessing your sinful condition, turning away from it, and wholly trusting in and following the Savior.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

As children, there were times when we were required to apologize for even the slightest infractions against our playmates. The words would roll reluctantly from our lips but never quite reached a depth that would be considered heartfelt. We said, “I’m sorry” because we had to, not because we wanted to.

As adults, it still seems so hard to say, “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” Why? They are such simple words but when expressed with a penitent heart they are very powerful. Those simple words have the power to change the hearts of men and most importantly they have the power to change the heart of God. They are words of humility that initiate forgiveness and bring peace to adversarial relationships.

Repentance cannot change the past nor undo the damage that was done as a result of the offense but somehow a heartfelt apology mitigates the pain and paves the way for reconciliation. It remains a mystery but the acknowledgement of wrong, coupled with the desire to correct it and to do right, is so powerful that it almost always results in forgiveness.

Have you ever been offended and felt that someone owed you an apology? Have you ever felt that a simple “I’m sorry” would set things right and make it much easier to forgive the offender and forget the offense?

An offense can bring a wedge between the dearest of friends and the only way to bridge the gap is by way of repentance and forgiveness; repentance on the part of the offender and forgiveness

on the part of the offended. Only then can there be reconciliation. Heartfelt apologies have diverted the wrath of kings, restored friendships, and altered the eternal destiny of countless souls.

Reconciliation is always preceded by repentance. True repentance must come, not only from the head but from the heart. Where there is no repentance there is no true reconciliation.

—Darrell Johnson

AUGUST 1, 2021

RETURNING TO GOD

Isaiah 31:6 Turn ye unto him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted.

Jeremiah 3:12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.

13 Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.

14 Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:

Jeremiah 8:6 I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.

Zechariah 1:3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

MEMORY VERSE: For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. —**I Thessalonians 1:9**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Repentance means a change of direction; a turning around from following our own ways and thoughts and serving idols, to wholly following God and serving Him.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 31:6 “Revolted”: turning away; apostasy; defection; rebellion.

Jeremiah 3:13 “Hast scattered thy ways”: left traces everywhere.
“Every green tree”: the familiar places of idol worship.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The verse we quote from Isaiah was addressed to the Israelites in the time of Hezekiah, when the king of Assyria (Sargon, or Sennacherib) was coming against them. Isaiah had prophesied of Assyria’s march against Egypt and Ethiopia, and the folly of Israel in going down into Egypt for help and asylum. Here again he predicts the fall of Sennacherib and exhorts His people to put their trust in the Lord and turn away from their idols. The Assyrians certainly fell by a super-human sword (II Kings 19:35, II Chronicles 32:21, and Isaiah 37:36), when God’s angel smote 185,000 soldiers.

Jeremiah’s words in chapter 3 were directed to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel, who were carried away captive by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser, in the ninth year of King Hoshea, to the lands north of Judah—Assyria, Media and Mesopotamia. Jeremiah was giving them God’s words of mercy and forgiveness, if they would return to Him with their whole heart and walk no more after their wicked imaginations. “I will heal your backslidings” is a blessed promise in verse 22, and the prophet encourages the response, “Behold, we come unto thee.”

In the 8th chapter, the Lord is lamenting the lack of repentance and remorse on the part of His people; this time directing His mournful dirge toward the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The chapter ends with the tragic cry, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved,” and the sorrowful question, “Is there no balm in Gilead?” Both cries have inspired songs which apply to the impenitent sinner today.

Zechariah, a priest as well as a prophet, accurately foretold the

siege of Babylon by the Persian king Darius, of which Isaiah and Jeremiah had also forewarned the Jews, “Remove out of the midst of Babylon.” It is probable that they took heed and went back to their own country before the city was taken. Darius was the king “spoken of in Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, as the king who renewed the permission to rebuild the temple, given to the Jews by Cyrus and afterwards recalled” (*ATS Bible Dictionary*).

Two months before Zechariah’s prophecy, which admonished the Jews to seek the Lord and not fall back into the sins of their fathers, the prophet Haggai had encouraged the Jews to resume the rebuilding of the temple. The two prophets worked together to encourage God’s people in this great work.

Malachi, last of the minor prophets and writer of the last book of the Old Testament, reproved the priests and people of Judah during a time of great disorder, sometime after the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah.

The memory verse is taken from Paul’s epistle to the Thessalonians, in his testimony of the conversion of the brethren in that place, whose faith and reception of the gospel was an example to all the believers in Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. In Isaiah, what term did God apply to Israel’s forsaking God and going after idols?
2. Jeremiah’s plea was for backsliding Israel to return, because God was _____ to them.
3. In Jeremiah, for what question did God listen that should be asked by someone who is repenting? What did the Israelites do instead?
4. What was the promise given by God through both Zechariah and Malachi?
5. Turning away from idols to serve the living God describes the actions of what New Testament church?

LIFE APPLICATION

It is a common human tendency to gloss over the condition described by God as “deeply revolting” or “lost,” or make excuses for it. People get defensive and angry when someone even suggests that they are not right with God. “Wherein shall we return?”

Our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. Our ways fall short of His ways. When we turn to *our own ways*, we are actually no better than the “heathen” man who falls on his knees before his idols. We can even do this and call it worship, or ministry, or missionary work.

God’s call is to “Return.” How do we do this? We can begin by asking the question, *Lord, what have I done? Shine Your light upon my actions and weigh my motives. Have I just gone my own way? Did I replace Your Spirit’s leading for thoughts of my own?*

We can ask God to show us how we, like the Israelites, have scattered our ways, or left traces of our self-will and pride everywhere. *Lord, examine everything I’ve done. Open my eyes to what YOU see about me. Have I made an idol out of my own opinions or desires? Have I mistaken the dust of my endeavors for the smoke of Your fire?*

God has promised that if we return unto Him, He will return to us. What hope is offered in these promises!

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

There is a tendency in mankind to gravitate towards the earthly (things we see, feel, taste) and neglect the spiritual. When earthly things take on an elevated sense of importance in our lives and the Lord becomes secondary, we become guilty of idolatry. Thankfully, God’s Spirit is calling, through our inner conscience and the circumstances of our life, for our return into holiness which means being separated from the world unto Him.

A while back, I had an experience where I had been busy, feeling tired and inwardly thinking that today would be a good day to seek the Lord through prayer and study. However, I had planned earlier in the week to go somewhere that day. I got into my truck and endeavored to start the truck, but the battery was dead. After two or three attempts at charging the battery, I finally got the truck

running. I got into the truck, ready to go, and moved the gear shift to reverse but it didn't shift the transmission. At that point, I surrendered, turned off my truck and made my way to my prayer closet.

Some might think that was a coincidence—not me! I believe the Lord works with us to help us. Lamentations 3:39-41 puts it so well. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens."

—Bob Wilson

AUGUST 8, 2021

HUMBLE YOURSELVES

II Chronicles 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Jeremiah 13:15 Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the LORD hath spoken.

16 Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.

17 But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD'S flock is carried away captive.

18 Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, even the crown of your glory.

Daniel 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

Micah 6:8 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?

James 4:8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

MEMORY VERSE: For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

—Isaiah 57:15

CENTRAL THOUGHT: An important part of repentance is that of humbling ourselves before God, that He might have mercy on us, heal our land, lift us up, revive our souls, and draw us near so that we might walk closely with Him.

WORD DEFINITIONS

II Chronicles 7:14 “Humble”: bend the knee; bring down low; bring into subjection; subdue.

Jeremiah 13:15 “Proud”: to soar; be lofty; be haughty; lift up.

Jeremiah 13:18 “King....queen”: Jehoiachin, king of Judah (II Kings 24:8-15), and “the queen mother who, as the king was not more than eighteen years old, held the chief power. Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan, carried away captive with Jehoiachin by Nebuchadnezzar” (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*). “This and the title of ‘mistress’ are indications of the high rank they enjoyed in the social system. In the case of Asa, we are told that he removed his mother, Maachah, from her position as ‘mistress,’ or queen-mother, on account of her idolatry (I Kings 15:13). The political value of the station is strikingly shown by the ease with which Athaliah, as queen-mother, usurped the supreme authority (II Kings 11). From an historical point of view, the ‘queen-mother’ of the Jews is a most interesting personage; she is a relic of the primitive age in which relationship was reckoned with regard to the

mother” (*Pulpit Commentary*). “Principalities”: literally, headtire, or royal diadem of state.

Daniel 10:12 “Chasten thyself”: to humble yourself; to afflict oneself by fasting and humiliation.

Micah 6:8 “Walk humbly”: humble yourself to walk with God.

James 4:9 “Be afflicted”: realize one’s own misery; suffer hardship; be wretched.

James 4:10 “Humble”: to make low, as to reduce a mountain to a plain.

Isaiah 57:15 “Contrite”: literally, crushed or pulverized, as powder or dust.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The first verse in our lesson comes from the night visit by God to Solomon after Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and holding a dedication and feast, offering thousands of burnt offerings and peace offerings. The people had all been sent home and all his desires for building God’s house and his own house had been realized.

“I have heard thy prayer,” God said. He went on to establish and sanctify the house Solomon had built for Him as the location He had chosen to place His name, promising that in a time of drought or pestilence, if the people would humble themselves and pray, His ears would be attentive to the prayers made in that place.

The prophecy of Jeremiah in chapter 13 begins with an object lesson God instructed Jeremiah to use to describe the ruined condition of Israel and the place of their captivity. The linen girdle, left to rot for a long time, was a type of the manner in which their glory would be marred. He also used the illustration of wine skins filled with wine to describe the judgments of God against them. Then he makes an affectionate, personal plea to the royal family, which at this time was Jehoiachin, or Coniah, and his mother, Nehushta, to humble themselves.

Daniel had been fasting and praying for three weeks. He was beside the river when a man clothed in linen and girded with fine gold suddenly appeared to him in a vision. The man’s face had the appearance of lightning and His eyes were like fiery lamps. His feet

were like polished brass and His words sounded like a great multitude. The other men fled and Daniel was left alone. His strength drained from him so that he fell into a deep sleep. The man lifted him up and began to speak, telling him that He had heard his prayers when he had first begun to humble himself. The man who appeared was truly Jesus, in the form in which He appeared to the Old Testament saints. The point we can take from this story is that He heard the prayer as Daniel humbled himself.

The prophet Micah appeared in about the same time frame as Isaiah, and prophesied for about fifty years to kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. His prophecies include special details about the Messiah, and he also spoke concerning God's judgment upon the apostatizing Jews. The verse in our lesson is a familiar one, where God answers the questions asked about acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. His answer was simple but succinct: do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

The New Testament writer, James, gave stern admonitions to "worldly" believers who were "double-minded." His emphasis was on being a doer of the good works that accompany salvation. The instruction we quote in our lesson is still relevant and the promise still holds, that if a man humbles his heart, God will give him more grace. The one who draws closer to God can know that God will draw closer to him.

The memory verse from Isaiah gives us a clue of what it means to be contrite and humble (see the Word Definitions!). I am reminded of Job's response to God's dealings; when God was finished with him, Job said, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," and he wasn't just being melodramatic. Repentance is exactly what will put us in the place where God will dwell with us.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the time and place in which God spoke the words in II Chronicles 7:14.
2. Jeremiah explains God's response to pride. What is it?
3. The "Man" in Daniel's vision heard his humble cry from the start, but how long did He bear with Daniel before He came to answer?

(Look in Daniel 10). How does this encourage us in our times of unanswered prayer?

4. Share the steps James lined out for drawing closer to God.
5. What is the word picture given by the word “contrite” in Isaiah 57:15?

LIFE APPLICATION

When we read the different messages—from various times and various prophets—all put together, we really get a clear picture of how God views man’s pride and how He immediately responds when man humbles his heart before Him.

Another prophet, Obadiah, once lamented in his message to the Edomites, “The pride of your heart has deceived you.” A Scottish poet, Robert Pollok (1798-1827), in his book, *“The Course of Time”* penned, “Here then, in brief, what peopled hell; what holds its prisoners there. Pride, self-adoring pride...” God pleaded with His people; He held them at length from Him; He wept for them. They could not dwell closely with Him on earth, or live in eternity with Him—because of pride.

I hope—oh, I pray!—that you or I don’t forfeit all the good things God has for us because we are simply too proud to humble our hearts. Are there decisions you made when your heart was stiff and obstinate in pride? Perhaps you are several years down the road from that choice that was made, and you are wiser now and see the folly of your ways. Don’t let pride hold you back from repentance. You can still turn around and change the ending story of your life. Don’t miss out on God’s sweet blessings—a revival of your heart, His abiding presence, a close, intimate walk with him—because of pride.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" These were the words spoken by the king of Nineveh in the 3rd chapter of Jonah, after the people of Nineveh heard Jonah's warning that God would destroy their city in forty days for its wickedness.

Can you visualize the scene when Jonah arrived and began to

declare God's judgment? Can you imagine the commotion and disruption as so many began to turn to God? They believed God's warning and began to humble themselves and repent through the ancient custom of donning sackcloth and sitting in ashes, and as word reached the king, he too humbled himself and declared a fast. Even the animals had to fast and wear sackcloth! God saw their repentance and spared their destruction for another 250 years or so.

This is a great illustration of humility and repentance, and Jesus Himself stated that the people of Nineveh would condemn those who have the Gospel and dealings of the Holy Spirit available to them, and yet don't yield. One commentator called this refusal to yield "obstinate impenitence" and it is hard to argue against that characterization of those who refuse to bow before God, when He so frequently and willingly extends mercy and goodness to those who do humble themselves before Him. Are you obstinate and proud, calling on God to fight against you (see James 4:6), or do you regularly choose to relent to Him, exalt Him, and allow Him to bless you exceedingly?

—Fari Matthews

AUGUST 15, 2021

GODLY SORROW

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalm 51:16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Joel 2:12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto

the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

14 Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?

Zechariah 12:10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

MEMORY VERSE: For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!

—II Corinthians 7:10-11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God desires the repentant heart to be broken and sorrowful, not because of the humiliation of being caught, or even for the hardship sin has brought, but because of the broken relationship with Him, the realization of the awful price Jesus paid for our sins and transgressions, and the guilt and shame of disobedience to God's will.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 34:18 and Psalm 51:17 "Broken": shattered; broken in pieces. "Contrite": crushed; pulverized to powder (also Isaiah 57:15).

Joel 2:12 "Weeping": continual weeping; an overflowing.

Joel 2:13 "Rend": to tear [a garment], as a sign of grief or distress.

Zechariah 12:10 "Supplications": earnest prayer; intreaty for a favor.

II Corinthians 7:10 “Godly sorrow”: sorrow according to God, or what His will approves; what is conformable to His will or desires.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Psalms and the prophets give us a good picture of the attitude of heart that is pleasing to God when someone sets their heart to seek after Him. David is said to have written Psalm 34 after God delivered him from the Philistines. This incident must have reduced him to the lowly and contrite state of mind that pleased the Lord, and though He is omnipresent, and thus near to each of us at all times, we can access His help more readily when we are broken. “The broken in heart’ are those in whom the egotistical, i.e., self-loving life, which encircles its own personality, is broken at the very root; ‘the crushed or contrite in spirit’ are those whom grievous experiences, leading to penitence, of the false eminence to which their proud self-consciousness has raised them, have subdued and thoroughly humbled” (*Keil and Delitzsch*).

Psalm 51, as we have noted in an earlier lesson, was David’s prayer of repentance after his sin with Bathsheba. Here David notes, as have Isaiah and other prophets, and even Christ Himself, that God truly does not desire the blood and smoke of animals, sacrificed in a ritual that may not include the heart at all. His real desire is the cry of a heart truly broken and done with its self-reliance and arrogance.

Joel’s prophecy possibly contains a double meaning; literally of devouring locusts and drought, but also figuratively of military destruction upon Israel and Judah. The four different kinds of insects described in Joel have been speculated to represent four different times of attacks upon the Israelites by the Chaldeans; four different kingdoms that came against Israel—Assyrians and Chaldeans, Medes and Persians, Greeks, and Romans; or four different Assyrian/Chaldean kings. To prepare their hearts for repentance, the prophet called for a solemn assembly, a time of restraint, of total abstinence from food or secular employment; and the elders and representatives of the people were to gather at the temple to cry for mercy.

Zechariah’s prophecy takes in the time of the crucifixion of the Messiah, directing us to the weeping and repentance of the people in response to Peter’s message to the crowd after Pentecost, when he

proved to them that they had crucified the Holy One sent from God.

Jesus spoke to the multitude about the Kingdom of Heaven and the blessed ones who would be able to enter. He began by describing the meek, the poor in spirit, and those who mourn as being the ones who could receive the kingdom. This mourning specifically means the brokenness one must feel before God because of the conviction of his lost condition before Him.

Paul also described that brokenness as the sorrow that is “godly” or after God.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The Psalmist said God was _____ to the repentant, broken spirit; Isaiah said God would _____ with the broken and contrite person. Describe what these terms mean.
2. What were Joel’s requirements for seeking the Lord?
3. Joel said, “Who knows if God will change His mind?” What other group of people (in a previous lesson) said this same thing?
4. The mourning Zechariah describes is the emotion a parent has for the sufferings and death of an _____ .
5. “The sorrow of the world worketh death.” What does this mean?

LIFE APPLICATION

The mourner’s bench—a rejected concept in many churches. Yet we can see by the Scripture that godly sorrow is a vital element of turning back to God. Why is it so? What is the importance of shedding tears before God?

Certainly it’s not just tears that count with God. There are pretended tears—dramatic, theatrical performances that don’t involve heart-repentance at all. But surely we can grasp the meaning of brokenness before God. Coming to the end of myself; my endeavors, my schemes, my well-crafted religious pretenses. Realizing how utterly undone and shameful and needy I am and reaching the place where I’m ready to surrender to God’s requirements. Comprehending the depth of my personal rebellion and sin against God and the great love He had for me in sending His only Son to take my place. I was the one who should die. It was my

sin that nailed Him to the cross.

Reader, have you ever reached this place?

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"And he [Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:9).

Several points can be observed from this passage. The Pharisee presented himself and prayed while the publican stood afar off, not lifting his eyes. The Pharisee was thankful that he was not a sinner while the publican admitted that he was a sinner. The Pharisee told of all of his good deeds while the publican smote upon his breast. The Pharisee prayed thus with himself while the Lord heard the prayer of the publican. The Pharisee exhibited pride, while the publican displayed humility.

When we can fully recognize who we are, then we can understand that we are in desperate need of God's mercy and salvation. "But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee" (Luke 14:10). It is always best to present yourself before the Lord, to the world, and to each other in true humility.

—LaDawna Adams

AUGUST 22, 2021

CONFESSION OF SIN

1 Samuel 7:3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

9 And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.

10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

14 And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

MEMORY VERSE: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

—1 John 1:9

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A true confession of sin will not only bring the mercy, pardon, and forgiveness of God, but will also put us in the place to receive the help and deliverance of God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

1 Samuel 7:4 “Baalim and Ashtaroth”: Baalim, the male god and Ashtaroth (Ishtar of the Accadians and Astarte of the Phoenicians and Greeks) his female counterpart. In Canaan, Baalim (Baal means *lord*; plural is *Baalim*) was the sun god; he was also worshipped as the storm god and the fertility god. Baal worship was very sensual and involved prostitution. Ashtaroth became the moon goddess. “Solomon introduced the worship of this idol (1 Kings 11:33). Jezebel's 400 priests were probably employed in its service (1 Kings 18:19). It was called the ‘queen of heaven’ (Jeremiah 44:25)” (*Easton's Bible Dictionary*).

1 Samuel 7:6 “Drew water, and poured it out”: a symbol of sorrow and of pouring out their hearts to the Lord in penitence.

1 Samuel 7:10 “Discomfited”: the confusion of sudden panic.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson today is an Old Testament example of the type of repentance which touched the heart of God. After twenty years of the ark of the Lord being displaced, the people of Israel began to seek the Lord, lamenting the absence of the presence of the Lord. When Samuel told them they must turn away from their idols, they followed His instruction, repented, and “served the Lord only.”

Samuel announced a national day of fasting and prayer. He prayed for them, and they poured out their hearts also before the Lord, symbolizing the act by pouring out water and acknowledging their sins with a public confession.

There were other confessions of sin in the stories of the Bible; however, some of them did not achieve the kind of results the Israelites received in the account just mentioned. Pharaoh, when refusing to let the children of Israel go out of Egypt to serve the Lord, would make a pretense of confession just to get the plagues stopped. Time and again he did this with no intention of carrying through with his promise to let the Israelites go (Exodus 9:27). Achan confessed his sin only after the lots were drawn and pointed to him. God had already given orders that the man who had taken the accursed thing would be burnt with fire (Joshua 7:15). Saul also confessed, "I have sinned," and asked Samuel to pray for him, but his heart was not sincere (1 Samuel 15:24).

David confessed his transgression after covering it with deceit and lies and keeping silent about it for a time. When God confronted him through Nathan, the prophet, David threw off his cover and said, "I have sinned." God didn't take his life, although that was the just punishment for his sin of having Uriah killed; however, God told him He was bringing a sword upon David's family because of the evil deed. What might have happened if David had not confessed? We can only imagine.

The verse from Proverbs states the importance of not just confessing, but also forsaking sin when seeking the mercy of God. Our memory verse comforts with the promise that God will forgive and cleanse from all unrighteousness when a true confession of sin is made.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What was the "fruit meet for repentance" demonstrated by the Israelites when they were seeking for God?
2. By what symbol did they show their confession and repentance being poured out before God?
3. What did God do when the Philistines attacked them?

4. What monument did they erect to remind them of God's deliverance, and what did it say?
5. Give the promises about confession of sin from Proverbs and I John.

LIFE APPLICATION

I had never before connected the "Ebenezer" stone with the repentance and confession of Israel until this study. This monument was much more than a remembrance of "a time the Lord helped us." There was much preparatory work done before this great deliverance from the Philistines. They had a period of longing and lamenting after God. Then the ultimatum by the prophet. At that point they could have cooled off their search for God and just kept on with things as they were. I'm glad we have this account to teach us that if we "follow on to know the Lord" He will come to us with forgiveness and deliverance.

Again, true repentance is about forsaking the worship and service to other gods and returning to "the Lord only." Once they had done that, they could truly pour out their prayer and confession and their plea for God to deliver them from the oppression of the Philistines.

Many people today are oppressed. Anxiety, depression and mental disease, alcohol and drug addiction, anger, bitterness, and abuse wreak havoc in individuals and families. Do you need deliverance? Have you laid down your idols? Are you continuing to seek the Lord, even if you do not see immediate results? How long will you keep up your search? Will you be willing to make a complete confession of your sins and pour out your heart like water? The promise has been given—will you believe it? Open your hidden sins up to God, and He will have mercy upon you and deliver you from your oppressors. Then you can erect YOUR "Ebenezer" stone.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The prophet Isaiah, prophesying of the coming of John the Baptist, said, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare

ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all quote this passage in reference to John the Baptist’s preaching of the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Also, Isaiah 62:10 says, “Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.”

As our lesson today indicates, there is something required of us to prepare our hearts unto the Lord. Hosea 10:12 says, “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”

Jesus spoke of four different kinds of ground upon which the gospel seed falls: wayside ground, stony ground, thorny ground, and good ground. It is ultimately up to each one of us as individuals to prepare the ground of our hearts to receive the Word of God. We must, with determination and resolve, break up the fallow ground of our hearts. Those stones and thorns that hinder and obstruct the fruitfulness of the gospel seed must be cast up and gathered out.

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded” (James 4:8). “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (II Chronicles 16:9a).

—Harlan Sorrell

AUGUST 29, 2021

FASTING

Fasting—Part of the Day of Atonement

Leviticus 23:26 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

27 Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

28 And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God.

29 For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that

same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.

30 And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.

31 Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

32 It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.

Fasting Commonly Accompanies Urgent Petition

Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

Daniel 9:3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.

Joel 2:12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.

Acts 10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Guidelines for Fasting

Isaiah 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his

soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Matthew 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

MEMORY VERSE: Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. —**Matthew 17:21**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Fasting was to accompany repentance and urgent petition many times in the Bible; it was called afflicting the soul and was intended to prove the earnestness of the seeker, make the spirit preminent to the flesh, and bring a person into a spiritual condition as to receive inspiration and direction from God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Leviticus 23:27 “Holy convocation”: sacred assembly. “Afflict your souls”: humble yourselves by fasting; in discipline before God.

Isaiah 58:3 “Exact all your labours”: Drive, or oppress your toilers or hired workmen; same word as “taskmaster.”

LESSON BACKGROUND

A fast was usually an individual token of humility, grief, or urgent need of God’s deliverance or direction, dependent upon personal volition. The only fast commanded in the law for all the children of Israel occurred on the yearly Day of Atonement. Isn’t it significant that on the Day of Atonement God commanded abstinence from

food and physical labor for those seeking God for forgiveness? Certainly the implications of that carried on into the times of reform when Israel was returning to God from the worship of idols. There is a connection there with the recognition that the flesh had been in control and must be brought under the dominion of the spirit. Clearly, fasting doesn't save us, but it could be *an aid to the repentance and faith in Jesus Christ*, which are the requirements for salvation.

We have cited a few examples of individuals seeking God for deliverance or direction: Esther, Ezra, Daniel, Cornelius, and the apostles; also the command given by the prophet Joel to Israel in his call for national repentance. There are more in Scripture, but these are enough to start our minds thinking of the earnestness and self-discipline that brought about the intervention of the Lord for them. Jesus Himself revealed the need for His disciples, after He went back to heaven, to seek for His Spirit's power and direction by fasting and prayer. As long as the Bridegroom is with them, they don't need to fast, was the admonition. But after the Bridegroom is gone, then they will need to fast. As our Memory Verse states, there is a kind of spiritual warfare which is only won by the Christian soldier disciplining his body and soul by fasting and prayer. This was spoken when the disciples could not understand why they could not cast a demon out; they had before that time, why not now? Jesus told them it was, "Because of your unbelief," then added words about prayer and fasting, strongly implying that there is a connection between faith and fasting and prayer.

Jesus also gave guidelines about prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. I believe His point was that all three of these are spiritual disciplines intended to bring about self-denial, preventing the flesh from having dominion. If these are done for a show, the intended discipline is of no avail. The flesh wins anyway, and the whole point is lost. The reward of which He speaks is God's presence and power. The reward of doing it for show is man's short-lived approval, which is of no value.

We also read Isaiah's words to the Jews, rebuking them for their formal, sanctimonious way of fasting. They attempted to gain God's recognition and commendation, and then complained when it was withheld—all the while carrying on with strife, oppression, covetousness, personal pleasure and gain. They also held a critical,

holier-than-thou attitude toward others. These actions give us understanding that true fasting not only includes abstaining from food, but also encompasses humility of heart, unselfish giving, charity, and compassion. Again, there is a kind of fasting that actually feeds the flesh and ego, while God's kind of fasting brings about true self-denial.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Discuss the connection between fasting and atonement.
2. Discuss the connection between fasting and urgent petition.
3. What was wrong with the fasting of the Israelites in Isaiah 58?
4. What really happens when fasting is done for show?
5. Explain the connection between a certain kind of spiritual warfare and fasting.

LIFE APPLICATION

“Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting, the other, with which we let loose and cast away the visible. In nothing is man more closely connected with the world of sense than in his need of food, and his enjoyment of it. It was the fruit, good for food, with which man was tempted and fell in Paradise. It was with bread to be made of stones that Jesus, when an hungered, was tempted in the wilderness, and in fasting that He triumphed. The body has been redeemed to be a temple of the Holy Spirit; it is in body as well as spirit, it is very specially, Scripture says, in eating and drinking, we are to glorify God. It is to be feared that there are many Christians to whom this eating to the glory of God has not yet become a spiritual reality. And the first thought suggested by Jesus' words in regard to fasting and prayer, is, that it is only in a life of moderation and temperance and self-denial that there will be the heart or the strength to pray much.” These are the words of Andrew Murray in his book, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. I felt they expressed the essence of the lesson so clearly; of course, there is far more that can be said, which we cannot cover in one small lesson. I hope there has been enough to stir our minds to the great worth of and valuable reason for prayer accompanied with fasting.

In this time of the delay of Christ's coming, when we are admonished to earnestly desire the return of our heavenly bridegroom; when the warnings about these last days contain the idea that eating and drinking will be rampant, as in the time of Noah; and our extreme danger will be that we will be ensnared by these things—let us give ourselves unto fasting and prayer, that our warfare will be successful, our soul-winning accompanied by the Lord's deliverance, and we will ready and waiting for the return of our Lord.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I am often intrigued by grueling workouts that professional athletes endure in order to win a gold medal and claim the honor of being the Olympic champion. Their moment on the podium is the culmination of countless hours, days and years of rigorous training and self-denial.

They train their body as well as their mind. They cut no corners. They monitor everything that is pertinent to their goal—what they eat, how much they eat and when they eat it. They monitor their exercise regimen and the intensity of it. They fully understand that the integrity of their training will translate into victory during the times of their greatest testing. They are not just battling their competition, they're battling themselves. Therefore, it is imperative that they bring their body into subjection. They do it to obtain a corruptible crown. We do it to obtain an incorruptible crown.

The integrity and intensity of our private devotion and obedience to God and his Word determines how successful we are in the battles that we face. How rigorously we train and subdue the flesh plays a vital role in our success as well. Our spiritual foes are not just what comes against us from without, but we must also contend with our flesh. It is constantly being recruited by the enemy to join forces and fight against us.

Fasting is one of our most deliberate forms of self-denial. It is the gateway, the path that leads to a deeper experience with the Lord. It is one of the ways that God has chosen for us, of our own volition, to subdue our flesh and have dominion over it. If we fail to master

ourselves, we will fail at nearly every spiritual battle we face. We must train ourselves to exert constant control over our flesh. It must be conquered! Either we conquer it, or it conquers us.

—Darrell Johnson

SEPTEMBER 5, 2021

TURNING AWAY FROM SIN

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Isaiah 1:16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Daniel 4:27 Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

John 5:14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

John 8:10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

I Corinthians 6:9 Know ye 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.

MEMORY VERSE: 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. —**I Corinthians 6:11**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As God spoke to Israel, King Nebuchadnezzar, the man at the pool, the woman caught in adultery, and the Gentile believers, “Sin no more,” so He speaks to all who mourn their sinful condition, turn to Him, and confess their sins: “Forsake your sins and live!”

WORD DEFINITIONS

Proverbs 28:13 “Forsake”: relinquish; leave.

Daniel 4:27 “Break off”: tear away; break away; discontinue.

John 8:11 “Condemn”: judge worthy of punishment; issue a penalty.

I Corinthians 6:9 “Fornicators”: anyone engaging in sexual immorality. “Abusers of themselves with mankind”: same-gender sexual activity.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We have studied the steps of repentance—turning back to God, humbling oneself, having sorrow for sin, fasting, and confessing sin. The order of these things may not always be the same, and that really isn’t important, but they should all lead to a total break with the old life, where we leave all sin behind.

God promised to the Israelites that He would abundantly pardon the unrighteous man when he forsook his thoughts, and the wicked man when he forsook his ways.

Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which foretold how God would humble him by bringing him down to the level of a beast for seven years. He let the king know that he could lengthen his time of prosperity and safety from such a plight by forsaking his sins and turning to righteousness. A year later, King Nebuchadnezzar was

walking in his palace, boasting of his selfish glory, when God brought the pronounced chastisement upon him. How sad that he had not taken the wise counsel Daniel gave him!

The Pharisees had brought the adulterous woman to Jesus to test Him and see if He would keep the law, which said those caught in adultery should be stoned. Jesus ignored them and wrote on the ground. Then as they persisted, He looked them in the eyes and said, "Whoever is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone." One by one, the men slipped away, each convicted by his own conscience. The only man there who could have cast a stone, did not. He offered forgiveness. He did not issue a penalty to the adulterous woman, but He did command her, "Go and sin no more."

The man at the pool of Siloam whom Jesus made whole obeyed Him and took up his bed and walked away; however, Jesus met him later in the temple and let him know that he would be in a worse condition if he did not forsake his sins.

Jesus pardons, but His pardon does not *condone* sin. The two passages we quote from Paul's writings let us know clearly that sin is not allowed in God's kingdom. Being under the law of grace and no longer under the old law does not give us license to continue sin. God's unconditional love, which He commended to us while we were yet sinners, will also lift us up from the pit of sin and set us free from sin and its bondage.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Give the action words which describe forsaking sin in the following scripture references: Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 1:16, Isaiah 55:7, Daniel 4:27, John 5:14, John 8:10.
2. Name the different steps of repentance which we have studied so far.
3. How did Paul answer the question he asked in Romans 6:1?
4. Many people today say that moral sins do not matter to God. Give the scripture that lets us know they do matter.
5. Share other Bible verses that have to do with forsaking sin.

LIFE APPLICATION

What if you had a “pet” sin. A “drug” of choice. A sin you loved and enjoyed. You had left God to go after your sin. You preferred it over the sweet sense of His presence. But God had offered you His loving grace and forgiveness. He had given you a chance, an opportunity to return. So you began the journey back to Him.

You knew you had broken many of His laws. The importance of those unlawful things began to grow less and less as you longed to know God again. You regretted ever doing them and confessed them, one by one. You mourned the wasted years, the hurt you had inflicted upon yourself and others; and especially you mourned the knowledge that Jesus had suffered your penalty and died in your place.

In seeking Him, you grew so convicted that instead of eating, you prayed during your lunch hour. You quit going to the bar at night, and spent the evening praying and reading your Bible. Still, there was something missing. You began to sense a struggle going on between what you knew to do and what you had always wanted to do.

Here are all the steps being taken in returning to God. The last step is forsaking the sin you love. What if you wouldn't do it? What if you let go of all your ungodly lifestyle except that one thing? What if you hid the fact that you still preferred it, but professed to come back to God and live for Him?

We all know the answer. Pretty soon God's offer of grace to you would be forgotten, and little by little the deeds of your old life would return. You would go back to sin and pretend everything was the same. But it would be different. The bondage would be greater, the fun would be gone, and instead of your sin comforting you, it would torment you.

I began with “What if...” but this is a true story for many people. The only remedy is to totally, completely, and without reserve, forsake every sin and return unto the Lord.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The Road Back Home

Vessels of clay mar in his hand,
Taking their way, follow their plan.

Sin so enticing, lust to fulfill,
Pleasure, promises—consequence conceal.

Blinding the mind, deceiving the heart,
Till fatal wound strikes, a deep piercing dart.

Death of the soul—separation from God—
For the sin I love, Oh, what cost!

Purity, honesty, integrity displaced
For guilt, shame, and confusion of face.

Glamor of world, smile of sin;
Fake indeed, delusional trend.

Revealed in the Gospel, good news divine:
In search for one, He left ninety and nine.

He's searching for you, or it may be me;
Calling us out, sensing our need.

He called for famine on prodigal son.
To gain attention—to feel undone.

“Father loves me!” —senses arose;
Road brought hence, leads back home.

The road back—difficult to bear.
Pride was crushed as he travelled there.

Blot of sin, the mark of shame;
I will face all; find a new name.

Looking so hard, straining to see—
Is my son on the road, coming to me?

All was spent; nothing to boast.
For mercy he cried, and that alone.

Father's arms opened wide;
Price is paid, you may abide.

New heart, new mind, new life had he;
Forgiven at last, Oh, jubilee!

Vessels of clay, marred in his hand,
Reshaped and born, to live again!

When you have strayed, so far and alone,
Always remember the road back home.

—Bob Wilson

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

PERSONAL REPENTANCE

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired

servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

The Thief on the Cross

Luke 23:39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

MEMORY VERSE: And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. —**Luke 18:13-14**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God hears every individual cry of

repentance, from anyone and from anywhere on earth, who turns away from sin unto Him, humbles the heart, confesses guilt, accepts the consequences, yet cries in faith to Him for mercy and forgiveness.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luke 15:12 “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me”: “According to the Jewish law of inheritance, if there were but two sons, the elder would receive two portions, the younger the third of all movable property” (*Vincent’s Word Studies*).

Luke 15:13 “Riotous living”: literally, “living without saving anything” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*); living ruinously; intemperately. “The reckless waste of noble gifts and highest energies on unbridled sensuality of life, or sensuous, idolatrous forms of worship” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). The older brother’s comment was, “[he] hath devoured thy living with harlots.”

Luke 15:17 “When he came to himself”: restoration to sound sense from a course of folly and madness (*Clarke’s Commentary*). Came to wisdom; restored to sanity, or to his true self.

Luke 23:39 “Malefactors”: criminals. “Railed”: “Began to use injurious and insulting language” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Luke 23:43 “Paradise”: the garden of Paradise, a place of exquisite pleasure and delight.

Luke 18:13 “Publican”: “a tax-collector, gathering public taxes from the Jews for the Romans” (*HELPS Word Studies*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

We have cited three New Testament examples of true repentance, all from Luke’s gospel. They are each very familiar; we will not use the space to retell the entire accounts, but there are important things we can find out that will broaden our understanding.

In the story of the prodigal, while the subjects of the story were most likely actual people known personally by Jesus, He was relating it, along with the previous two parables about the sheep and the coins, to bring understanding to the Jews of His deep love for them AND the Gentiles; and that He had come to seek and save ALL people

from the “lost” condition of sin. The elder brother represented the haughty mindset of the Jews toward the Gentiles.

For the purpose of our discussion about personal repentance, we want to look closely at the elements of the prodigal’s change of mind. In my *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*, a table is included in the Supplement section, which lists the steps to ruin and the steps to reconciliation taken by the prodigal: “Self-will, Selfishness, Separation, Sensuality, Spiritual Destitution, Self-abasement, Starvation.” And, “Realization, Resolution, Repentance, Return, Reconciliation, Re-clothing, Rejoicing.” These are steps which are familiar to all of us, for we have “turned every one to His own way” (Isaiah 53:6). “Sin takes us far away from God, and the root of all sin is that desire of living to one’s self which began the prodigal’s evil course” (*MacLaren’s*). Thank God, when we, like the prodigal, “come to ourselves,” we can begin the steps toward reconciliation with God. “It is insanity to try to shake off God, to aim at independence, to wander from Him, to fling away our ‘substance,’ that is, our true selves, and to starve among the swine-troughs” (*MacClaren’s*).

The thief on the cross had a completely different attitude of heart than the thief on the other side of Jesus. What made the difference? There are legends about this man, that he had seen and been helped by Jesus as a child. Whether or not that is true, there was enough to see in Jesus’ forgiveness and fortitude on the cross to cause him to reverence and fear this man and to believe the inscription above His head, though given in scorn, was completely true. Matthew Henry had this to say about his repentance: “[He was] softened at the last: he was snatched as a brand out of the burning, and made a monument of Divine mercy. This gives no encouragement to any to put off repentance to their death-beds, or to hope that they shall then find mercy. It is certain that true repentance is never too late; but it is as certain that late repentance is seldom true.”

The final example, the publican named in the Memory Verse, certainly got the highest commendation one can get, when Jesus said, “This man...went...justified.” His terse prayer showed elements of true repentance: humility (he didn’t feel worthy to lift his eyes), confession of sin, and seeking God in prayer for mercy and deliverance. The writer does not say that he went down to his house

and quit his sinning, but we know two of Jesus' publican friends who did—Matthew and Zacchaeus.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Explain the division of goods that probably took place in a family in this era.
2. Explain the condition of “want” that the younger son experienced.
3. What was the prodigal's resolution?
4. Name the elements of the thief's repentance.
5. What did Jesus see in the publican that brought God's pardon?

LIFE APPLICATION

The prodigal son, the thief on the cross, and the publican were all men who demonstrated repentance for us. Combine these stories with the three Old Testament examples, and you have a clear picture of what God accepts.

One element in each of them I also saw in the repenting Ninevites, and that is the unworthiness they expressed. All hauteur was gone. That sense of unworthiness is a good thing. Not that people should be beaten down with it, but it must accompany our search for God, because as we hit bottom and realize the depth of our personal sin and wickedness before God, we can then accurately realize the depth of His love and sacrifice for us. Our world has gone far off-balance in saying that a person shouldn't feel “guilty.” John Bunyan described in *Pilgrim's Progress* the struggle Christian had with his burden and how Worldly Wiseman tried to ease him of it. It is the same today. There is a burden a sinner bears, and there is only One who can rid him of it. It tumbles off at the Cross of Jesus Christ. “Jesus, keep me near the cross!”

That humility, combined with the tiniest glimmer of faith and hope in God's mercy, brings peace and eternal rest into the heart of the soul who diligently seeks God!

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Raised in a godly home, I had made early childhood decisions to serve God at three years of age, which I don't remember, and at six, which I do remember. However, it wasn't until I was twelve that I truly understood how sinful I was and how I was accountable before God for all the hidden sins of disobedience, theft, anger, and selfishness I was committing, even if my parents didn't know! My father had made the Biblical concept of repentance pretty clear in our home, and it required making a 180-degree turn from the direction one had been going away from God, and heading back to God (a U-turn, or "you turn" if you will). I remember vividly one evening laying in bed, guilt and shame and embarrassment at my hypocrisy overwhelming me. Finally, unable to hold back any longer, I rose from bed and made the slow, yet resolute, walk to my parents' bedroom door and knocked softly. As I knelt at their bed, tearfully confessing my sins and asking God to change me and come into my heart, I then experienced the joy of being reunited with God, and of having nothing separating me from Him. I have never regretted making that decision!

When I think of true repentance, a couple of examples come to mind. I often consider David, a man who broke each of the five commandments God gave for dealing with one's fellow man, when he coveted after, committed adultery with, and eventually stole another man's wife, and then tried to cover it up with lies and murder. Yet, the 51st Psalm reveals his penitent heart when confronted with his sin and expresses beautifully his desire to change and not be found in that state again!

Another example of repentance is the story of the Englishman John Newton, who wrote the poem that became the basis of the well-known Christian hymn Amazing Grace. John escaped "many dangers, toils, and snares" only through the mercies of Divine Providence, and eventually sought salvation. At one time a captain of slave ships, he became a preacher, and later in life began to experience deep regret and guilt due to his previous involvement in the slave trade. He became an abolitionist, actively advocating against slavery, and rejoiced when the slave trade was abolished towards the end of his life.

It is so wonderful to know that when one returns to the LORD,
God will have mercy, and will "abundantly pardon." HALLELUJAH!

—Fari Matthews

SEPTEMBER 19, 2021

CONGREGATIONAL REPENTANCE

Revelation 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Revelation 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Revelation 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the

Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Revelation 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou

mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

MEMORY VERSE: Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. —**Revelation 3:20**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Five out of the seven Asian congregations were given the command, “Repent!” as Jesus had found their works lacking in His sight; two were commended for keeping His Word; all were given a special promise to overcomers, plus a challenge to truly hear what He was saying.

WORD DEFINITIONS

In the 2018 3rd Quarter (July, August and September) issue of the Bible Lessons (Volume 50, Number 3), we did an in-depth study of these scripture passages. In order to save time and space for this issue, the reader may refer to that issue for Word Definitions. You may check online at churchofgodtoday.com and go to Archives; 2018; July, August and September.

LESSON BACKGROUND

While on the Island of Patmos, in the Aegean Sea, John the apostle, there “for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ,” was commanded to write the vision he was given and send it to the seven churches in Asia. Most scholars agree that it was around 95 A.D. The Romans had already destroyed Jerusalem, the other apostles had been killed in the persecutions by Domitian, the Roman Emperor, and the fleeing Christians were scattered into different parts of Asia. How comforting it must have been to receive this vision from the Lord concerning the present persecutions and spiritual challenges of the church and those to come, and the final triumph of Christ over it all.

Two of the churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, were praised and

comforted, but five of the churches received a stern rebuke from Jesus. The Christians at Ephesus had fought so long and hard against the false doctrines and evil spirits working through false apostles that they were no longer filled with the “first love” they had for the Lord, as when they had first heard the gospel.

The Pergamos believers had not denied the faith of Jesus, even in the midst of severe persecution; however, they were reprovved because they had allowed dangerous false doctrines among them, which the Lord said He hated.

The church at Thyatira had allowed a false prophetess to teach and seduce the brethren to fornication and idolatry. Jesus said that He had given the prophetess “space to repent” of her fornication, and she “repented not.”

Jesus commended the few saints at Sardis who had not “defiled their garments,” but for the most part, the congregation was full of spiritually dead, “name-only” believers.

The Laodiceans were, in their self-righteous formalism, as disgusting to the Lord as tepid water. They didn’t feel they needed a thing, but Jesus said, “You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked,” and counseled them to acquire true spiritual riches, white raiment to cover their spiritual nakedness, and spiritual eye-salve so they might see.

To all five the command was, “Repent.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Name John’s physical location and his spiritual “location” when he received this vision.
2. Name Ephesus’ good qualities and their fault.
3. Pergamos and Thyatira had both allowed _____.
4. What was the spiritual condition of Sardis?
5. What counsel did Jesus give to Laodicea?

LIFE APPLICATION

In this lesson we can see the justice, love, and mercy Christ has

for souls. He may have sent a “group message,” but He had every individual in mind. Not one soul who had allowed a false spirit or doctrine missed reproof, and not one soul who had been true and faithful was forgotten. Space was given for repentance, even for grievous errors. Every good and worthy deed was remembered and noted before judgment was meted out for the sins. Encouragement was equally given with rebuke.

Yet—there was no getting around repentance. The pastor (called an angel, and represented by a star) and the church (represented by a candlestick) were commanded to turn back to God; change their ways of thinking and doing; throw out the idolatry, fornication, false doctrines, and those who were teaching false doctrine; and pay the price to get what was lacking. They were called to remember, to be zealous—and there you have the weeping, the earnest praying, the fasting—to do the first works—confession of sin, baptism, consecration to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to hold fast to the revelation of the gospel which had been given them at the beginning.

Here is the route for congregational repentance. As much responsibility is on the pastor as is on the congregation. If we receive the kind, loving warning alert—yellow “danger” lights flashing, siren sounding, mega-phone blasting—from the Lord, it is time to repent. Turn around, get rid of the sin and false doctrine and those who spread it, weep, and pray, or else—He will remove our candlestick out of its place, spew us out of His mouth, fight against us with the sword, cast us into great tribulation, and come upon us like a thief.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Recently while traveling on the road, we passed a billboard that stated, “Does your pastor preach the truth?” It was a thought provoking sentiment. It probably should have been followed with a billboard stating, “Does your congregation believe and practice the truth?” How comfortable would you be if Jesus came visiting your congregation to decide if it should go forward or be dissolved?

This Bible lesson is a very sober one. The churches mentioned in Revelations were being pinpointed and judged on some very unsavory and uncomfortable subjects. Thankfully, the Lord gave space for repentance for those congregations and their pastors.

There is a responsibility that lies within each one of us. This does not happen in mundane repetitions but with a passionate heart. Here are a few questions that might be asked of individuals/congregations of today:

Do you love the Word of God? Do you have an understanding of the doctrines of the church of God? Do you practice any personal convictions?

How are your daily devotions? Do you have a sincere desire to read the Word of God and search the scriptures or do you read/pray just so you won't feel guilty?

Do you attend services regularly? Are you happy to give of your financial means to the work of the Lord?

How is your passion level for the unsaved? Are you interested in reaching out to those who are lost or are their names just a passing phrase in a repeated prayer?

What kind of environment does your congregation have? Is it warm and inviting? Or is it toxic?

How about your relationship with those of the household of faith? Is everything clear between you and your brother?

These questions may make us squirm a bit, not unlike the churches in this lesson. But thankfully, the Lord gives space for us to repent so that we may all stand faultless before his throne. When the Lord comes knocking on your door, be willing to open to Him gladly. He wants to sup with us; to have a close and personal relationship with each one of us. The Lord desires that we all go to heaven.

—LaDawna Adams

SEPTEMBER 26, 2021

PROMISES FOR REPENTANCE

II Chronicles 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Proverbs 1:23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but

whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Isaiah 55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Isaiah 66:2 For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

Jeremiah 3:22 Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

MEMORY VERSE: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

—II Peter 3:9

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Those who repent are promised abundant mercy, forgiveness, and pardon; cleansing and healing; a place in the presence of the Lord with His Spirit poured out to revive and refresh them; His eyes of care looking upon them; and His Word revealed to them.

DISCUSSION:

1. According to the verses in this lesson, name some of the conditions that must be met as we repent.
2. List the blessings which come from repentance.
3. Discuss the purpose of repentance.
4. Discuss the consequences of not repenting.
5. Review the steps of repentance.

LIFE APPLICATION

We are definitely in the last days before Christ's coming. We are in the time of delay as described by Jesus' parable of the ten virgins; therefore, it is also a time of spiritual drowsiness and slumber—a very dangerous time for God's people.

So we shouldn't think it awkward or inappropriate for God to send His church a message of repentance. Rather, we should be grateful, knowing that it is His goodness to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4), because He truly does not want anyone to perish. Except we all repent, Jesus said, we all perish.

We should also be encouraged by the promises repeated in this last lesson. Think back on all the people about whom we have studied in this series: Manasseh, David, the people of Israel and Judah, the churches of Asia, the Ninevites, the prodigal son, the publican, the thief on the cross, the Gentiles. The call to repentance is God's love and mercy extended to people, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they have done.

Let us heed the call for personal repentance. Let us each one lay down our own thoughts, tear down our private idols, be completely humble, set aside time for fasting and earnest prayer, and continue until the Spirit is poured out upon our souls.

Let us heed the call for congregational repentance. Let us call each other to repentance; take one another by the hand, confess divisional attitudes and grievances, ask each other for accountability, join with each other in fasting and prayer.

Let us heed the call for national repentance. Let us confess the national sins for which the cup of the vengeance of God is nearly full: adultery, fornication, homosexuality, dishonesty, drunkenness, pride, celebrity worship, anger, abuse, violence of every kind, murder of the

unborn, covetousness, spiritual lethargy, false religion.

It may be—IT MAY BE—that God will hear and repent Himself of the evil He has pronounced upon our nation for its sins. But if not, let us weep and pray and fast, and keep returning to Him with all of our hearts. God may destroy our nation, but our souls will be saved.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:19-20).

These direct words from Jesus were addressed, not to non-professing Christians, but to “the church of the Laodiceans,”—the lukewarm, self-satisfied church! I am reminded of a poem written by Bro. C. E. Orr nearly a century ago. If he felt this urgency then, how much more should we as we now approach the borders of eternity!

Stirring the Nest

“Stir us, oh, my Savior, stir us!
As an eagle stirs her nest;
Let us all be up and doing,
No time now for wayside rest.

“Stir us, oh, my Savior, stir us!
Stir us up to give and go,
Upon those at ease in Zion,
There’s pronounced a dreadful woe.

“Do you love the blessed Jesus?
Would you of His grace partake?
Then be active in His service,
Doing something for His sake.

“Stir our hearts, dear blessed Savior,
May we all strict vigil keep!
Souls are sleeping all around us;
Others, too, are going to sleep.

“Soon the Bridegroom will be coming,
And that you may not recoil;
Keep your lights all trimmed and burning,
And your vessels filled with oil.

“Blow the trumpet, oh, ye watchmen!
Never from your duty shirk:
Here and there throughout God’s Zion,
‘Little foxes’ are at work.

—Harlan Sorrell

